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# **NEW CONSERVATIVES IN RUSSIA AND EAST CENTRAL EUROPE**

Edited by  
Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga



# New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe

This book explores the emergence, and in Poland, Hungary, and Russia the coming to power, of politicians and political parties rejecting the consensus around market reforms, democratization, and rule of law that has characterized moves toward an “open society” from the 1990s. It discusses how over the last decade these political actors, together with various think tanks, intellectual circles, and religious actors, have increasingly presented themselves as “conservatives,” and outlines how these actors are developing a new local brand of conservatism as a full-fledged ideology that counters the perceived liberal overemphasis on individual rights and freedom, and differs from the ideology of the established, present-day conservative parties of Western Europe. Overall, the book argues that the “renaissance of conservatism” in these countries represents variations on a new, illiberal conservatism that aims to re-establish a strong state sovereignty defining and pursuing a national path of development.

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# **New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe**

**Edited by Katharina Bluhm and  
Mihai Varga**

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Katharina Bluhm  
Mihai Varga

# 1 Introduction

## Toward a new illiberal conservatism in Russia and East Central Europe

*Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga*

### **The return of conservatism**

The western-driven wave of globalization that began with the liberalization of financial markets from the 1970s onward, and strengthened even further with the collapse of the Eastern bloc, has come to an end. It is widely acknowledged that the financial crisis of 2007–09 represents the tipping point, even though it seemed at first that the architecture of the financial markets—with economic liberalism as its ideological frame—had survived largely unquestioned (Crouch 2011). It accelerated the much discussed “crisis of democracy,” becoming manifest in a deteriorating relationship between what were once mass political parties and their supporters. The further rise of China; Russia’s return to the table of global powers; the unsolved crisis of the Eurozone: all indicate the tectonic shifts that are well under way. The struggle over the future of existing institutional arrangements has also become an ideological battlefield, seeing increasingly developed arguments formulated by right-wing or even far-right forces.

This departure from the recent liberal vision of the polity as well as criticism of market economies are often characterized as illiberalism, nationalism, and populism. While these concepts highlight important commonalities, they do not capture the sweeping contestation that liberalism now has to face. A central thesis of this book is that we are witnessing a “renaissance of conservatism,” an attempt to create a *new, illiberal, and activating* conservatism aiming to change the status quo from within the capitalist order and the traditional cleavage between left and right. This holds especially for East Central Europe (ECE), where communism interrupted the conservative tradition of thought, and where conservatism is being redeployed against communism *and* liberalism. The literature on *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (“Law and Justice,” PiS) and Fidesz (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, “Alliance of Young Democrats”), the right-wing parties in power in Poland and Hungary, stresses that the agenda of these parties is more systematic and comprehensive than the concept of “populism” would suggest. However, there has been little research done so far to study the genesis of these parties’ agendas and the conservative milieus and intellectual circles that have given the political turn in Poland and Hungary its intellectual foundation and legitimacy.

This is even more the case for Russia, where no populist party conquered power in order to change the track of development. Many scholars have conceptualized Vladimir Putin's official turn toward conservatism during the period 2011–13 in the context of the mass protests against his third presidency and acts of election fraud as a cynical, eclectic, and populist attempt of an “authoritarian kleptocracy” to stay in power at any cost (Casula 2017; Rodkiewicz and Rogoza 2015; Shekhovtsov 2017). In fact, Russia's state-owned media and presidential administration play quite skillfully with different narratives and identity concepts such as “one-country-civilization,” “Russian World,” anti-Westernism, nationalism, or traditional (conservative) values. Yet the focus on the official turn to conservatism underestimates the groundwork carried out by conservative milieus and intellectuals, and the discursive power conservative views have developed in Russia.

The declared goal of the conservative intellectual circles in this region is to challenge today's Western economic and cultural liberalism while at the same time opposing communism. This goes beyond a diffuse “sliding back” toward authoritarian structures and mentalities. More than elsewhere, intellectuals and moral and political activists involved are purposely re-inventing conservatism and trying to determine the political agenda.

With Karl Mannheim (1955 [1936]) and Michael Freeden (2006 [1996]), we argue that the new conservative thought has themes, ideas, and core concepts in common that are related to its communist and post-communist past and reflect severe disappointment with the results of the transition and the manner in which Western integration took place. The references to neo-colonial theories, from which new conservatives in Hungary, Poland, and Russia draw, can only be understood in this context. At the same time their history, different geopolitical positions, and weight have also produced decisive differences. Polish and Hungarian conservatives search for *ideational* alliances within Central and Western Europe rather than further to the east.

This introduction proceeds as follows. The next subsection reviews major explanations of the rise of illiberalism in the post-communist region and asks why it is that illiberalism, in its conservative expression, emerged in Poland, Hungary, and Russia and not elsewhere. We also clarify our focus on actors, networks, and key concepts of the new conservatism. We then argue why we think that it is conservatism—rather than other conceptual alternatives—that more plausibly captures illiberalism in these three countries and introduce our approach, combining insights from the sociology of knowledge with scholarship on social movements. We then end the chapter by presenting the outline of the book.

## **Explanations for the rise of illiberalism**

The dominance of liberal and neoliberal ideas throughout post-communist Europe was formidable by all accounts: all countries but one (Belarus) sooner or later in their transitional path implemented neoliberal ideas such as “increasing



national competitiveness” through the pursuit of “fiscal discipline,” an outward economic orientation, and reliance upon markets for the allocation of goods and resources (Ban 2016). Most countries also pursued the liberal political agenda of ensuring free elections, strengthening civil society (initially with external, Western support), building checks and balances around governments, and passing legislation to protect minorities. In the words of one observer: “Liberalism in this part of the world became an obligatory syntax of political thought” (Trencsényi 2014, 136, citing political theorist Aurelian Crăiuțu).

Neoliberalism—understood as an approach to government claiming that “unhindered markets are best able to generate economic growth and social welfare” (Bockman 2013, 14)—boils down to an “identifiable set of economic theories such as monetarism, rational expectations, public choice, and supply-side economics” (Blyth 1999; Ban 2016, 10). It represents more than just a “revived version of classical liberal economics” (Ban 2016, 9), since in contrast to classical *laissez-faire* liberalism and later libertarianism, it does support the continued existence and relevance of a minimal state that “would protect private property, maintain order, and provide some protection for the poor. In spite of its anti-state rhetoric, neoliberal policies were not meant to eradicate the state, but rather to have forged a new kind of state” (Bockman 2013, 14). Variations existed in the extent to which post-communist countries “embedded” neoliberal policies through welfare spending, with the Baltic and Balkan EU member countries pursuing what was called a “disembedded neoliberalism,” while the Visegrad countries generally followed an approach that combined neoliberalism with—at least until EU accession—relatively generous welfare schemes (Bohle and Greskovits 2012).

Several explanations have been advanced for understanding neoliberalism’s rise to dominance in the region. First, post-communist countries started their transition when neoliberalism was reaching its ascendancy (Appel and Orenstein 2016). Ideas of different inspiration were far less present and absent from the advice extended by international organizations and in particular the Western advisors that did extensive counselling of the post-communist reformers.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, proponents of neoliberalism framed it as a promise not just about economic well-being, but also about democracy and the rule of law (Crawford and Lijphart 1995; Shields 2008), leading to the conceptual “great merging” (Ban 2014) of free market and democracy in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Following a communist state that had attempted to control all spheres of social activity, mistrust toward the state was widespread and the large-scale retreat of the state a priority for the reformers.

Second, Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley (1998, 73) document how neoliberal reformers strengthened their position and isolated themselves from potential challengers, most importantly by forging an alliance with the new managerial class (in the case of Russia with the young oligarchs) around the “new ideology of managerialism, monetarism,” and also by the means of selective welfare spending in order to contain collective action (Vanhuysse 2006; Greskovits 1998). It has also been noted that neoliberalism bore a certain resemblance to

Marxism-Leninism, being a “holistic,” “revolutionary,” and “universalistic” world view claiming to affect all spheres of life, and promising that, if administered in the right dose, it would spur the growth that would trickle down to all (Eyal et al. 1998, 74); it should therefore not come as a surprise that, as Eyal et al. have claimed, there was a certain “overlap in personnel” between the “high priests” of communism and those of post-communism. And precisely this view is shared by new conservatives in the region.

Third, further contributions have emphasized that neoliberalism advanced not so much through sheer coercion, but rather that its success throughout the region was largely due to the existence of transnational academic networks that paved the way for neoliberalism while rejecting other approaches, to “the hybrid and dialogic origins of neoliberalism, rather than the arrogance and might of a Western monologue” (Bockman and Eyal 2002, 336). While this process is referred to as diffusion or translation (Ban 2016), Bockmann and Eyal followed Bruno Latour’s criticism of diffusion and proposed instead the notion of “lengthening networks” as a better metaphor for understanding the advancement of neoliberalism.

How then could alternative ideas—openly challenging neoliberal tenets, and often referred to as the illiberal backlash in post-communist Europe—emerge and, in the case Poland and Hungary, win the support of major political forces? Arguably, this is not just a matter of the extent to which liberalism was embedded (Bohle and Greskovits 2012), as the embedding of liberalism hardly approximates the contours of illiberal conservatism. First, illiberalism is actually quite widespread, irrespective of whether or not the country in question belonged to those countries in which reformers mitigated the impact of neoliberal reforms through welfare spending. Second, even though power holders critical of liberal tenets are present in several post-communist countries (Dawson and Hanley 2016), it is mainly in Poland and Hungary that they invested considerable efforts in developing such criticism into a full-fledged ideological contestation of liberalism (and we would also add Russia to this group). Hence, the strength of conservatism cannot be simply seen in inverse correlation to the amount of liberalism experienced by society. Poland as well as Hungary belonged to the group that actually attempted to “mitigate and embed” reforms (although admittedly not as much as the Czech Republic, as discussed further below). Conservatism, on the other hand, is virtually absent from those countries that did the least embedding of economic liberalism and saw extensive austerity programs following the financial crises, such as Romania (Ban 2016), Bulgaria (Adascalitei 2017) and the Baltic states (Sommers 2014), notwithstanding the signs of illiberalism manifest in the political arenas of these countries (Greskovits 2015).

### ***The weak institutionalization of political systems***

Another approach in answering the question about the emergence of illiberalism has been to reconsider the effects of transition and in particular the eastern enlargement of the European Union. Thus illiberalism appears as the result of

the lack of institutionalization of established political parties, showing that the parties in power throughout transition failed to ensure the representation of popular interests. This happened because post-communist political party systems have been hardly structured by cleavages and barely enjoy legitimacy, and since political party organizations have tended to be highly unstable (Powell and Tucker 2014). Dissatisfaction with political elites and perceived corruption also tended to be far higher in East Central Europe than in Western Europe (Dahlberg et al. 2013), although the data suggests that if dissatisfaction alone were to explain the rise of illiberal conservatism, it should have emerged in Romania and Bulgaria, not Poland and Hungary.

Furthermore, while the European Union has initially been seen as having made a crucial contribution to the spread of liberal democracy in the post-communist area (Vachudová 2005), more recent contributions have doubted the lasting impact of “Europeanization” (Coman 2014, 920). Rather than “Europeanization,” they document “concentration and abuse of executive power, a systematic political patronage and a plebiscitary interpretation of democracy” (Tomini 2014), although until 2015 liberal democracy was perceived to be far more “resilient” in Poland than in other countries (Tomini 2014; Brusis 2016). Simply put, it was perhaps just a matter of time until the weak institutionalization, deep divisions and volatility of political party landscapes would turn out to be an opportunity for one “political partisan player [...] to cement its predominance by degrading democratic competition,” as happened in Hungary from 2010 onwards (Kitschelt 2015; Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015). This explanation, however, raises the question of what drives that “political partisan player” and why such a player would attempt to do more than simply reverse the liberal transition agenda by attempting to form a new national and international model of political economy. Explanations stressing the weak institutionalization of party systems also fail to address variation across the region: why are conservatives politically successful in Poland and Hungary, pledging to pursue nothing less than a “national-conservative revolution” in those countries while hardly even present in the parliaments of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania or Bulgaria?

### ***The political economy of market reforms and transition***

A broad comparative literature on political–economic transition and the different ways in which post-communist countries mastered the economic transition from plan to market suggests that the answer might reside partly in the extent to which post-communist politicians could “embed” the market economy in the wider society, and in which way they managed to integrate their economies.

In the Variety of Capitalism literature (VoC), the Visegrad countries—Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia—are sometimes called “dependent market economies,” characterized by fast integration into Western and international value chains during the 1990s and an ensuing strong presence of Western capital in key sectors such as manufacturing, banks, or media (Nölke

and Vliegenthart 2009; King and Szelényi 2005; Bluhm et al. 2014). Manufacturing investment in the four countries compensated for the deindustrialization that took place in almost all post-communist countries after the breakdown of the Soviet-led international economic system with semi-tech and semi-skilled manufacturing jobs in highly modernized and productive subsidiaries of Western companies. In Poland and Hungary, the strong presence of Western capital sparked calls for something coming close to the re-nationalization of key industries, an idea later adopted by “national-conservatives” around the Kaczyński brothers and Viktor Orbán. In the Czech Republic, such debates over the Western presence in national markets have been under way since the Vaclav Klaus-led government of the 1990s. However, this criticism then fused with otherwise neoliberal ideas on social welfare, and Klaus could not realize his version of a market economy “without social adjectives” because of resistance in the former dissident elite and in the population, favoring a “social liberal” approach to reforms (Orenstein 2001). In contrast to Poland and Hungary, Czech conservatives largely excluded social protection from their agenda.

While the VoC approach might offer a hint about what facilitated the counter-movement precisely among the leading transition countries Poland and Hungary, the concept of “embedded neoliberalism” gives another. Many countries in the post-communist region witnessed liberalism without embedding that is a comprehensive social policy aiming to mitigate the social impact of economic reforms. For instance, in the Baltic countries reformers simply framed market reforms as a matter of national survival (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). In Romania, neoliberalism in the form of wide-ranging privatizations only reached the country in the 2000s (Ban 2016), and only after an initial period of “embedding,” meaning significant concessions to militant and vocal trade unions (Varga 2015; Varga and Freyberg-Inan 2015).

In contrast, Visegrad countries—including Poland and Hungary—witnessed more “embedding” of market reforms, meaning higher levels of social and welfare spending than other countries of the post-communist region, at least throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. For instance, in the Czech Republic such “embedding” mitigated the impact of reforms by incorporating popular demands for social protection into policymaking from the onset of transition (Sil 2013; Orenstein 2001). However, Poland and Hungary could not reach similar levels of embedded liberalism as the Czech Republic, simply because they did not share with the Czech Republic a powerful left-wing trade union with strong political support from left-wing parties without a communist past (Sil 2017; Varga 2015). In Poland and Hungary, political forces on the left and right and trade unions participated in liberalization and market reforms, while conservatives could largely dissociate themselves from the large welfare cuts and reforms of the 1990s and 2000s. As a consequence, they developed an agenda around defending national sovereignty from perceived Western economic and political domination, recuperating the welfare state, and eliminating all traces of “communism” (as outlined in the next subsection, this insistence upon “anti-communism” is a further difference from the Czech Republic).

To conclude, the rise of conservatism is largely an effect of how post-communist countries embedded their respective market economies. However, despite the political economy literature's contribution to understanding the contours of illiberalism, it shares with the "weak institutionalization" literature a focus on variables mainly concerned with the actions of political parties. Yet, as argued throughout this book, the emergence of a new illiberal conservatism is a broader phenomenon, and specific conservative ideas do not simply emerge within certain political forces, but rather within broader discursive fields, and from the interaction between politicians, think tanks, intellectual circles, non-governmental organizations close to the various churches, and the influence of mobilization efforts or conservative civil society actors.

### *Civil society in ECE*

Much of the literature on the sources of illiberalism studies these at the level of political parties and of the institutionalization of a certain degree of representation of popular interests. A different and growing literature suggests that illiberalism might owe its rise not only to the dynamics of political systems, but also to developments in civil society and the agency of social movements. Long before the return to power of Fidesz and PiS in the 2010s, civil society in these countries showed a strong presence of what were referred to even then—at the beginning of the 2000s—as "conservative" forces. Human rights advocate and scholar Wiktor Osiatyński, for instance, referred to the network of organizations and initiatives around Radio Maryja in Poland as the largest formation of Polish civil society, "capable of engaging the commitment of millions" (Graff 2008). In Hungary, the conservative "Citizens' Circles" developed from 2002 onwards as a reaction to the electoral victory of Socialists and Liberals (Molnár 2016); already by that time, right-wing and conservative civil society forces showed the strongest street presence in protests and demonstrations in Hungary (Greskovits and Wittenberg 2013). It is important to note that a crucial point around which illiberal conservatism organized in Poland and Hungary has been the defense of the Catholic Church and the relevance of Christian precepts for their respective societies. We would also add Russia to this group of countries, as the importance of its Orthodox Church to conservatives can hardly be understated (see Bluhm and Brand; Köllner; and Wierzholska in this volume). Church and religious organizations play a major role in all three countries in fostering a conservative civil society that aims to counterbalance the idea of civil society in the 1990s as a Western-financed lever for promoting democracy (Saxonberg 2016; Köllner this volume; Graff and Korolczuk 2017).

One further major position around which these forces coalesced in Poland and Hungary was the perception that liberalism, with its focus upon markets and political institutions, ignores or even obscures problems that conservatives deemed as important as political-economic ones, allegedly interfering with liberal reforms: most importantly, issues of "transitional justice" (Stan 2009), of how to deal with the communist past. Conservatives in general argued for

harsher and broader prosecution of former communist officials and secret service personnel. While the Czech Republic quickly moved beyond this debate by adopting a radical “lustration law” that was heavily criticized internationally at the time, Poland, Hungary, and many other countries were far less resolute in this respect, finding ways to “accommodate” past elites rather than preventing them from holding public office. Consequently, the conflict over the culpability and influence of former communists raged on in Poland and Hungary, “escalating mutual accusations and deepen[ing] mistrust among people” (David 2006, 365). These conflicts “eroded the post-1989 consensus politics,” led to the first formulations of conservatism not just among politicians but also among intellectuals, and even turned against former dissidents, accused of having had “abandoned the anti-communist platform” (Trencsényi 2014, 137).

To summarize, research into the causes of illiberalism and more broadly the shape of democracy in ECE has either traced it back to structural factors such as weak political party institutionalization, the path of economic integration after the fall of communism and the conditions of EU enlargement, or to voter preferences and ideologies espoused by parties (Rovny 2015). It has generally explored illiberalism as a phenomenon characterizing political parties and has rarely focused on illiberalism within other social formations, such as civil society and social movements. While the literature on civil society in post-communist countries has documented the growing contestation of liberalism well ahead of—or parallel to—the rise to power of illiberal politicians such as Viktor Orbán and Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński, we still know little about the wider discursive field that has facilitated conservatism, something explored throughout this book.

### ***How does Russia fit in? The re-ideologization of Russia’s increasingly authoritarian regime***

At first glance, the Russian turn to conservatism appeared to be triggered by a completely different set of reasons. Russia’s “slide back” toward authoritarian structures and thought occurred much earlier than in Poland and Hungary, and well before opponents of liberal reforms united under the flag of conservatism. The liberal system of checks and balances never really took off, and the window of opportunity for a competitive party system—even a weak one—ended when Putin took office as president in 2000. The neoliberal economic reforms were contested from the beginning by greater sections of the elite, in particular during the constitutional crisis of 1993, when President Boris Yeltsin dissolved the country’s parliament by force. In the ensuing State Duma, the Communist Party and the Far Right had the upper hand over pro-presidential forces. The subsequent strengthening of the president’s power ended the experiment of introducing a liberal checks-and-balances system and stopped further reforms, while the social situation of most of the Russian population did not recover from the initial shock. Since then, the identification of liberalism with pure market liberalism as the cause of the socio-economic disaster in the 1990s, along with the

notion of the decay of statehood, have turned into strong narratives in Russia. They incorporate diagnoses about the neoliberal reform agenda that are not so different from what can be heard in Poland or Hungary.

Nevertheless, the ideology of managerialism and monetarism, as Eyal et al. put it (1998, 74), continued to influence Russia's hybrid regime. One of the most important lessons Putin took from the volatile 1990s is that stable rule requires macro-economic stability, limiting inflation through a strict control of the money supply. That is why the Putin regime refrained from interfering with the restrictive monetary policy of the central bank despite ongoing criticism from conservatives and communists. In his first term as president, Putin pushed through neoliberal-inspired welfare reforms that had already been prepared under Yeltsin (e.g. Cook 2007). Despite the Russian elite's strong anti-Western sentiments, since the mid-2000s the administration has increasingly turned to "neoliberal" administrative techniques such as New Public Management or public-private partnerships (Bikbov 2018).

The new "party of power" "United Russia" (*Edinaya Rossiya*), created in a top-down manner in 2003, started with a strong anti-ideological attitude (Bluhm in this volume) that allowed different approaches to economic policy. This attitude fits the literature on modern authoritarian regimes that sees the lack—or even avoidance—of a particular ideology as a key feature of such regimes (Krajev 2011; Hale 2010). Hence, the emergence of conservatism as an active opposition to the liberal reform project raises the question of why this kind of "re-ideologization" has happened.

The literature offers two sets of explanations for this phenomenon—both are related to the thesis of a pure instrumental use of ideology mentioned above. First, the "re-ideologization" is supposed to compensate for the increasing uncertainty of Putin's regime after the financial crisis, the drop in the oil price, and the colored revolutions that during 2011–12 even seemed to have reached Russia. It was also supposed to compensate for Dmitry Medvedev's failure to break out of the development trap with liberal-inspired ideas about "conservative modernization" (Trenin 2010; Shekhovtsov 2017, 80; see also Busygina and Filippov in this volume). Second, Shekhovtsov (2017, 84) and others argue that "Russian conservatism" became a starting point for seeking legitimation for Putin's regime in certain political camps in the West, including the Far Right. However, this understanding acknowledges the conservative turn only when Putin officially referred to it in 2013; it tends to reduce the role of conservative intellectuals, norm entrepreneurs, and political activists to "ideologues for hire" or believers that can be perfectly controlled from above. This view ignores the emerging discursive field of Russia's new conservatism: although supported by the administration from the beginning of the 2000s (with ups and downs), it became strongly connected to the fights within the Russian elite over Russia's future, and became rooted in an active conservative civic society and backed by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) (see Köllner; Bluhm and Brand in this volume). Despite the fact that attempts to make a stringent "quasi-state" ideology out of conservatism have failed, and that Putin himself still claims to be a

“pragmatist with a conservative bent” (Putin 2013), the creation of a conservative infrastructure, networks and influence channels has had an impact on Russia’s foreign and domestic politics.

### **Defining conservatism**

Modern political conservatism is a reflexive political ideology that distinguishes itself from a conservative habitus or everyday mindset. The constructed nature of modern political conservatism is apparent more than elsewhere in the post-communist context. Western Europe conservatism was re-established as part of a liberal order after the Second World War and is—although challenged by the New Right—still deeply rooted within the West European party systems. This is not the case in post-communist Europe. Although conservative thinking was not totally absent during the period of state socialism, it was unreflectively embedded in revolutionary rhetoric and could not distance itself from communist ideology. The return of conservatism as an ideology in the region—or its “resurrection,” as some Russian authors put it (Makarenko 2016, 286)—since the 2000s is the result of intellectual work and political self-identification that also allows the formation of alliances with other “conservatives” within and between countries, and thus a highly reflexive process from the beginning. Its promoters operate at different levels of ideas: at the level of analytical and ideational reflections on current situation and crises, the level of historical–philosophical tradition and identity construction, as well as on a quasi-scientific level of (self) research into the phenomenon in the context of other conservatisms. It is often authors who identify themselves as conservative that carry out research on new conservatism in post-communist countries.

The first analysis of conservative styles of thinking provided by the well-known sociologist of knowledge, Karl Mannheim in the mid-1920s, is an established reference point for these authors. So is Samuel Huntington’s work on modern conservatism (1957), stressing the situational and positional character of conservatism as a counter-ideology to the “progressive” ideologies of modernity—liberalism and socialism. This idea of conservatism as an intellectual and political counter-movement to liberalism and socialism forms a key frame for the new conservatism in the region.

The main criticism of new conservatives is directed against Western neo-liberalism and the idea that political models can travel between regions and countries. Furthermore, they also question an alleged alliance between neo-liberalism and the political and cultural agenda of the so-called New Left: they accuse this alliance of forgetting the old social questions in favor of identity politics and the protection of minority rights. It is important to note that the conservative response to liberalism and socialism does not exclude the incorporation of “progressive” ideas (Huntington 1957; Freedon 2006 [1996]). For instance, the new conservatives in the three countries share with the Left the conviction about the need of state redistribution. Orbán directs his notion of “illiberal democracy” primarily against recent models of liberalism that have



supposedly turned into the opposite of an original liberalism that truly defended “freedom.”

Despite their positional and situational character, all versions of modern political conservatism have some elements, themes, and motives in common that form a specific “style of thought” (Mannheim 1955 [1936]) of conservatism and that allow conservatives to identify themselves as such. In their perspective, conservatives often stress the existence of national specificities, which they contrast with the universalist claims of liberalism and socialism. However, in order to become a true counter-movement with mobilizing power across countries, they need constitutive elements that overcome particularism. Melvin Thorne has argued that all conservatives share a certain “intellectual core” around notions of “human nature” as “unalterable and unchanging” and of an “objective moral order” that is “real, immutable and eternal” (Thorne 1990, 8). George Lakoff has shown that conservatives share a type of thinking around a “central model,” allowing them to recognize themselves as conservatives despite tremendous divisions among them. This model consists of a deeply moralizing approach to politics, seeing only those social institutions as necessary that act as “strict fathers,” disciplining individuals toward more autonomy rather than cultivating their dependence (Lakoff 2010 [1996]). Michael Freeden (2006 [1996]) has argued that modern conservatism possesses—like the “progressive” ideologies—a set of ideas or “core concepts” (“natural order,” “tradition”) which varies in terms of precise content but generally remains stable. These core concepts are surrounded by other, more situational concepts, themes, and motives that help create the impression of conservatism’s high level of heterogeneity. Three core concepts stand out in particular: the concepts of change, natural order, and tradition. Conservatives share the idea that change is problematic if it does not aim to restore or move closer to the “natural order.” The understanding of “natural order” has varied tremendously, including diverse concepts as “God, history, biology, and science” as the “anchor of social order” (Freeden 2006 [1996], 334).

Sociologists have criticized approaches to conservatism that stress the existence of “intellectual cores” (Thorne), a “central model” (Lakoff) or “core concepts” (Freeden) for assuming the “intellectual coherence” of the conservative project rather than treating such coherence as something in need of explanation (Gross et al. 2011, 329). We agree with this contention, but point to one major explanation of such coherence, namely the efforts of conservatives themselves, often sustained over decades. Lakoff for instance has argued that US conservatives have been working on achieving internal coherence, expanding networks and influence, and developing ways to reach the wider population ever since the 1970s (Azab Powell 2003). Similarly, the intellectual coherence of conservatism in ECE and Russia is the outcome of the conservatives’ sustained efforts at expanding networks and disseminating their ideas.

There are many qualifiers for conservatism in the post-communist context, such as “national,” “social,” “left” or “right,” “enlightened” or “responsible” conservatism. What they share—although with varying emphasis—is the concept

of a “strong state,” meaning a high power concentration at the level of government to the detriment of the checks-and-balances system of modern liberal democracy. The preoccupation with state strength is the key to understanding why the new conservatism is illiberal and authoritarian at its core (despite the opposite claims heard from new conservative ideologists and politicians). The notion of a strong state goes hand in hand with a deep skepticism toward liberal *laissez-faire*. The new conservatives propose Karl Polanyi’s idea of a global counter-movement against globalization that “re-embeds markets” into national states and societies through *national* re-regulation and state-driven development. The economy is therefore a major playground for the new conservatives, although concrete economic approaches often differ. In contrast to the *Gemeinschaft* (community)-romance on the far-right periphery in Europe and Russia, conservatives accept the market economy and private property. They regard the introduction of a market economy as a major achievement of transition, but one that has to be better related to national values and standards, and which should serve the overarching goals of the state and society (which are usually perceived as identical). “Tradition” thus provides precisely the cultural program that guides the perception of morally proper and socially acceptable behavior.

### ***Conservatism versus populism and nationalism***

The recent literature on the rise of illiberal thinking in post-communist Europe and elsewhere depicts some of the concepts, themes, and motives of the new conservatism using terms such as “populism” or “neo-nationalism.” There are two reasons why we do not follow this path. First, “populism,” as well as “nationalism” or “neo-nationalism” to some extent, are not self-designations, but concepts coming from outside of the new conservatism. In contrast, the “resurrection” of conservatism in the region is a self-perception and should be taken seriously as such, in the sense that it is worth looking into what these actors understand by it. Populism in particular has become a highly politicized term used by different sides in recent political battles, something that makes the use of the term more difficult.<sup>3</sup>

Second, despite certain overlaps, populism and nationalism do not cover all aspects relevant to grasping the new phenomenon. Populism is understood as “a moralistic imagination of politics [...] which opposes a morally pure and fully unified, but ultimately functional, people, to small minorities” (Müller 2014, 485). While some see in it a mere “communication strategy” (Aalberg et al. 2017), it is nevertheless decidedly illiberal “because of its rejection of intermediaries and institutions as well as the political discourse fostered by them” (Aalberg et al. 2017, 12). Populism and nationalism are sometimes regarded as “thin-centered” ideologies (Mudde 2004, 544)<sup>4</sup>, as “discursive” frames rather than ideologies (Aslanidis 2016). Most importantly, nationalism and populism both need “thicker” or “full” ideologies in order to achieve concrete political goals and take the shape of concrete policies (Stanley 2008). What the concept of populism therefore misses (to the extent that it fails to take into account more

specific ideological formulations) is that the actors usually associated with “populism” in post-communist Europe and Russia have a specific agenda, specific contents or concepts that go beyond the people–elite contradiction.

Furthermore, populism is almost exclusively applied to political parties: the term is never used to denote think tanks, foundations, or any other organizations or groups beyond political parties that do the groundwork for the new conservatism. We therefore need a frame that captures illiberalism beyond the electoral arena. “Illiberalism” per se is hardly a candidate: “illiberals” do not just reject liberalism, but actively seek alternatives (which we intend to investigate). And illiberalism can also characterize forces in the post-communist area that are not conservative by self-definition, or that fall under the term of the Far Right. Thus, while illiberalism seems to feature widely throughout the region, conservatism is a particular contestation of liberalism.

Terms such as right-wing nationalism or neo-nationalism also feature heavily in the description of post-communist illiberalism (Gingrich and Banks 2006). “Economic nationalism” seems to have become an important answer worldwide to the unsolved questions that the financial crisis left behind. A flurry of studies dedicated to economic policies pursued in ECE demonstrates the relevance of this analytical frame, even though some countries stick more to a neoliberal path than others (Johnson and Barnes 2015; Ban 2016). The term “nationalism” is often close but not exclusively related to conservative, right or far-right thought, and is reconcilable with economic liberalism: the Baltic States, for instance, followed a path of far-reaching economic liberalization in the 1990s precisely under the slogan of national survival (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). Yet conservatism includes ideas about social order that go beyond the notions of national identity, history, and solidarity that nationalism usually praises. Moreover, nationalism is primarily particularist and fosters rivalry between nations. Conservatives who want to mobilize beyond their own national community often distance themselves from a “chauvinistic” nationalism of the Far Right, and pledge their dedication to a “healthy” and “tolerant” version of nationalism open to other national identities.

### ***Our approach***

We see new conservatism as part of an expanding discursive field in which liberalism, at least in the 1990s, played the role of the “incumbent,” or dominant, ideology. A “field” is a “space of conflict and competition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and “consists of relationships between different ‘positions,’ with various types of ‘resources,’ economic, symbolic, etc., flowing between them” (Crossley 2003, 59). Discursive fields are “discursive terrain(s) in which meaning contests occur” (Spillman 1995, 140) and that focus our attention not only on the competing ideas and discourses, but also on the actors engaged in their production and dissemination. We approach the discursive field of liberalism and new conservatism as structured not so much by isolated actors and organizations, but by “knowledge networks” (Stone 2005), understood as loose

groups of think tanks, media outlets, politicians or factions within political parties, and university departments or holders of single university chairs that engage in the production and dissemination of ideology, that is of a “political conception of the world” (Mannheim 1955 [1936]).<sup>5</sup> We are particularly interested in the role played in such networks by conceptual or “conceptive ideologists” (Marx and Engels 2010 [1845]), the intellectuals that have the capacity and skills to take on the task of bringing together the disparate strands of criticism vis-à-vis the present situation into ideologies, political conceptions of the world.

Mannheim wrote of groups engaging in the production of knowledge as “communities of knowing” and emphasized the importance of shared experiences and the “rootedness of knowledge in the social texture” for the emergence of such communities: political knowledge is not just a reflection upon (or “contemplation” of) distant events, but often emerges from concrete and often *resented* collective experiences. The spread of neoliberalism among Central and East European intellectuals, and in particular economists, harks back to their resentment over communist state bureaucracies (Bockman and Eyal 2002). Similarly, conservatism has re-emerged as an intellectual and political current out of experiences such as Russia’s loss of international influence and prestige following the fall of the Soviet Union. In the case of conservatives in Poland and Hungary, it has emerged out of the resentment over the liberals’ failure to do justice to post-communist societies by pursuing a thorough condemnation of communism and of what conservatives perceived as its internationalist legacy.

In such processes of knowledge production and reflection upon collective experiences, societal actors actually do more than simply collect and reflect upon the information and events around them: they also develop frames, that is “interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment” (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). For Mannheim, the development of ideologies such as conservatism start from “definitions of the situation,” that is “meaning-giving, evaluating definition[s]” producing “situation[s] where activity and counter-activity are distinguishable, and the totality of events are articulated into a process” (Mannheim 1955 [1936], 21). We take frames or “situational definitions” as a starting point in our empirical analyses, helping us to structure the empirical material and the various “positions” that conservative actors take in their discursive field. We thus ask what the starting point is in conservative criticisms of the post-communist period, how these conservative critiques define the situation of their group and country, and to which problems and actors they trace back their specific situations.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of the American conservative movement, George Lakoff has argued that US neocons have mastered framing far better than their political opponents, at least since the 1970s—for instance by framing taxes as an encroachment on individual freedoms, a frame Lakoff considers more powerful than the frame used by liberals that presents the payment of taxes as an issue of

patriotism (Azab Powell 2003; Lakoff 2010 [1996]). Similarly, in ECE, the new illiberal conservative framing of transition as a missed opportunity to undo an unjust past eventually trumped the neoliberal framing of transition as an opportunity to catch up with the West (Trencsényi 2014). Furthermore, we refer to this new conservatism in ECE and Russia as activating, because it challenges the established post-1989 order, including the countries' positioning in the international labor division.

To summarize, in this book we aim to research how conservatives develop, recombine and adapt concepts under a broader frame of conservatism, and how they struggle to achieve conceptual coherence in their positions. We build on the notion of frame from the field of social movements research and pay attention not just to the contents of discourses, but also to the networks in which they emerge and which then circulate them. This focus opens up the ground for conceptualizing the contested nature of conservatism. Thus, even though conservatism has emerged in each of the countries we study as an important diagnostic and moralizing frame, different groups and circles often disagree over important aspects of conservatism, and have produced a heterogeneity of conservative "positions" within the wider discursive field, making conservatism anything but a monolithic ideology.

## Chapter synopsis

### *Part I*

Our book proceeds as follows. Russia is a key case for the rise and conceptual development of the new illiberal conservatism, which is far from being the same as "Putinism." Hence, two chapters in this section are devoted to the Russian case. In Chapter 2, Katharina Bluhm analyzes the emergence of a conservative discursive field of think tanks, foundations, and media, and the core concepts of the new Russian conservatism, which has become the dominant frame for different groups and circles since 2003. She argues that the new illiberal conservatism emerges from two directions: first, from Putin's administration and the "party of power," which was searching for an ideological label after the victory in the 2003 elections. The second side—encouraged by the first one—consists of ideologists and political activists who were concerned by the road Russia had taken not only in the 1990s but also since Putin's ascension to power. Putin's return to presidential office in 2012 led to a further expansion of conservative infrastructure, which, however, did not pacify the internal elite conflicts about economic models, the state's role, and the concept of tradition.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that conservatism in general has a binary nature: it can be seen as proposing a set of absolute, sometimes religiously derived values, which are applicable to all people at all times; and it can be seen as promoting the concept of organic development, which implies that there are no absolute values and that each society should develop according to its own nature. Conservatism is therefore simultaneously both universalist and particularist. Paul

Robinson charts these two trends in Russian conservative thought. He argues that Russian conservatives from the Slavophiles onwards have taken two approaches to reconciling the universal and the particular. One has claimed that Russia's particularity is that it is the repository of universal truth, and has therefore insisted that Russia must defend its separate identity for the benefit of mankind as a whole. The second has identified the universal good with the promotion of national diversity. This second approach has therefore rejected universalism while at the same time preserved the idea that Russia has a universal mission. In line with this logic, many Russian conservatives in the modern era claim that the development of a multipolar world, in which nations protect their sovereignty and defend their right to a separate path of development, serves not only Russian interests, but also those of humanity as a whole.

In Chapter 4, Aron Buzogány and Mihai Varga take interest in the intellectual contours of the illiberal project in Hungary and explore the writings and core concepts of major intellectual figures associated with Viktor Orbán. They find that what is central for Hungarian conservatives is the restoration of state authority to define and pursue "national interests." Focusing on the core elements of the illiberal agenda and the main intellectual figures that formulated it, Buzogány and Varga find that these elements were manifest long before the 2010 electoral victory of Fidesz, and were heavily influenced by the Hungarian reception of Western conservative writers. Ewa Dąbrowska reaches similar conclusions in Chapter 5, in which she details the complex scene of Polish think tanks and intellectual circles that formulated conservative ideas long before the rise to power of Law and Justice in 2015, and examines their discourse. Using the concept of a discursive coalition, she shows how conservatives formed such a coalition following the electoral victories and corruption scandals of the post-communist social-democrats. In response, they developed the positive vision of a new, fourth republic featuring a strong state that is able to act and follow national interest. She interprets the institutional changes enacted by PiS as consistent with the conservative discourse, yet following a more narrow political ideology.

It is important to note that much of what conservatives articulate in terms of ideas is reflected at the level of the core electorates of PiS and Fidesz. This issue is explored in Chapter 6 by Jochen Roose and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski with the help of European Social Survey data. While religious orientation and a belief in one's own low political efficacy are common for both parties' core supporters, a strong valuation of tradition and homophobia are typical for Polish PiS supporters but less so for Hungarian Fidesz supporters. Roose and Karolewski further argue that both parties built their electoral success on problems of transformative governance, such as high social costs for some social strata, a perforated welfare state, and the corruption of elites in connection with specific scandals of previous governments. Krzysztof Jasiński further develops the focus on the PiS agenda in Chapter 7, taking particular interest in what the PiS means with its "conservative modernization" strategy. Jasiński sees in it an attempt to respond to the "dependent market economy" that has emerged as a result of the

transition and European integration. He explores how PiS politicians want to overcome Poland's semi-peripheral position within Europe by "strategic coordination," and explains the fundamental controversies surrounding its implementation and consequences.

## ***Part II***

The book's second part focuses on the translation of conservative ideas into economic and social political action, as well as across borders, between national settings. Irina Busygina and Mikhail Filippov argue that despite the intellectual build-up in the conservative camp, the conservative influence over Russian economic policy remains limited, as Putin and liberal economists deem their proposals unacceptable. The only exception—albeit a significant one—is increased military spending, with the ambition of Russian military dominance in the world. In contrast, Dąbrowska, Buzogány, and Varga observe that Polish conservatives found considerable inspiration in the rise to power of Viktor Orbán in 2010 and his use of heterodox economic policy. Examining contacts between Polish and Hungarian conservatives and the reception of Hungarian ideas and policies by Polish experts related to PiS, the authors conclude that Polish conservative economic ideas in the 2010s were heavily influenced by Orbán's policy experiments.

Returning to Russia, Katharina Bluhm and Martin Brand also find considerable influence exerted by the new Russian conservatism over family policy. Their focus is on an ultraconservative coalition of the Russian Orthodox Church, civic organizations, and experts and politicians, demanding a return to a multi-child family as social norm and the strengthening of the family as a fundamental institution, against the individual rights of its members *and* the state. Despite their growing influence, ultraconservatives are far from determining family policy in Russia. Agnieszka Wierzcholska examines the Polish conservative actors' approach to gender roles and reproductive rights, and discusses how Polish society has been polarized and mobilized over gender issues since PiS came to power in November 2015. The author shows how a "war on gender" became the "glue" that helped bring together various conservative actors. Here too, the Church played a decisive role, opposing "gender-ideology," targeting sex education in schools, and calling for the strengthening of the traditional roles of men and women.

Drawing on an ethnographic study, Tobias Köllner offers a bottom-up perspective on conservatism in contemporary Russia. In particular, he draws attention to notions of conservatism within Russian Orthodoxy and related activities at the local level. In this way, he, too, rejects conceptualizations of conservatism as being exclusively introduced and cultivated from above by Putin's administration. In contrast, the relation between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia is perceived and described as a complex interplay of two powerful institutions that are engaged in both cooperation and conflict.

Sebastian Schiek and Azam Isabaev further develop the prospects of conservative transfers between post-communist countries by studying conservative “transfers” from Russia to some of its neighboring countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Their focus is the law “against homosexual propaganda amongst minors” adopted by the State Duma in 2013, which they see as an instance of “moral conservatism,” an ideological predisposition widespread in the post-Soviet space. The chapter addresses the question of why the Russian law and the existing links between Russia and its neighbors did not lead to a domino effect, causing neighbors to adopt similar laws. Although moral conservatism is dominant in all former republics, its politicization and the interests of political actors are crucial to grasping the diffusion process.

The last chapter concludes this volume by systematizing the key similarities and differences found between the Polish, Hungarian, and Russian cases. Bluhm and Varga argue that the broad picture emerging from the volume is that conservatives contest liberalism not just in terms of rejecting economic liberalism, but struggle to reaffirm and reorient state policies across a wide range of domains from the perspective of national traditions. This has the effect of paradoxically limiting alliances between Russian conservatives and their Polish and Hungarian counterparts, who see their traditions as deeply rooted in the Western world. For Russia’s new conservatives, the proclaimed distancing from Europe goes hand in hand with an attempt to maintain and develop an ideational influence over those actors in Europe who are perceived as potential allies. These, however, are likely to be found more on the Far Right than among fellow conservatives in East Central Europe.

## Notes

- 1 For comparison, in the case of earlier transitions such as the Spanish one—Spanish economists and reformers participated not only in networks imbued with neoliberal ideas, but also German ordoliberal ones, at that time emphasizing relatively progressive approaches to redistribution (Ban 2016, 23).
- 2 Before that decade, the dominant conviction was that democracy and free market were not mutually reinforcing, but that instead there is a need to reconcile the two (Blyth 1999).
- 3 See for example Mouffe, who demands a new Left “populist” strategy to counter the “populism” of the nationalist Right (Mouffe 2013). See also Müller (2015) for a discussion of the dangers of conceptional overstretch in the case of populism.
- 4 Mudde paraphrases the terminology used by Freedon in discussing nationalism (Freedon 1998).
- 5 Similarly, Marlene Laruelle conceptualizes the “Kremlin” as competing networks of knowledge production she refers to as “ideological ecosystems,” “each of which consists of specific institutions, funders, patrons, identifiable symbolic references, ideological entrepreneurs, and media platforms” (Laruelle 2017).
- 6 See Varga (2014) for an analysis of social movement strategies with the help of “definitions of situations” in the context of post-communist worker protests.



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**Part I**

**Genealogies**



## 2 Russia's conservative counter-movement

### Genesis, actors, and core concepts

*Katharina Bluhm*

#### Introduction

The formation of a new illiberal conservatism in Russia represents a central—and at the same time special—case. As in Poland and Hungary, this process was already under way in the first half of the 2000s, and took shape with considerable intellectual dedication. The new Russian conservatives do not confront contemporary liberalism with “the truth” or the “general will” of the people, as populists do, but intend to establish one ideology against another. Conservatism and ideology are self-chosen terms. Conservatives nowadays in Russia, to the extent that they refer to the classics of modern conservative research, place themselves within the tradition of heterogeneous conservative thought that, as in the work of Karl Mannheim, is characterized by a high degree of reflexivity, and, as in Samuel Huntington’s work, constitutes a situational and positional counter-movement to the great “progressive ideologies”—socialism and liberalism (Averyanov 2006; Benediktov et al. 2014; Remizov 2006).

In this chapter the genesis, actors, and concepts of the new Russian conservatism are analyzed. It originated from two sides which do not act without evidencing some relation of tension with the other. On the one hand, the conservative turnaround in Russia was initiated and supported “from above”—from the center of power around the new president Vladimir Putin. On the other hand, it is the result of a movement by intellectuals, political and moral activists who often started from outside the political establishment, or even in opposition to it. “The Kremlin” has co-opted some of these intellectuals and activists into the elite, providing them with high and comfortable positions in think tanks, foundations, and media, to work as “conceptive,” or conceptual, ideologists. According to Marx and Engels “conceptive ideologists” make “the formation of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood” (Marx and Engels 2010 [1845], 60). The term works well in grasping the role of intellectuals in the knowledge network of the new conservatism in Russia—even though ideology represents more than just a cover for interests.

I use the terms “ideology” and conservatism as analytical tools and to refer to the self-descriptions of promoters of the new conservatism. According to Michael Freeden, ideologies are strategies for managing the underlying pluralism

of political ideas in all societies (Freeden 2013, 117). In this sense, they come close to what the research on social movements calls “meta-frames,” a concept originally developed in distinction to the traditional understanding of an ideology as a class-based and coherent *Weltanschauung* (Benford and Snow 2000). Meta- or master-frames are interpretative schemes that simplify the “world out there,” combining diagnostic statements, prognoses and imperatives for collective action (Snow and Benford 1992, 137; Della Porta 1999, 68). Meta-frames do not necessarily refer to abstract political ideas, as ideologies do, but the framing concept helps to understand the rise of conservatism as an influential interpretive schema in Russia that was gradually enriched with ideational content.

I want to pursue three arguments. My *first argument* is that, since the 2000s, conservatism has become the ideological meta-frame on the Russian political and intellectual scene that—officially promoted—has unfolded its ideational and organizing power in political discourses step by step. My *second argument* is that the new Russian conservatism shows context-specific peculiarities but wants to be attractive abroad. Its conceptual ideologists are contributing to the contours of a new, more comprehensive illiberal conservatism that aspires to mobilize to change the international order. This implies a strong sense of mission for Russia, which has been frequent in its history (see Robinson in this volume). Leonid Polyakov, a self-professed and rather “moderate” conservative political scientist (Melville 2017) sees the country’s mission strongly related to the conservative turn: “the fate of the world depends on the fate of conservatism in Russia” (Polyakov 2014, 130). The growing influence of conservatism and its ideologists has not, however—thus my *third argument*—led to a pacifying of the internal elite disputes over Russia’s future path of development. Rather, the battles have been drawn into the vortex of the new conservatism, which is far from being monolithic.

At the center of this analysis are the conceptual ideologists and their positioning in the conservative field of the production of political ideas. The organizational activities and publications of these intellectuals form the basis for my reconstruction of the core concepts of the new Russian conservatism. First, I sketch the rise of the new conservative meta-frame and the institutionalization of the conservative production of ideas in Russia. Then I analyze core concepts of the Russian conservatives and the main variations on these. I conclude with a brief summary.

### **From communism to conservatism: the production of a new meta-frame**

The “resurrection of conservatism” in Russia can be understood both as a continuous process and as a gradual development. According to the first reading, conservatism was never completely gone. At the latest since Stalin, the Communist Party had continually been a “patriotic,” national-imperial party that linked its progressive rhetoric to conservative values and cultural ideals. This legacy prepared the ground for a new illiberal conservatism, but does not explain its



character. The second reading better reveals what is the *new* in the new Russian conservatism. Its genesis is the result of an *interaction* between the ruling political elite and conservative intellectuals and milieus. Political parties, especially the new “party of power,” United Russia, and other parties supporting President Vladimir Putin, are relevant. However, because in Russia party competition does not work as a recruitment mechanism for political leaders, members of the Russian elite also have other forms of organized influence and support, such as think tanks, foundations, media platforms and journals, and political “clubs,” in which conceptual ideologists, policy advisors, and moral and political activists combine their analytical and discursive power. The number of such clubs, especially in Moscow, is a striking feature of Russia’s political-ideological scene and is often part of the “para-political practices” (Sakwa 2010, 196) of the elite circles. Elite members support or even create this kind of infrastructure in order to gain public attention and influence the very top of government hierarchy. Yet in doing so they have also provided the conservative knowledge network with room and resources to continue and intensify its ideational and organizational activities.

In turning conservatism into a new meta-frame we can identify the following four key processes: (1) the return of the self-identity problem and thoughts about geopolitical space; (2) the separation of statist from communism; (3) the formation and institutionalization of a discursive field of conservative ideology production; (4) regroupings, radicalization, and counterbalancing within the field of conservative ideologists that has gained greater influence over politics since 2012.

### ***National identity and space***

The former, banned Communist Party and the new Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), which was re-established in 1991, were the strongholds of patriotic and nationalist forces in the 1990s (Reddaway and Glinski 2001, 31). Neo-Eurasians, Neo-Slavophiles, or Orthodox monarchists on the other hand constituted only marginal phenomena on the political spectrum, and not infrequently were on the side of the Communist Party against Yeltsin’s reform course. Yet through them, a specific combination of geopolitical and identity discourses re-entered the public debate. Central intellectual figures here are the Eurasians Aleksandr Panarin (1940–2003) and Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1961), as well as the lesser-known Vadim Tsymbursky (1957–2009). In a programmatic essay after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Tsymbursky proposes considering Russia as an “island” which should develop in all its parts (not only in its European part but mainly in the South and the East). In contrast to the Eurasians, he rejects a vision of Russia as the “heartland” of the entire Eurasian continent (Tsymbursky 1993). Conservatism plays an important role for all three authors, but it is subordinated to geopolitical thinking.

Panarin, whose writing is clearly superior in intellectual quality to Dugin’s, is the best-known representative of the New Eurasianism of the 1990s and early

2000s (Laruelle 2008). Many of his arguments are integrated into the new Russian conservatism. The philosopher first supported Gorbachev's perestroika, but then, disappointed by Boris Yeltsin's political and economic reforms, turned to the Eurasian exiles of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as to the works of Lev Gumilyov, which in the Soviet era formed a kind of bridge to post-revolutionary Eurasian thinking.<sup>1</sup> Panarin adopts the essentialist idea of Russia as a civilization of its own, an idea that Neo-Eurasians share with Neo-Slavophiles and apply to the new post-Soviet circumstances. Already in the 1990s he rejected Western universalism as an illegitimate claim to hegemony and saw, after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Second Chechen War, "Russia's salvation" only in a strong presidential regime with authoritarian features (*ibid.*, 88). He criticizes the global division of labor, which post-Soviet Russia has entered, as "modern feudalism." Panarin defines the term "globalism," often used in the conservative discourse, as "democracy for a privileged extraterritorial few" who enjoy all the democratic rights without "taking responsibility for the indigenous population" (Panarin 2014, 113, 745). He sharply criticizes liberalism as a system that tends to dismantle the defense of the weak, referring in particular to neoliberalism and liberal democracy, in which nihilism, consumerism, and hedonism rule, while faithfulness, sacrifice, and dedication have no place (*ibid.*, 113, 201). Panarin does not entirely oppose capitalism (preferring a conservative, national capitalism) or modernity. On the contrary, he envisages the return to the "Enlightenment on a new basis" that interprets humanity not according to a "Malthusian model," but as "creative producer" (*ibid.*, 1095).

Unlike Panarin and Tsymbursky, Dugin was a political activist from the outset. His close contacts with the European New Right, in particular in France and Italy, date back to the 1980s and helped shape his Eurasianism (Umland 2009). From 1993–94 he moved out of the context of the Communist Party and became chief ideologist of the National Bolshevik Party (NBP) until he broke with it in 1998 (Laruelle 2008, 109). After several attempts to attain a place as party politician in the Kremlin orbit during Putin's first term, Dugin founded the International Eurasian Movement in 2003 calling for "freedom and independence of Eurasia" from the West. In 2005 a Eurasian "youth organization" followed. At the height of his academic career (2008–14) Dugin headed the Center for Conservative Research at the sociology faculty of the Lomonosov Moscow State University (MGU), where he also published his book *The Fourth Political Theory: Russia and the Political Ideas of the 21st Century* (2009), which was to give Eurasianism an explicitly conservative, anti-Western and anti-liberal foundation. At the beginning of the 2000s Dugin not only managed to dominate the newly awakening geopolitical Eurasianism, but could also build a bridge to neo-Keynesian economists, who in the 1990s held positions in the Yeltsin administration while growing increasingly dissatisfied with his reform course. This was especially true of Mikhail Khazin, who joined the International Eurasian Movement and made a name for himself in Russia in 2003 with a book on the "end of the Pax Americana" that predicted a global financial crisis.

### ***The separation of statism from communism***

In the rise of conservatism to a dominant meta-frame, the separation of statism from communism by the end of the 1990s was a decisive step. Though the deep economic crisis of 1998 weakened the power of the oligarchs and again intensified the debate about the direction of economic policy (see Yakovlev 2014), Yeltsin's legitimization strategies remained within the anti-communist frame until the end, while opponents more or less closely gathered around the new Communist Party.<sup>2</sup> The mentioned separation occurred mainly during and after the battle over the next presidential term in 2000, in which the alliance Fatherland—All Russia (*Otechestvo—Vsyā Rossiya*, OVR) emerged as a new challenger to the Kremlin's candidate Vladimir Putin over the succession to Yeltsin. Behind the OVR there was a union of members of the elite that stood for a national path of development outside the Communist umbrella. After their defeat, part of the OVR joined the Putin-supporters' party Unity (*Edinstvo*). This step has had two outcomes: first, the fusion cleared the way to set up a hegemonic party, United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*), and second, it led to a precarious alliance between market-oriented liberals and statists within the newly founded official "party of power." As a result, United Russia received two-thirds of the votes in the parliamentary elections of 2003, while the Communist Party lost its position as the strongest party in parliament. In addition, the Kremlin privileged carefully selected smaller parties as a "system opposition." While Dugin could not succeed with his project of a Eurasian party in this orbit, Sergey Glazyev, Sergey Baburin, and Dimitry Rogozin fulfilled the mission of capturing the electoral potential of leftist and rightist nationalist forces surrounding the Communist Party and the National Bolsheviks with their newly created party Motherland (*Rodina*) almost too well (Politkovskaya 2007).<sup>3</sup> In the precarious alliance between the different camps, Putin himself was perceived as a "liberal conservative" linking a strong state and conservative values with an open market economy (Polyakov 2000; Prozorov 2005, 135). Over the next almost two decades of Putin's rule, and in spite of the growing state control of large companies and crucial sectors, key positions concerning economic policy remained occupied by market liberals, that is, the ministries of economy and finance as well as the central bank, which has become a point of permanent friction between the various camps.

### ***Time of manifestos: the emergence of a conservative ideological field***

The new majority party United Russia was conceived with the intention of reaching the widest possible voter constituencies in order to secure power permanently, and it therefore attempted to establish itself as a centrist or "catch-all" party aiming at "transcending ideological myths" (Casula 2013, 5). The first manifesto, "Path towards National Success" from United Russia, published in April 2003, called for an "ideology of consolidation and solidarity" (United Russia 2003), but the party presented itself as pragmatic-technocratic and

anti-ideological. At the same time, numerous political clubs, internet platforms, magazines, and publishers sprang up that started to work on a new political-ideological frame that they began to call “conservative.” Many intellectuals of this new type, anti-communist as well as anti-liberal, were born in the 1970s and therefore were too young to have held political office during Gorbachev’s perestroika. They quickly received indirect support from the presidential administration, satellite parties, and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

The new constellation of parties after the parliamentary elections of 2004, and the success of Putin’s administration in strengthening the state against the regions and oligarchs, triggered a broad debate in elite and intellectual circles about the future path of Russia and the political identity of the centrist party of power. This debate went far beyond United Russia. The writing of manifestos for a new conservative agenda began with the “Memorandum: From the Policy of Fear to the Politics of Growth” of the Seraphim Club in 2003 and was published by the former editor-in-chief of the economic journal *Ekspert*, Valery Fadeev, and the journalist Aleksandr Privalov. *Ekspert* was close to Vladislav Surkov, the former PR chief of Yukos and then deputy head of the presidential administration, who two years later formed a think tank around the journal, the Institute for Social Projecting (*Institut obshchestvennogo proektirovaniya*) headed by Fadeev. The Memorandum shares key demands with other opponents of the free-market liberal course, which the authors would later frame as “liberal-conservative”: the state has to engage in industrial policy and should employ an intelligent protectionism and a favorable loan policy to promote home-based industries and the new (bourgeois) middle class (Leontyev et al. 2003). These themes are also found in subsequent conservative manifestos. The club quickly disappeared because of incompatible positions among its members, whereupon Fadeev and Privalov founded the Fourth of November, a better-known club which was integrated as the “liberal-conservative platform” into United Russia. Fadeev and Privalov later distanced themselves from the new conservative meta-frame by trying to differentiate an “authentic liberalism” from the “false neo-liberalism” of the 1990s, and by renaming the liberal-conservative platform a “liberal platform,” without, however, gaining much success in internal party battles (Dąbrowska 2017, 183).

The major wave of conservative manifestos appeared in the context of the next parliamentary election of 2006. United Russia founded a second official wing under Andrey Isayev that the party called the “social-conservative platform.” In 2005 Isayev and other politicians of the party first founded a Center for Social-Conservative Policy (*Tsentr sotsial’no-konservativnoy politiki*). In 2010 he published ideas for an “ideology of social conservatism.” Two years later he brought out a document, “Program Theses for a Russian Social-Conservative Union,” from which the social-conservative wing within United Russia emerged (Isayev 2010; *Tsentr sotsial’no-konservativnoy politiki* 2012). Isayev’s claim to the term “social conservatism” did not imply a carefully drafted agenda in social policy but rather a quite general definition of conservatism as the protection of values such as “freedom and responsibility,” “morality,

solidarity and justice” (Tsentr sotsial’no-konservativnoy politiki 2012). The core ideas of the manifesto refer to a strong state as a developmental agent within a market economy, which in consequence produces a greater social balance. The social conservatives also advocated a speedy integration of Eurasia with Russia “as its heart.”

Not only intellectuals and politicians from the immediate vicinity of the party of power participated in the programmatic competition. As early as the spring of 2006, the young right-wing Orthodox intellectuals Egor Kholmogorov and Arkady Maler, together with other journalists from the internet-project *pravaya.ru*, composed a “Manifesto of Russian Conservatives. Imperatives of a National Rebirth.” In seven points, they called for the formation of a National Conservative Union. Initiating this call was the Rodina founder and member of Parliament Baburin, who after the dissolution of Rodina worked on the creation of a new national-conservative party. In 2006 yet another manifesto appeared, “Russian Political Conservatism,” by the political scientists Mikhail Remizov and Boris Mezhuev, who also belong to the new generation of conservatives (Brazhnikov 2006; Militarev 2006). This manifesto, published by the conservative news agency APN, was not directly linked to party activities. Both authors were editors at the influential internet journal founded in the early 2000s.

Kholmogorov and Remizov introduced themselves within the emerging field of conservative ideological production in the early 2000s with a Conservative Press Club, which published the journal *Conservative* that quickly disappeared because of a lack of funding. Kholmogorov had then worked many years at the Foundation for Effective Politics of the Putin supporter Gleb Pavlovsky, while Remizov became an editor at Pavlovsky’s *Russian Journal*.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Kholmogorov, who propagates a “political Orthodoxy” as political religion (Knorre 2016, 22–6), Remizov (together with Mezhuev) pursues the idea of re-establishing conservatism as a *modern political ideology*. The American conservative tradition was an important reference here. At first, they were oriented after the US “neocons” (neoconservatives), whose concept of market globalization and US global leadership, however, they soon rejected. Today, Remizov and Mezhuev acknowledge their affinity with the American “paleoconservatives” who unite Christian opposition to abortion and homosexuality with a defense of the market and a call for protectionist policies (Remizov 2006; Mezhuev 2007, 2014; O’Sullivan 2013, 306).

The most comprehensive program design, which completely breaks with the character of a manifesto, is from the pen of the Center, later the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism, founded in 2005 and located rather remotely from the Kremlin. Between 2005 and 2007 a group of intellectuals, activists and church representatives elaborated and discussed the text of “Russian Doctrine—a Weapon of Consciousness,” which the authors understood as a key document in the formation of a “new generation of conservatives.” Among them are the founders of the Center, philosopher Vitaly Averyanov, publicist and economist Andrey Kobayakov (co-author of Khazin’s book on the end of the Pax Americana and lecturer at Lomonosov University), and the journalist Vladimir Kucherenko,

who under the pseudonym Maksim Kalashnikov produces at rapid-fire speed extremely contentious literature. Averyanov, like Kalashnikov, was born in the 1970s and considers liberalism and conservatism to be fundamentally incompatible (Averyanov 2006). Kholmogorov, Khazin, Remizov, and the well-known TV moderator Mikhail Leontyev have contributed to the doctrine. The latter was also involved in other manifestos. These authors note that Putin has not broken the power of the oligarchs, so that the degenerating state is still a “committee of oligarchical clans” (Russkaya Doktrina 2005, Part IV, Chapter 3, 9; see more in detail Bluhm 2016a).

Significantly more supportive of the state is “Right and Truth: Manifesto for an Enlightened Conservatism” by Nikita Mikhalkov, a well-known filmmaker, actor, self-proclaimed monarchist, and Putin adherent. This manifesto first appeared in 2010. The online publication was preceded by several years of debate in a “conservative seminar” sponsored by the state Russian Cultural Fund. It was published for the first time in book form in early 2017. In the foreword (2017, 6) Mikhalkov commemorates the revolutionary year 1917, saying that after all of the national tragedies, “we have finally begun to live according to the laws of normal human logic, without revolution and counter-revolution.”

None of these manifestos were embraced by United Russia or the ruling elite. They could more easily agree with what Surkov proposed to the party. In November 2006 the journal *Ekspert* published the text from a speech entitled “Nationalization of the Future” given in 2005 (Laruelle 2009, 145–8). In it Surkov famously formulated the phrase “sovereign democracy,” which was included in the United Russia party agenda of 2007. Interesting is what does not appear in his text. Surkov, for example, does not use the word “conservative” or “conservatism,” nor does he speak of “traditional values.” He stresses the need for an “open economy” to make Russia competitive and strengthen its influence again in the world, and warns against defining Russia outside of Europe (Surkov 2006). Only at its IXth Party Congress in 2009 did United Russia officially adopt the political label “conservative,” without, however, specifying a particular program.

### ***Regrouping, radicalization, and counterbalancing***

In Western perception, the new Russian conservatism is linked above all to Putin’s open confession of “conservative values” in 2013 and his recommendation of selected Russian pre-communist conservative thinkers as required reading for the Russian elite (Putin 2013a, 2013b). Putin has thereby placed himself rather at the forefront of a movement. Nevertheless, his confession represents a qualitative leap. While before, the conservative political identity of United Russia was formally and symbolically separate from the president, conservatism had now received “a stamp of approval from the very top of the Russian government” (Polyakov 2015, 6). At the same time, Surkov lost his position in the presidential administration and, with that, the “liberal conservatives” lost a strong supporter. Even if Putin still defines himself as a “pragmatist with a conservative bent,” he has now publicly tied himself to conservatism (Putin 2013c). Since then, the

attempts by conservative circles and Duma MPs to throw out the “pseudo-liberal” and “neocolonial” Russian constitution have been intensifying. An important point of criticism is Article 13.2 of the Constitution, according to which “no ideology may be established as a state or obligatory one.”

The impression of a conservative “symphony” of the Russian elites and the population in the aftermath of the Crimean annexation of 2014 (Melville 2017, 30–31) can, however, scarcely conceal the ongoing conflicts over the interpretive prerogative of the new conservatism and its practical political consequences. Though the Kremlin continues to invest in the conservative ideologists and milieus, it also tries to keep them in check, especially since the patriotic mood in the population has begun to cool down.

### **A regrouping of the Russian conservatives**

After 2012 two new hubs of ideological production and dissemination were founded around which different groups with few overlaps gathered. The first of these hubs is the Izborsk Club, founded in September 2012. The founding memorandum, *Mobilization Project, Key Prerequisite for a “Major Breakthrough” Strategy*, sees Russia in a hybrid war with the West that will soon turn in an open battle (Averyanov et al. 2012; see Bluhm 2016a). From this statement, the authors deduce the need for a new national economic model, at the center of which is the military–industrial complex. The prerequisite for the successful geopolitical positioning of Russia should be a vast replacement of elites and a patriotic mobilization ideology. The club was a strong supporter of the project New Russia (*Novorossiya*), and has branches in several locations, among them Crimea, Donetsk, and Moldova. Despite a basic loyalty to Putin, its criticism of the elite is still massive. Its positions are regarded as particularly radical by many observers of the new Russian conservatism (see Melville 2017, 31; Laruelle 2017).

The Foundation – Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Research (Foundation ISEPR) forms the second hub.<sup>5</sup> The ISEPR was established in 2012 out of an initiative of the presidential administration as a new analytical center and promoter of civic projects, but also involves conservative manifesto-writers who do not share the militancy of the “Izborskians.” The *Essays on Conservatism*, published by ISEPR since 2014, are mainly concerned with the creation of a classic canon of Russian conservatism, which is supposed to keep it compatible with conservative thought in the West. Even if the editors and authors of the *Essays* appear less radical, they see their potential allies in Western Europe not in the established conservative parties, but in the New European Right and the anti-EU left.

#### ***The Izborsk Club—nexus of radical ideologists and political activists***

The Izborsk Club was established by the nationalist writer and political activist Aleksandr Prokhanov, and the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism, which

merged with the club. The founder of that Institute, Vitaly Averyanov (b. 1973), has since then been one of Prokhanov's two vice chairmen. The club has inconspicuous office spaces in Moscow, but an opulent website, a journal, and book series, and is well connected with state and conservative private media.<sup>6</sup> An informal supporter is Rogozin, one of the founders of the first Motherland party (*Rodina*) in 2003. After *Rodina*'s failure, he represented Russia at the NATO headquarters and in 2011 became the first deputy prime minister in charge of the defense industry – a position that he again had to leave with the new government in 2018. In the autumn of 2012, Rogozin initiated a new *Rodina* in the Kremlin's orbit, but without assuming a leadership role in it. The club has also had the benevolence of the Minister of Culture (since 2012), Vladimir Medinsky (b. 1970), who since 2017 has been a member of the Supreme Council of the United Russia party.

The Izborsk Club represents the hitherto widest alliance of conceptual ideologists and political activists in the new illiberal conservatism. Although Prokhanov and club member Dugin are sometimes excluded from the conservative field as only “fellow travelers in modern Russian conservatism” (Makarenko 2016, 258), the common ground on which the Izborsk Club unifies its diverse members is “social conservatism.” “Social conservatism” they define as an ideal “synthesis” of Russian statist (*gosudarstvenniki*) ranging from “socialists and Soviet patriots to monarchists and Orthodox conservatives” (Izborsk Club 2017). Prokhanov himself was born in 1938, yet the majority of permanent members belong to the last “Soviet generation” born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and to the new conservative generation born in the 1970s.

Some of the club members hold distinguished positions within parties, government bodies, and in other organizational structures within the same or related conservative knowledge networks. The economist Khazin (b. 1962), for example, serves as chairman of the Economic Council of the newly founded *Rodina*. In 2016 he was unsuccessfully proposed by the party as successor to the deposed Minister for Economic Affairs, Aleksey Ulyukaev.

Glazyev (b. 1961), briefly a member of the Communist Party and one of the founders of the first *Rodina* party, has been advising Putin on questions of Eurasian integration since 2012 and is a member of the President's Economic Council, in which, however, the “system-liberals” have with the inclusion of the former finance minister and their front figure again got the upper hand since 2016.<sup>7</sup> After Putin rejected Glazyev's attempt to become the next Chair of the Central Bank of Russia (Åslund 2013, 383), he joined the National Financial Board of the Bank. Glazyev is an initiator of the Stolypin Club, an assembly of economists and business representatives calling for a “turnaround in economic policy” – in line with the famous conservative reformer of the last Tsar and mercantilist, Pyotr Stolypin. The Stolypin Club has turned into a new think tank assigned by the presidential administration the task of developing an alternative to the economic agenda of the Kudrin think tank, in support for Putin's fourth presidential term in 2018. They are trying to maneuver along a middle way between Glazyev's statist and Kudrin's market liberals.<sup>8</sup>



Also belonging to the Izborsk Club are several heads of established academic institutions, above all the Moscow State University (MGU) and the Academy of Science (RAN), of which Glazyev has been a permanent member since 2008. The RAN has lost influence significantly since 1990, especially after organizational reforms of 2013 that eventually took away its formal independence. Still, it has a relatively high reputation in society, with its economic and social science sections often positioned in opposition to market liberalism.

For a long time, the only woman in this circle was Natalya Narochnitskaya, a historian, former diplomat and Duma MP, now member of the new Rodina. Since 2004 she has headed the Foundation for Historical Perspectives (FIP), which follows the “principles of a nationally oriented conservatism” (Fond Istoricheskoy Perspektivy 2017). In 2007 she founded the EU-hostile European Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC) in Paris.<sup>9</sup> She receives funding from, among other sources, the Russian President’s Foundation for her project the Other Europe, which regularly holds contests for European and Russian youth, calling its “partners” those from the Identitarian Movement and others representative of the new European right. Further, she sits on the political advisory council to the foundation Russian World initiated by Putin in 2007.

The think tank *Katekhon*, founded in 2015, is also associated with the Izborsk Club. Its founder is the former investment banker, billionaire, and TV station owner Konstantin Malofeev (b. 1974), who conceived a role for Russia in Europe modeled after the Vienna Congress of 1840. The militant-apocalyptic figure of Katekhon, the “keeper” of the catastrophe or “world evil,” appears repeatedly in Russian conservative-orthodox discourse.<sup>10</sup> Glazyev and Dugin serve on the board of the think tank, which promotes the “principles of a multi-polar world” and a “Conservative Internationale.”<sup>11</sup>

### *The “moderate” counterweight*

The Foundation – Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Research (ISEPR) is much more part of the government structure and therefore might rely less on the kind of personal networking we see in the Izborsk Club. Its head is not an ideologist, but a public administrator: Dimitry Badovsky (b. 1973), a political scientist up until 2011 at MGU before being appointed to a position in the Russian presidential administration, from where he moved on to the foundation’s board of directors. He also served as a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (*Obshchestvennaya palata Rossiyskoy Federatsii*) and the Russian National Front (*Obshcherossiyskiy narodnyy front*, ONF), created in 2011 by the decision of United Russia in addition to the already existing Civic Chamber, in order to support Putin for re-election. These structures supported each other: the Foundation ISEPR initially got funding from the ONF and the Civil Society Development Foundation, which was also created in 2012 and on the board of which Badovsky sits as well, while the ISEPR itself funded research and other projects. Over the years it has developed into a more analytical think tank to monitor the realization of socio-economic strategies and initiate

“professional discussions” (see Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Research 2017). The ISEPR’s board of trustees consists of the Minister for the Development of the Russian Far East and other top officials from politics, societal associations, including the head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and the Chairman of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, research institutes and others. Among them are Ekaterina Lakhova from United Russia, who is the head of the Association of Russian Women and hated by the ultraconservative family politicians for her support of sexual education in schools and the protection of children’s rights in Russia (see Bluhm and Brand in this volume).

One can only presume why the ISEPR began to publish the journal *Essays on Conservatism*, concerned with the history of Russian conservatism. It is likely that the state authorities did not want to leave the definition of “Russian conservatism” to the Izborsk Club. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that for two years the journal had organized a competition entitled “The Heritage of Russian Thought—N. A. Berdyaev” (on the occasion of the philosopher’s 140th birthday), one of the authors Putin advised the elite to read, but who was largely ignored by the radical and Orthodox conservatives.<sup>12</sup> The editorial board of the *Essays on Conservatism* includes two manifesto writers of the younger generation: Mikhail Remizov (b. 1978) and Boris Mezhuev (b. 1970).<sup>13</sup> Remizov, who has been running the think tank Institute of National Strategy (INS) since 2006, is by now a political advisor active on various expert committees close to the government. Particularly noteworthy is his recent position as chair of the expert council of the Military-Industrial Commission Board under the Russian government, an important link between the administration and the military-industrial complex.<sup>14</sup> Under Remizov’s direction, the INS produced *Conservatism as Russia’s “Soft Power,”* a study financed by the ISEPR. Mezhuev, who teaches at MGU, briefly became the deputy chief editor of the famous newspaper *Izvestia*, which has been part of Gazprom-Media since 2008. In addition to his work as editor of the *Essays* and as a university lecturer, he runs a website called “The Russian Idea: A Website of Conservative Political Thought,” for which Remizov also writes. Shortly after the US presidential elections, Remizov (2016a) was quoted there as saying that Moscow has become the “capital of the Conservative Internationale” and that the division of the world is less geopolitical than ideological in nature.

### ***The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the field of conservative ideology production***

The ROC, far from being a unified body, has not embraced the conservative frame without internal battles. Yet under the Patriarchate of Alexy II and the Moscow Metropolitan Kirill I, who became the next Patriarch in 2009, “traditionalists,” in terms of ideas and liturgy, clearly got the upper hand (Papkova 2011, 44). Already by 1997, they successfully lobbied for the principle of the “four traditional religions of Russia” (Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and

Buddhism), by which the church managed to impose significant restrictions on “non-traditional” religions and sects operating on Russian territory (Marsh 2013). Some observers interpret the appearance of the “Rodina” electoral bloc on the political stage in 2003 as a result of the close collaboration between its political leaders and the ROC (Papkova 2011, 163). However, the church has carefully distanced itself from the idea of a political Orthodoxy, and concentrates on its role as a conservative “moral norm entrepreneur” (Stoeckl 2016; see Bluhm and Brand in this volume).

Nevertheless, the ROC’s authorities engaged in the institutionalization and legitimization of the emerging field of conservative ideology production. High-ranked representatives participated at least in the debates on the *Russian Doctrine* of the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism and Mikhalkov’s “Manifesto for an Enlightened Conservatism.” The filmmaker has long been a member of the presidium of the World Russian People’s Council (WRPC) founded in 1993 by the then-officiating Patriarch of Moscow Alexy II. While a state foundation supported Mikhalkov’s initiative, the 800-page “Russian Doctrine” got its main funding from sources close to the ROC.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the publishing house of the Sretensky monastery in Moscow runs an online journal, *pravoslavie.ru*, which was founded by Averyanov and, especially in the early 2000s, represented an important platform for the “new generation of conservatives.” The Sretensky monastery headed by Bishop Tikhon (Georgy Shevkunov) is an influential center of ultraconservatism within the ROC (Laruelle 2016). Tikhon—a famous filmmaker, bestselling author, and Putin’s spiritual guide—is one of the two Orthodox bishops who joined the Izborsk Club as permanent members. As a member of the Supreme Church Council of the ROC he also has a seat on the Presidential Council for Art and Culture (Papkova 2011, 48). Tikhon advocates the idea of a *pravoslavnnaya derzhavnost*, sometimes translated as “Orthodox statism” (Hagemester 2016, 6), but—as Irina Papkova points out—the term refers more exactly to Russia as a great power, “with the renewal of Orthodox values as the source of the country’s strength” (Papkova 2011, 47). Neither the Patriarch Kirill nor Bishop Tikhon promote the idea of a state church that would imply a subordination of the church to the state, with consequences that they know only too well.

The linkage between the Izborsk Club and the ROC, however, exists not only via personal ties, but is mediated by conservative non-profit organizations. The Institute of Dynamic Conservatism, for example, not only authored the *Doctrine* but also the program of another People’s Council (*Narodnyy Sobor*), which was established in 2005, apart from the already existing WRPC of the Patriarchate. Averyanov is still in the governing body of this “decentralized, grass-roots citizens’ initiative and movement.” The new People’s Council unites more than 250 different organizations and has its own flag as well as a TV channel.<sup>16</sup> The Patriarch’s WRPC and *Narodnyy Sobor* collaborate from time to time with the Union of Orthodox Citizens (*Soyuz pravoslavnykh grazhdan*) that Glazyev helped to create during his first Duma term, 1994–95. The founders of the Union of Orthodox Citizens espouse a rebirth of Russian statehood on the basis of a

united Russian Orthodoxy, with the intended inclusion of Belarus and Ukraine. Even though Glazyev himself is no longer active in the Union, its chairman, the publicist Valentin Lebedev, belongs to the group of experts in the Izborsk Club.

The “moderate” conservatives surrounding the ISEPR Foundation have less notable links to Orthodoxy. There are no high-ranking church officials on its advisory board. The sociologist of religion Aleksandr Tsipko is the board member closest to the ROC. Tsipko is an associate of the Russian Academy of Sciences and at the same time a state adviser to the Russian Federation for the Relationship between Church and State. Since 2015 he has also assumed similar responsibilities in the Synod’s department for state–church affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate. He is also an author and editor of the *Essays on Conservatism*.

### **Core concepts in the new Russian conservatism**

According to Karl Mannheim and Michael Freeden, modern conservatism does not restrict itself to a situational and positional counter-movement to the “progressive” ideologies, but is constituted by “thought styles” of its own (Mannheim 1954; Mannheim et al. 1984), or by a set of concepts which vary with the context and are combined with other ideas (also “progressive” ones). Freeden’s (1996, 2013) three “core concepts” are of particular importance: the concepts of *change*, *order*, and *tradition*. Modern conservatism is not about a return to a romantic-transfigured place we long for, or the preservation of a status quo, but about an organic, or natural, and controlled change that does not jeopardize order and respects tradition (Freeden 1996, 344).

The linkage between ordered change and the renewal of tradition can be found in many texts of the new Russian conservatism, and it seems to correspond to Putin’s claimed “conservative formula (development on the back of national traditions)” (Polyakov 2015, 19). Clear differences appear in the formulation of this basic consensus, however, both in terms of what the current ruling political elite is ready to implement, and in terms of differences among the conceptive ideologists of the new illiberal conservatism in Russia.

#### ***“Conservatism for development”***

“Conservatism for development”—thus the title of the book by Makarenko (2016)—essentially means the return of the interventionist state as an economic actor and the limitation of self-regulating markets. The state cannot be a “night-watchman”—as is said time and again (see, among others, Avdeev 2014, 67; Delyagin 2016, 261). Neither private property nor the capitalist market economy are questioned here, to the extent that they are (nationally) embedded in the state. What role the state should have in the economy, however, is controversial.

In 2005 the “liberal-conservative” political club the Fourth of November published in *Ekspert* an “economic doctrine” for Russia, called “Return to Leadership,” which sees its development opportunities linked to the global financial markets and proposes the privatization of scientific and technical facilities, while

at the same time giving the state an important role in the redistribution of the petroleum and gas industries' profits to the high-tech sector (Gurova and Fadeev 2006). The program of a "conservative modernization" by the interim President Dimitry Medvedev takes this line (see Lesnikova 2012; Samarina 2013). Though today the Moscow journal *Ekspert* sounds much more patriotic than 10 years ago, the skepticism of the "liberals" or "liberal conservatives" within United Russia over state "dirigisme" remains (Kudrin 2017). For the "radical" as well as "moderate" new conservatives, in contrast, "conservatism for development" includes the return of a mercantilist state as a driver of economic development. "Developmental states" in Japan, East Asia (in the 1980s) and China are seen as role models. At the same time, attention is drawn to the development of state capitalism at the end of the tsarist empire (for example, after Stolypin's reforms) (see, among others, Mikhalkov 2017; Remizov 2016b; Glazyev 2016; Cheban-kova 2016).

In their fight for the "developmental state" the new conservatives make use of argumentative figures similar to those of the left- and right-wing moral anti-globalization discourse (see Münnich 2017). A sharp boundary is drawn between insiders and outsiders in the national community, understood both ethically and socio-structurally. Outsiders are transnational corporations and "global financial capital" as well as their so-called "compradors" within Russia who block a promising national development model and do everything to degrade Russia (Averyanov et al. 2012, 2014; Delyagin 2016; Glazyev 2016; Starikov 2011). The domestic compradors include not only potential counter-elites such as the assassinated Boris Nemzov and the lawyer and corruption fighter Aleksey Navalny, but also parts of the ruling elite. The outsider-insider dichotomy also allows the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate profit-making, i.e. between irresponsible, exploitative financial capital on the one hand, and productive, value-creating, (national) responsibly-minded entrepreneurship and the "middle class" on the other. The new conservatives see themselves allied with the latter. As in the "new moral economy" that Russian conservatives share with other new anti-globalist movements, they argue expressly *not* primordially, i.e. the transnational class is not equated with the globally acting Jewish financial class as in the 1930s (see Giesen 1999, 397). Even though the epithet of "cosmopolitanism" was synonymous with an anti-Semitic stance in the Soviet Union and plays a role in Orthodox fundamentalism (Papkova 2011, 60–67), the major focus of the conservatives is on a theoretical distinction of class. The new "transnational class" is formed by the quite heterogeneous social strata of the supposedly ruling global financial elite, the management of transnational (American/Western) corporations, the domestic "offshore oligarchs" and the "system-liberals" around Kudrin. This class also includes the "creative class" that has lost its roots in the national community, as well as the activists and professionals in transnational organizations, including left-wing, globalization-critical "cosmopolitans" such as human rights organizations and other NGOs. According to the conservatives, such international activists and professionals support neo-liberalism "culturally" and push forward a unilateral agenda of Western norm

transfer to Russia (Averyanov et al. 2012; Remizov et al. 2014; Glazyev 2016). For the political debate within Russia, this claim makes liberal positions per se illegitimate.

The sharpness of the polemics varies between the “radical” and “moderate” conservatives. However, they agree that Russia’s unprepared opening-up to global markets and the attachment of the state to the doctrine of the “Washington consensus” is the primary problem of post-Soviet failure. In the study of “Conservatism as Russia’s ‘Soft Power,’” Remizov et al. (2014, 26) state that in all countries “without exception” economic development and modernization were preceded by a “long period of intensive protectionism,” and that they “only after that began to move towards the liberalization of their commodity relations with the outside world.” Today—not only for Russia but also for other countries that are striving for development—it is not the liberalization of trade that has priority but protectionism and the support for national business (*ibid.*). In addition, the authors note that large countries (in contrast to small ones) tend to be “quasi-self-sufficient” and avoid a narrow specialization which brings too much dependence on external volatility (*ibid.*, 27). “Modernization of the economy and society”—thus Remizov (2016b, 107) continues the idea—“has never been and will never be realized under conditions of a complete economic, political, social and cultural opening to more developed markets.”

Conservative neo-nationalism in economic policy prioritizes state investment in the domestic market, a targeted industrial and innovation policy, systematic capital controls such as in Europe as part of the Bretton Woods monetary system of 1944–73, as well as a growth-oriented monetary, fiscal, and credit policy which lowers interest rates on loans to domestic enterprises. The core of the dispute with economic liberalism is macroeconomic policy and the role of the central bank, which, according to Glazyev (2016, 52), during the entire post-Soviet period was governed by the monetarism of the “Chicago School.” Its recipe for successful economic development—reducing inflation by limiting the money supply, replacing government intervention with self-regulating markets, and monitoring financial stability to uphold international creditworthiness and the trust of foreign investors—is considered to have led to the “degradation” of the country (*ibid.*, 42, 260).

With regard to innovation policy, Glazyev proposes a comprehensive, centrally organized corporatist system headed by the Russian President and ranging from basic and applied research institutes to companies, regional authorities, and non-profit organizations (e.g. for consumer protection), aiming to develop competition as well as to monitor prices (*ibid.*, 414). While Glazyev (2017) stresses the need for a “harmonization of two principles”—“indicative planning” and “self-organization of the market”—other Izborskians contemplate the need for a (temporarily) militant “developmental dictatorship” in the lineage of Stalin (Starikov 2017) or Ivan the Terrible (Averyanov 2010), in order to overcome the lack of state capacity and corruption that blocks economic and technological modernization.<sup>17</sup> Such ideas crop up even more suspiciously not only among “liberals,” but also among “moderate” conservatives.

The neo-nationalist development program of the new Russian conservatives does not mean isolationism. Remizov et al. (2014, 27) see Russia as an important factor “in the struggle for just economic relations which respond to the true national interests of the majority of countries.” Glazyev envisions a new global “social-conservative synthesis,” that is, a just international financial and economic system based on national sovereignty and reciprocally advantageous trade. This would require a substantial limitation of the scope of action of market forces (Glazyev 2016, 255). Both authors see the new international order based on a few macro-regions. Theoretically, they refer to Wallerstein’s World-System Theory, Friedrich List, and the French economic historian Ferdinand Braudel. Russia should, according to Remizov et al., again create its own “world economy” (Braudel), as an economically self-reliant part of the world capable of a certain degree of internal self-sufficiency (2014, 28).

### ***The sovereign state as nation or civilization-builder***

The idea of an interventionist state is not necessarily an element of modern conservatism. Conservatism can also, as in the United States, be accompanied by a pronounced anti-statist sentiment, or even combine both at the same time. Russian conservatives perceive themselves as *gosudarstvenniki* (“pro-state”), as the “natural party of power” supposed to guarantee order and state-led economic development (Makarenko 2016, 17, 245). With this, today’s Russian conservatives are updating a well-known pattern of Russian thought when they demand restoration of the “full”—economic, political, cultural—sovereignty of the state and a return to a mythologized, pre-global Westphalian system of co-existing sovereign states based on constitutional separateness (Coward 2005, 858; Casula 2013). New is the link to the “neo-colonial” discourse. Development after 1989 is interpreted as “colonization by the West,” from which Russia must free itself by re-inventing its own identity. The “Russian idea” becomes in this regard an “anticolonial political practice” (Markov 2014, 41).<sup>18</sup>

Yet, the state is more than a political, administrative, and military system. It is elevated into a “central value” of Russian conservatism, even to the “highest spiritual and moral value” (Makarenko 2016, 17, 245) or expression of the fundamental value of Russian culture itself (Delyagin 2016, 261), which stands in striking contrast to these authors’ assessment of the existing state administration. The Izborskian Delyagin, for example, criticizes “the ruling kleptocracy” on the one hand, but on the other hand calls the state the only source of social guarantees and justice, the security and unity of the country, the “organizer of technological progress,” and even the “modern existential form of the essence of the Russian people” (ibid.). The State means here first of all executive power embodied by a strong leading personality (Remizov et al. 2014, 22). Their Western references include Carl Schmitt’s “Leviathan” as well as the current rightist and leftist criticism of *post-democracy* and *post-liberalism* (in the West), but they have no sophisticated state theory.

An important line of differentiation within illiberal Russian conservatism stands out with regard to the imperial tradition. Conceptive ideologists who emphasize the imperial tradition of the Russian state also mostly see Russia as an independent civilization that should form a new geopolitical axis with Beijing, Delhi, and Tehran (see *Russkaya Doktrina* 2005; Averyanov 2016; Dugin 2009). They consider Lenin's nationality policy a severe mistake because it introduced ethnic principles into the territorial organization of the multi-ethnic empire and laid the ground for the disintegration of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s. In a new book *Doctrine of the Russian World*, published by the Izborsk Club in 2016, the authors demand the restoration of the *Russian* state of the "imperial type," i.e. the state should give culturally defined Russians the status of a state-constituting people, and recognize its significance as the "marker of civilizing identity" of the whole country (Averyanov 2016, 96–101; 2017a). At the same time their high esteem of the "symphony of cultures" within the Russian civilization-empire refers mainly to the historic presence of Islam and the other "traditional religions" in Russia (Izborsk Club 2017). The authors distinguish this imperial concept of civilization from the "racist and chauvinist nationalism" of Europe that promotes "separatism" (Averyanov 2016, 96–101).

The emphasis on the concept of civilization does not automatically lead to a departure from the Roman Catholic legal tradition, as the differences between Panarin and Dugin show (Laruelle 2008; see Dugin 2009). But in most cases the image of a separate civilization includes the assumption of a fundamentally different legal tradition. In the *Russian Doctrine* of 2005, the authors argue, for example, that the "Russian model of statehood" should be built on the Greco-Byzantine legal tradition (*Russkaya Doktrina* 2005, introduction, section 7, part II). The head of the Russian World Foundation, Vyacheslav Nikonov (2016, 293), sees Byzantine law and the rejection of Western natural law as elements of the "genetic code" of Russian civilization, which lends it its uniqueness.

The counter-design to the concept of civilization is less prominent in the public discourses up to now, but can be found in Remizov's work, who argues in favor of a non-imperial Russian nationalism. Remizov considers the disintegration of the Soviet Union a "geopolitical opportunity" to stabilize the "Russian space on a national basis" (Remizov et al. 2014, 119). Remizov understands Russia as part of Europe, albeit as a particular or "other" Europe (*ibid.*, 32; Remizov 2016b, 120). Russian nationalism is fighting on two fronts, he argues: against the "coming empires of the global world order of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt," and also against the "phantom of its own past empire" (Remizov 2016b, 121). The conservative, non-revolutionary nationalism he demands is a "developmental model," combining cultural "holism" and sovereignty of the nation, "national solidarity" (based on horizontal brotherhood, communitarianism, and corporatism) with "national egoism in industrial policy." He, too, makes Lenin's nationality policy responsible for the disintegration of the Soviet Union, demanding a completion of Russian nation by a "standardization of society based on the national (Russian) high culture" and through mass education (Remizov 2016b, 106; Remizov et al. 2014, 20).



The understanding of Russia as a nation state within Europe, however, has far-reaching implications for the legal system. Remizov and other “moderate” conservatives see Russia explicitly committed to the European legal tradition and thus, fundamentally, to the rule of law (see Tsipko 2014, 31; Makarenko 2016). This legal understanding, however, is by no means liberal, but is based on republican and European conservative ideas. In this way he can reject the liberal concept of contract law and natural law as “facade ideologies” of “political correctness,” which serve only minorities, without completely breaking with the European and Western legal tradition (Remizov 2016b, 103; Delyagin 2016). Normative unilateralism is thereby rejected less by reference to the distinctiveness of civilizations than as a violation of national sovereignty, because the West had ceased to be the “driver of modernization” and is therefore no longer the main role model anyway (Remizov et al. 2014, 16).

Karl Mannheim, in his analysis of the conservative style of thought in the 1920s, elaborated the thesis that the conservative understanding of order is complemented by a “qualitative concept” of freedom that is different from the “revolutionary-egalitarian” concept of liberty in liberalism (Mannheim et al. 1984, 114; Mannheim 1954). While liberalism propagates the economic detachment of the individual from the state and social bonds, and sees the freedom of the individual only limited politically by the “freedom and equality of the other fellow citizens,” the conservative detaches the concept of freedom from the individual and makes “comprehensive collective structures” and “organic communities” the “true agency” (Mannheim et al. 1984, 116). The new Russian conservative frame contrasts this in the opposition between freedom and emancipation. For Remizov (2012, 74), freedom is participation in power and the public sphere, that is, the “freedom of bonds,” and not the “freedom of emancipation” (ibid.). Averyanov et al. (2014) similarly formulate, in a supposed “reversal of the neo-liberal doctrine,” a differentiation of freedom from (individual) emancipation:

- 1 instead of human rights: the righteousness (*pravda*) of ‘man’
- 2 instead of equating freedom with emancipation: freedom as sovereignty
- 3 instead of the personality of individualism: the personality of solidarity
- 4 instead of democratization: the real power of the people (majority rule and freedom of peoples).

Despite the shared “qualitative concept of freedom,” the two authors differ with regard to the relationship between individual and collective rights. While Remizov emphasizes participation, Averyanov et al. shift the emphasis from the level of the individual to the level of the collective that has to come first. The necessity of a developmental dictatorship cannot be justified otherwise. This position also applies to the Izborskians such as Dugin and Starikov. Arguing against the Stalin-cult of Starikov, the *Essays on Conservatism* co-editor Tsipko feels the need to recall the “intrinsic value of human life.” Tsipko regards the re-interpretation of human rights as the “right of the people” a “fatal result of the

flourishing civilization discourse,” since it tries to subordinate individual freedom entirely to the interests of the state, rather than seek a balance between them. Worried by this development, he points to a strand of Russian conservatism ignored by the “radicals”:

Either we take this liberal conservatism [from Berdyaev, Frank and Struve] [...] and will have the power to recognize our problems, to find the forces in ourselves for a moral renewal, and (at the same time) become western, but with a better spirituality. Or we will again come up with the idea of a special Russian civilization, close ourselves off from the West and die slowly this time—completely.

(Tsipko 2014, 41)

### ***Tradition between cultural constants and modernity***

The latent tension within the conservative camp, between the representatives of Russia as an Orthodox or Eurasian civilization on the one hand, and those conservatives who see Russia as a (special) part of Europe on the other hand, is reflected in the concept of “tradition.” In both versions, “tradition” draws from the past a normative point of reference for social criticism in the present, of both its own post-transformation society as well as the decadent West. The criticism is concentrated in the concept of postmodernity as an exaggerated and degenerate Western modernity (see Averyanov et al. 2014; Dugin 2009; Remizov et al. 2014). However, what exactly “tradition” means differs considerably.

In their understanding of tradition, civilization theorists tend toward an essentialist concept of an unchanged cultural core (a “genetic code”) that works in the past, present, and future. In this sense, Dugin (2009, 20) defines tradition as “religion, hierarchy, empires and family,” which he turns against both postmodernity and the European Enlightenment as the basis of the first period of Western modernity. While the (first) modernity was marked by increasing tension vis-à-vis religious beliefs, the postmodernists face religion with indifference. This makes it possible, Dugin suggests in his “Fourth Theory,” to ignore both positions: “We believe in God, ignoring those who teach his death, just as we ignore the statements of fools” (ibid., 22).<sup>19</sup>

Change is by no means excluded. For Averyanov (2006) the “dynamic silence” is the “innermost essence of the conservative idea,” which cannot be equated with “inertia” or “putting on the brakes.” The conservative became the brakeman only when “traditional society was attacked by the virus of modernity,” which he had to face. He further argues: while Western Christianity came to the “bourgeois phase of development” only after a “radical break with its dogmatic and scholastic traditions,” Russian Orthodoxy is held to have been always open to constant “socio-economic, political and cultural modernization” (Russkaya Doktrina, 2005, Part 2, Chapter 1.3), which makes it even compatible with the “Soviet tradition” at least since 1943 (Izborsk Club 2017). This combination of tradition and modernization allows the authors to predict a great

upheaval toward a new “high modernity,” which will leave behind the stages of postmodernism and *postindustrialism*. However, a prerequisite for this is a “transition from a compromise political ideology to the ideology of national development and growth.”

While Dugin and Averyanov see postmodernity as an exaggeration of modernity and argue that the European Enlightenment has destroyed itself, the authors of “Conservatism as the ‘Soft Power’ of Russia” emphasize rather a dialectical break between modernity and postmodernity (Remizov et al. 2014, 8). Remizov (2012, 71) speaks of the “re-actualization of the values of traditional societies in modernity,” a “productive revenge-taking by the Counter-Enlightenment” within modernity, which is, as it were, the “mission” of conservatism. But he and his co-authors stress the need of a new “successful synthesis” of conservatism and the Enlightenment that restores legitimacy to the modern concept of progress (Remizov et al. 2014, 8, 45). Traditions are therefore not just some eternal “constants” of a particular culture, but also what I call “imagined classical modernity”—a normative starting point from which postmodernity as a social and ideational process deviates.

The way, however, the two conservative camps criticize postmodernism is quite similar and partly resembles what Ulrich Beck has called “components of a *traditionality inherent in industrialism*” within the “first modernity” (Beck 1992, 14). The elements of the imaginary classic era of modernity include the tradition of a normed family, the appreciation of hierarchy and religion, and an unquestioned belonging to larger collectives (class, nation), industrialism, scientific and technological progress. The Russian conservatives regularly fall back on the French structuralists in their criticism of postmodernism, but also on the postmodern critique by Zygmunt Bauman, and Daniel Bell’s criticism of the decay of “traditional work and family ethics,” who Remizov et al. (2014, 10) imagine to be the “opponents of the New Left” of post-1968 and “their ideologists” such as Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School. Only this understanding of tradition explains why the Russian conservatives (and here they agree completely with the illiberal conservatives in East and West Europe) combine such (at first glance) different issues as “hyper-feminism,” biopolitics, the current human rights discourse, globalism and environmentalism, consumerism or the “McDonaldization” of education and culture (Remizov et al. 2014; Avdeev 2014; Averyanov et al. 2014; see Bluhm 2016b). Remizov et al. (2014, 11–19) bring this to a point in a few pages where they distinguish three ideological and societal transformations. First, postmodernity started a process of dehumanization by transcending the boundaries of the “natural order” (as in LGBT rights, transgender, pregnancy termination, genetic engineering and reproductive technologies). Moreover, under the guise of “self-realization” and “self-determination” (of women), the commodification of labor becomes total coercion. Globalism, environmentalism, and human rights discourses aim to *de-sovereignize* states, whereby environmentalism is not meant to deal with the cautious use of natural resources, but is a Western ideology that functions as a perfidious means of de-legitimizing the catch-up modernization of the

developing world. The concentration of the New Left on individual rights and the identity problems of minorities ultimately led to the neglect of the social interests of the majority of the population and thus to their *de-socialization*. Le Pen's "leftist conservatism" can thus be regarded as the main defender of the social interests of the majority in today's France (Benediktov et al. 2014, 84).

## Conclusions

Richard Sakwa (2010) has described the Russian state as a "dual state" consisting of the authority of a formal constitutional state and the actual administrative regime permeated by diverse para-political practices and informal networks, and in which "power" derives from the capacity to balance the strength of the two pillars of authority, and keep different elite groups in check. For reasons of pragmatic flexibility and inclusiveness, many scholars until recently regarded the "lack of a real ideology" as a crucial feature of the rising new competitive authoritarianism and Putinism (see Krastev 2011, 13). While some observers notice the rise of the "state ideology" of a "Soviet Union 2.0" (Laqueur 2015), others see the "conservative elite turn" as just a cynical facade adopted in order to stabilize power (Rodkiewicz and Rogoża 2015). In this case, the conservative turn of Russia's elite appears to be a populist exploitation and reinforcement of growing patriotic sentiments in the population. Both views fit together, but underestimate the importance of the fact that the Russian new conservatism is the result of a broader movement of intellectuals and moral and political activists who use the increasing room for maneuver and official support to further develop their infrastructure, networks, and discursive dominance.

The new illiberal conservatism is far from being as official and coherent a *Weltanschauung* as communism was, nor is it just a "Potemkin village" that can be quickly dismantled (Rodkiewicz and Rogoża 2015). The facade thesis underestimates three things: first, the seriousness of the intra-elite disputes over the best path of development for Russia, in which a decisive group grew less and less convinced that Western liberalism and integration was the right recipe for Russia's socio-economic modernization and for regaining its greatness. Second, it overlooks the changes in ideology and knowledge production that cannot be reduced to the musings of spin doctors or demagogues who have the ear of the president. The development of conservatism as a new meta-frame that organizes political ideas, discourses, and alliances rests on the creation and expansion of a considerable infrastructure of think tanks, foundations, publishing and media outlets that today outweighs the infrastructure of the Russian liberals. In addition, there has been an increasing presence of representatives of the first and second generations of the new conservatives in the public and political administration, and their backing by civic organizations. Third, the thesis does not take the positional shifts within the Russian elite and Putin's self-commitment to the new conservatism seriously.

The new illiberal conservatism works as an effective meta-frame that structures political ideas, discourses, and knowledge networks not only in the narrow

group of the political elite, but also for the broader civil society. New Russian conservatives combine a modernization discourse with ideas about the national state's "full" sovereignty, unconstrained by transnational agents enforcing roles and norms, and cultural and moral conservatism relying on constant "traditional values" and/or an "updated" notion of modernity. They intertwine the key conservative concepts of change, order, and tradition in a new way. It is only through the cultural and social underpinnings of political conservatism that it turned toward what Freedman calls a "thick-centered ideology." Yet in spite of their growing influence and Putin's commitment to conservative values, they are still far away from determining the core elements of Russia's economic and social policy, which makes the ideological fight between the different groups even more vicious.

The new Russian conservatives see themselves as part of an illiberal "Conservative Internationale." They promote the idea of a multi-polar world on the basis of an imaginary sovereignty and cultural plurality, which includes an alleged tolerance of the other without "mixing and interference." These components can also be found in protagonists of a new illiberal conservatism in Eastern and Western Europe. The peculiarity of the Russian conservatives, however, lies not only in the way in which this particularism is culturally constructed, but in the geopolitical mission the conservatives and large sections of the Russian elite attribute to their country as a key player in establishing an equilibrium in the new multi-polar world (Robinson, this volume). This role is not sustainable without socio-economic development, so that the conflict over the "developmental state" which permeates Russian history is just as bitter as the missionary consciousness, especially toward Europe, which persists. And here all the differences between the conservative camps narrow down to almost the same thing: Russia has the task of helping continental "post-Europe" rid itself of transnational structures, return to its roots, and find itself again.

## Notes

- 1 Panarin taught in the 1990s at the Moscow State University. Shortly before his death he received the Solzhenitsyn Prize for his book *Orthodox Civilization in a Global World* (2002).
- 2 Malinova (2016, 146) gives 2003 as the year of this shift.
- 3 Although they were quite successful in that mission, the alliance of the three did not last long and the party merged, after the re-election of Putin in 2004, with a new Kremlin party—Just Russia.
- 4 The Foundation for Effective Politics was involved in Yeltsin's (1996) and Putin's (2000) presidential election campaigns, and contributed significantly to the takeoff of conservative projects in the early 2000s. Gleb Pavlovsky, one of its founders, also established the *Russian Journal*, one of the early journalistic crystallizations of the new Russian conservatism. Pavlovsky has become increasingly critical of Putin's regime.
- 5 The foundation has representatives in Vladivostok, Kaliningrad, and Crimea.
- 6 The most prominent media representative in the club is journalist Mikhail Leontyev (b. 1958), who since joining United Russia in the early 2000s has become a leading political and economic commentator on First Channel TV, and has been, since 2014, Vice-President for PR at Rosneft, today the biggest oil company in Russia.

- 7 The term “system-liberals” is often used in the Russian debate and stresses their endeavor to reform the system from within, in contrast to an opposition from without as a potential counter-elite. System-liberals are not necessarily proponents of a representative democracy, as Busygina and Phillipov argue in this volume.
- 8 The economic-political wing of the Izborsk Club is also represented by the economist and political scientist Mikhail Delyagin (b. 1968), who heads a one-man Institute for Problems of Globalization as well as the publicist Nikolai Starikov (b. 1970), who is commercial director of the First Channel of Russian State TV in St. Petersburg.
- 9 See [www.idc-europe.org/](http://www.idc-europe.org/) (accessed 5 December 2017). The IDC was founded with another headquarters in New York that was closed in 2015 by the US authorities.
- 10 Dugin as a National Bolshevik in 1997 had already written a book entitled *Katechon and Revolution*. His former adherent Arcady Maler founded a club at the end of the 1990s which he called the Byzantine Club Katechon and the above-mentioned Philosophical-Political Center Northern Katechon. The difference was intentional.
- 11 See for example: <http://katechon.com/de/agenda/konservative-international-le-pen-besuchte-die-residenz-von-trump> (accessed 5 December 2017).
- 12 Berdyaev, together with other famous Russian intellectuals, published the *Vekhi* (Landmarks) essays on the revolutionary intelligentsia in the wake of the failed 1905 revolution. He was not radically “anti-Western,” and excluded two key references to authors among the new conservative civilization theorists, Konstantin Leontyev and Nikolay Danilevsky, from the canon of Russian conservatism.
- 13 Chairman of the editorial board is the above mentioned Leonid Polyakov (b. 1950), from the Higher School of Economics (HSE).
- 14 Further, Remizov is member of the government Council of Experts of the Russian Federation, as well as of the Commission of Experts on the Exploitation of Antarctica.
- 15 The doctrine and the two-year discussion surrounding it was financed by the Foundation of Russian Entrepreneurs, which, according to its own data, achieved this through voluntary donations to social charity activities. Among the founders and owners of this NGO is the eparchy of ROC in Yekaterinburg.
- 16 The Sobor advocates “for a healthy way of life and military-patriotic education of youth,” and opposes “uncontrolled immigration, totalitarian sects, lawlessness and corruption,” as well as any other action aimed at undermining the country, its spiritual-moral values and culture” (see Kurtov 2010).
- 17 However, the veneration felt for Ivan the Terrible and Stalin as modernizers is similar (see Averyanov 2010, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).
- 18 The concept of full sovereignty on the other hand, upon a closer look, refers only to the centers of the “world economies,” which peripheral states join out of well-founded personal interest or cultural proximity (Remizov et al. 2014, 35–43).
- 19 Since the early 2000s Dugin has presented his thoughts on postmodernity and post-modernism in many lectures, talks, and texts. His views might therefore have had a heavy influence on the way the concept is discussed in conservative circles. In a short version he speaks of postmodernism as a “kind of freemasonry of the 21st century” (Dugin 2007).

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### 3 The universal and the particular in Russian conservatism

*Paul Robinson*

#### **Introduction**

In a lecture delivered in 1893, entitled “The Decay of Slavophilism,” Russian historian and liberal politician Pavel Milyukov remarked that “[a]t the foundation of old Slavophilism were two indissolubly connected ideas: the idea of nationality, and the idea of its universal-historic destiny” (Milyukov 1893, 5). The early Slavophiles of the 1840s and 1850s had developed a form of what is sometimes called “conservative utopianism” (Leatherbarrow 2010, 111), which was to have a significant influence on later Russian conservative thought. On the one hand, they stressed the uniqueness of Russia’s development, its difference from the West; on the other hand, they wrote of Russia’s mission to bring to the rest of the world certain universal truths which Western Europeans had ignored. In the Slavophiles’ minds, these two aspects of their beliefs were intimately connected.

According to Milyukov, this attempt to mix the universal and the particular failed. As a result, Slavophilism decayed, and in the second half of the nineteenth century “among the school’s successors, these two ideas went separate ways,” producing on the one hand the universalism of Vladimir Solovyov and on the other hand the extreme particularism, verging on moral relativism, of Nikolai Danilevsky and Konstantin Leontyev. Russian conservatism became associated with the second of these two trends, and thus became more and more a matter of narrow Russian nationalism (Milyukov 1893, 5).

Milyukov’s lecture correctly highlighted the apparently contradictory impulses toward the universal and the particular in Russian conservatism. But his conclusion that the two parted company in the second half of the nineteenth century is highly questionable. As this chapter will show, a belief in Russia’s universal mission remained closely connected to ideas of Russia’s distinctiveness throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and remains so today.

This chapter examines the relationship between the universal and the particular in Russian conservatism from the time of the early Slavophiles through to the present day. In the process, it shows how Russian conservatives have sought to reconcile the two. It posits that Russian conservatives from the Slavophiles onwards have taken two approaches. One has claimed that Russia’s particularity

is that it is the repository of the universal truth, and has therefore insisted that Russia must defend its separate identity for the benefit of mankind as a whole. The second has identified the universal good with the promotion of national diversity. This second approach has thereby rejected *universalism* while at the same time preserving the idea that Russia has a universal mission. In line with this logic, many Russian conservatives in the modern era argue that the development of a multipolar world, in which nations protect their sovereignty and defend their right to a separate path of development, serves not only Russian interests, but also those of humanity as a whole.

### **Conservatism's binary nature**

Conservatism is notoriously difficult to define, in part because it has what Russian scholar Andrey A. Gorokhov calls a “binary nature” (Gorokhov 2016, 145). Broadly speaking, says Gorokhov, there are two primary ways of looking at conservatism: “as a political-ideological phenomenon and as a cultural worldview” (*ibid.*). Other authors have also described conservatives in a binary fashion, albeit using different terms. Michael Freeden, for instance, identifies two main elements of conservative ideology: (1) an “understanding of organic change,” and (2) “a belief in the extra-human origins of the social order” (Freeden 1996, 333–4). And Samuel Huntington distinguishes between conservatism as “an autonomous system of ideas [...] defined in terms of universal values such as justice, order, balance, moderation,” and conservatism as a “situational” or “positional” ideology “arising out of a distinct but recurring type of historical situation in which a fundamental challenge is directed at established institutions” (Huntington 1957, 455).

Gorokhov's, Freeden's, and Huntington's definitions of conservatism are not identical, but together do reveal a fundamental tension within conservatism between two main strands of thought. The first strand regards conservatism as resting on certain core, universal values, often seen as religiously based. The second views conservatism as what Russell Kirk's called “a way of looking at the civil social order” (Kirk 1986, 25–8). The latter is most commonly associated with a belief in organic development, for instance, a belief that nations should develop in a manner which accords with their own nature.

The first strands marks conservatism out as universalistic—the core values apply to all people, at all times, and in all places. In the second strand, however, there are no universal conservative values. Rather, as Kieron O'Hara puts it: “The conservative wishes to preserve different things depending on where she is located” (O'Hara 2011, 92). Or as Konstantin Leontyev wrote, “every nation's conservatism is its own: the Turks' is Turkish; the English—English; the Russian—Russian” (Chestneyshin 2006, 4). This strand is therefore particularistic, as it suggests that each nation's values are different.

To summarize, conservatism can be seen either as a set of universal values or as a belief in organic development. Conservatism of the first sort is universalistic, but conservatism of the second sort is particularistic. Yet the two types of

conservatism are often not clearly distinguished, and they are so wrapped up in one another that it is impossible to say which is the “true” conservatism. The binary nature of conservatism thus creates an almost inevitable tension between universalism and particularism.

### **The Russian case**

This tension is inherent to conservatism everywhere. Yet, there are some grounds for considering that it may be especially pronounced in the Russian case. Conservatism is often viewed as having arisen in response to the French Revolution. Russian conservatism, though, has a cultural as well as a political element, and can be seen as a reaction not just to the French Revolution but also to the process of Westernization launched by Peter the Great and to the *gallomaniya* (love of all things French) so prevalent in the Russian upper classes in the late eighteenth century. Russian conservatism has always been concerned with protecting Russian national identity, and so has always had a strong anti-Western element. To justify this, it has had to develop a philosophy which asserts Russia’s right to a separate path of development. Particularism is thus inherent in Russian conservatism.

At the same time, the particular feature, which Russian conservatives have generally identified as distinguishing Russia from the West, and so justifying its separate path, is Orthodox Christianity—in other words, a religion claiming to represent universal truth. In this way, Russia’s particularism is founded upon a universalistic claim.

Freeden remarks that reconciling “the fixed-core list approach to conservative ideology with the positional one [...] is the core challenge facing the student of conservative ideology, as distinct from the conservative ideologue” (Freeden 1996, 335). Another way of saying this would be that the “core challenge” is reconciling the particular and universal elements of conservative ideology. In the Russian case, though, the tensions between the two are sufficiently strong that the need for such reconciliation has extended beyond students of conservatism to the ideologues themselves. Attempts to reconcile the particular and the universal have, therefore, been a key element of Russian conservatism for at least the last 150 years.

### **Universalism in Russian conservatism**

As mentioned above, universalism in Russian conservatism derives in the main from Russian Orthodoxy. Christianity is by nature a universalistic religion, and Orthodoxy considers itself to be the bearer of the true form of Christianity. As a modern textbook on Orthodoxy says:

Papacy changed Christianity in many of its dogmas and teachings. It filled it with human injunctions and errors, and false teachings and heresies. [...] Orthodoxy is [...] the Church which possesses Christianity in its

original form; her worship is unadulterated and genuine, and her teaching unchanged.

(Tyneh 2003, 98)

Given that Russia is the most powerful Orthodox country in the world, it has, in the eyes of some, a holy mission to preserve the true Christianity and in due time bring enlightenment to the rest of humanity. Russian conservatism has therefore sometimes acquired a messianic tinge. This can be seen by examining the trajectory of universalistic thought in Russian conservatism from the time of the early Slavophiles onwards.

The idea that Russia was the preserver of key universal values was an important part of the initial Slavophile “conservative utopianism” in the 1840s and 1850s. Through the Slavophiles this idea influenced Russian conservatives thereafter. According to the Slavophiles, Western thinking was “one-sided”—by which they meant that it had become overly rationalistic. It was felt that with the works of Hegel in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Western philosophy had reached its climax. Thereafter, it lost its ability to contribute further to the development of history. By contrast, Russia had preserved “wholeness of spirit,” which “embraced reason and feeling, will and imagination into something unitary, whole” (Brodsky 1910, xliv).

In addition, the Slavophiles believed that the West had become too individualistic. Russia, in contrast, retained the spirit of *sobornost'*, which has been described as “the ‘togetherness’ and ‘oneness’ of Christian believers, the collectivity and unity which [the Slavophiles] believed could be found only in the Orthodox Church” (Duncan 2000, 22), and which the Slavophiles felt was embodied in the Russian peasant commune.

Through the example of its “wholeness of spirit” and *sobornost'*, Russia would, the Slavophiles held, save the Western world from itself. As Aleksey Khomyakov put it:

The West did great and glorious things. But [...] the edifice of your faith is crumbling and sinking. We do not bring you new materials to restore this edifice. No! We do no more than return to you the cornerstone rejected by your ancestors [...]. Put back the cornerstone of this building and [...] this building will rise in all the grandeur of its sublime proportions to be the salvation, happiness, and glory of all future generations.

(Khomyakov and Kireyevsky 1998, 114–15)

In this scheme, values are universal, and Russia’s mission is to enlighten Europe with those values and so contribute to universal progress. “History is calling Russia to take its place in the forefront of universal enlightenment,” Khomyakov wrote (Christoff 1961, 198).

Similar views were held by the so-called *pochvenniki* (native soil conservatives) such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, who derived their name from their belief that Russia’s ruling elite needed to re-establish its links with the Russian people and

their native soil (*pochva*). In writings from the 1860s onwards, the *pochvenniki* argued that the West could not justifiably claim to be the bearer of universal values. But at the same time they expressed the belief that such values existed and were to be found among the Russian people. As Shatov says in Dostoevsky's novel *Besy* (variously translated as *The Devils*, *Demons*, or *The Possessed*):

Every people is a people only as long as it has its own particular god and excludes all other gods in the world without any attempts at reconciliation; so long as it believes that by its own god it will conquer and banish all the other gods from the world. [...] But there is only one truth, and therefore there is only one nation among all the nations that can have the true God [...] and the only "god-bearing" people is the Russian people.

(Dostoevsky 1953, 257–8)

In the Soviet period, similar sentiments could be found in the writings of émigré Eurasianists. The foundational Eurasianist volume, *Exodus to the East*, stated that the Russian Revolution had brought to light the "salvatory power of Religion" (Savitsky et al. 1996, 3). Through "its immeasurable sufferings and deprivations," said Petr Savitsky in *Exodus to the East*, "Russia took upon herself the burden of searching for truth, on behalf of herself and for the benefit of all" (*ibid.*, 6–7). Co-author Petr Suvchinsky also noted that:

Perhaps the Russian revolution, by its outcome, is even destined to redeem all the blind, cruel, and presumptuous actions and acts, all the unprecedented sins of the European war. [...] The burning Russian flame is rising up over the whole world [...] every Russian, without exception, is infecting peoples and lands [...] and preparing unprecedented glory in the coming age.

(*Ibid.*, 28–9)

The writings and speeches of Russian thinkers and politicians of the post-Soviet era contain similar claims about Russia's messianic purpose. For instance, in a 1995 statement owing far more to nineteenth-century Russian conservatism than to communism, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Gennady Zyuganov, wrote: "Russia is the bearer of an ancient spiritual tradition, the fundamental values of which are *sobornost'* (collectivism), *derzhavnost'* (state self-sufficiency), and the striving to incarnate the highest 'heavenly' ideals of justice and brotherhood in reality on Earth" (Duncan 2000, 136).

Zyuganov is sometimes described as a "left conservative" (implying a combination of social conservatism and left-wing economics), but he has much in common with "right conservatives" (who are strongly nationalistic) and "social conservatives" (who champion "traditional values," especially "family values"). All of these, but especially the social conservatives, also share some of the messianic tendencies of the Slavophiles and the *pochvenniki*. According to Christopher Stoop, "the Russian discourse of moral mission and the superiority of



Christian values to those of the ‘decadent’ West has played a key role in the resurgence of social conservatism in post-Soviet Russia,” and is “bound up with considerations of the role that Russia should play in the wider world” (Stroop 2016, 6). This social conservatism draws on earlier Russian thinkers’ ideas “that absent absolute values grounded in unchanging religious truth, human morality will decay and society will descend into chaos,” and that “Russia has a spiritual mission to enlighten other nations” (ibid., 5–6). “This right wing iteration of moral exceptionalism,” concludes Stroop, “entails a belief that Russia was given a providential calling to revive the Christian root of European, or more broadly Western, civilization” (ibid., 10). Connected with this is the idea of Russia as the leader of a “Conservative Internationale,” promoting fundamental values throughout the world. In a 2013 speech, Vladimir Putin remarked that “[w]ithout the values embedded in Christianity and other world religions, with the moral norms formed over thousands of years, people naturally lose their human dignity. And we consider it natural and right to defend these values” (Putin 2013). Putin’s statement assumes that there are values which are held across cultures. It therefore affirms the relevance of the universal in modern Russian conservatism.

### **Particularism in Russian conservatism**

The messianic, universalistic strand in Russian conservatism contrasts with an equally strong particularistic strand, which has been in evidence since at least the mid-eighteenth century. An early example of this came in the work of the eighteenth-century Russian historian Vasily Tatishchev. Tatishchev set the tone for much of what would follow, writing:

It is impossible to say which [form of] government would be better and most useful to every society, but one must look on the status and condition of each, such as the location of its territory, the spaciousness of its regions, and the conditions of its people. [...] In single cities and on small territories [...] democracy is able to preserve well-being in peace. [...] But spacious territories with open borders and, in particular, those whose people are not enlightened by learning and reason [...] there [democracy and aristocracy] are unsuitable; here there must be monarchy.

(Pipes 2005, 56–7)

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Slavophiles picked up on this theme. Aleksey Khomyakov wrote that:

You must not graft foreign life on your own because thus you will graft not foreign health but foreign disease [...] that which for another people is not only harmless but beneficial will become for you an evil and ruinous principle. Every living creature has its own laws of existence, its own order and harmony on which are based its very existence. [...] But that which is

orderly and harmonious [...] becomes a principle of disorder and discord when it is grafted on another creature whose substance is based upon a different law.

(Christoff 1961, 258)

Russia, according to the Slavophiles, was inherently different from the West. Ivan Kireyevsky wrote: “The principles of basic Russian culture are *characteristically different* from the Western because they are completely *different*” (Christoff 1972, 323). Because of this difference, Russia should not, according to the organic principle, imitate Western institutions and models of development.

Later conservative thinkers agreed. For instance, in his 1869 book *Russia and Europe*, Nikolay Danilevsky developed the idea that human history did not follow a single trajectory of progress, common to all civilizations, or “cultural-historical types” as he called them. Rather each civilization developed in its own way, and different civilizations could not properly be measured against one another. “The principles of civilization for one cultural-historical type are not transferable to the peoples of another type,” he wrote (Danilevsky 2013, 76). “To solve a problem of some sort,” Danilevsky added, “one civilization cannot have another’s social principles in mind, so that its solution will be individualized, sufficient for it alone, not universally applicable” (*ibid.*, 83). “Never can a political or economic phenomenon observed among one people, for whom it is appropriate and beneficial, be automatically considered appropriate and beneficial for another,” he concluded (*ibid.*, 134). Similarly, Konstantin Leontyev wrote in his 1875 book *Byzantism and Slavdom*:

Nobody knows under which form of government people live best [...]. There are no statistics which confirm that it is better for individuals to live in a republic than in a monarchy, in a limited monarchy better than in an unlimited one, in an egalitarian state better than in one based on estates, in a rich one better than in a poor one [...]. In order to know what suits an organism, one must, above all, understand the organism.

(Leontyev 1876, 81)

Unlike the Slavophiles, Leontyev went so far as to deny the idea of universal values and the “universal good.” According to Leontyev:

The idea of a general human good, the religion of the universal benefit, is the coldest, most prosaic, and also the most improbable and unfounded of all religions. [...] There is nothing real in the idea of the universal good. [...] It is a dry, good for nothing, even intangible abstraction, and nothing more. One person thinks that the universal good is suffering and constant rest and praying to God; another thinks that the common good is now work, now pleasure, and not believing in any ideal; and a third thinks that it is pleasure alone. How can one reconcile this, so that it’s of use to everybody?

(*Ibid.*, 29–30)

Particularist views did not disappear with the Russian Revolution. Conservative thinkers in emigration continued to express similar opinions. A notable example is the philosopher Ivan Ilyin. In a collection of essays written in the late 1940s and early 1950s for émigré military veterans, Ilyin repeated the same theme again and again, saying:

There is no single, life-saving recipe for all times and all peoples. [...] There isn't and cannot be constitutions which are equally suitable for different peoples. [...] Justice in one country could be unjust in another. [...] In order to find Russia's true path, Russian political thought must above all else free itself from formalism and a doctrinaire attitude and become grounded, organic, and national-historical. The state system is not an empty and dead "form"; it is connected to the life of the people, to its nature, climate, the dimensions of the country, its historical fate, and—more deeply—its character. [...] It is foolish to think of the form of the state as a particularly absurd fancy dress costume, which fits men and women, old and young, tall and short, fat and thin, equally.

(Ilyin 1956, 128, 166–7, 180, 186)

Ilyin claimed that “[t]here is no single universally obligatory ‘Western culture’ compared with which everything else is ‘darkness’ or ‘barbarianism.’ [...] The West has its own errors, ailments, weakness, and dangers,” he added, “[o]ur salvation does not lie in Westernism. We have our own path and our own tasks” (ibid., 317–18). Each nation did things its own way, Ilyin noted: “And in this all things, all people, and all nations are right” (ibid., 271).

Post-Soviet conservative thinkers repeat these particularist claims. “One of the principles of conservatism [is that] it is impossible to transfer social norms, cultural traditions, the hierarchy of values from one cultural society to another,” says Leonid Polyakov for example (2014, 44). “Our conflict is one against universalism,” says the conservative nationalist thinker Mikhail Remizov (Robinson 2017). This is an attitude shared by many modern Eurasianists such as Aleksandr Dugin, who have further developed the idea proposed by Danilevsky in his book *Russia and Europe*, that the world is divided up into distinct civilizations, and that Russia should be considered a separate civilization to Western Europe. This concept has acquired considerable support in modern Russia, even beyond Eurasianist circles, and has found its way into government policy. According to the *Foundations of State Cultural Policy* published by the Russian Ministry of Culture in 2015:

[...] advocates [of Western liberalism] postulate a single path of development for all races, nations, and other social organisms. Supporters of this tendency, as a rule, look on the “Western” way of development as ideal, and all others as deviations from the one correct design. [...] In contrast to this approach are the works of a whole series of thinkers (N.Ia. Danilevsky, A. Toynbee, L.N. Gumilyov, S. Huntington), based on another, civilizational

principle. Mankind is the sum total of many communities, distinguished from one another by their attitude to the surrounding world, their systems of values and, correspondingly, their culture. [...] In this framework, Russia is seen as a unique and independent civilization. [...] In the Foundations of State Cultural Policy, guaranteeing the country's civilizational independence is defined as one of the priorities of cultural and humanitarian development.

(Ministerstvo Kul'tury Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2015, 29–30)

Particularism thus remains alive and well alongside universalism in contemporary Russian conservatism.

### **Reconciling the universal and the particular**

Defining Russian conservatism as either universalist or particularist is difficult, not only because the two elements exist side by side, but also because, as will be shown, conservative thought which appears on the surface to be especially particularist can be seen, on closer examination, also to have universalistic elements, and vice versa. The question therefore arises of how the two elements are reconciled.

Two main methods can be seen. The first presents Russia as being unique in preserving in its culture certain universally valid truths. Protecting Russia's particular identity from the forces of Westernization, and in the modern era of globalization, is therefore a necessary prerequisite for Russia to fulfill its mission of presenting these truths to the rest of the world. The second method rejects universalism and instead celebrates the value of cultural diversity. At the same time, however, it presents diversity as being of universal benefit. While repudiating *universalism*, this approach thereby still makes a claim to *universality*.

The early Slavophiles combined both methods in their thinking. On the one hand, while presenting ideas such as *sobornost'* as particularly Russian characteristics, they regarded these ideas as having universal value. Russia was not meant just to keep these values for itself, but to give them back to the West. This explains Khomyakov's statement, cited above, that "We do no more than return to you [the West] the cornerstone rejected by your ancestors." On the other hand, the Slavophiles also took from German Romanticism the concept that each nation contributed to human progress by developing what was unique and best about its own culture. The universal good was thus served by the promotion of diversity. Susannah Rabow-Edling comments:

The central aim of the Slavophile critique of imitation was to show how Russia could contribute to universal progress. [...] The national contribution to, and participation in, a universal development was closely connected to the nation's originality and uniqueness. Russia had to be original precisely in order to make a contribution to humanity and in order to be part of universal progress. [...] the universal development of history demanded of

Russia that she now expressed her national foundations [...] thereby creating a national culture, Russia could make an imprint on universal history.

(Rabow-Edling 2006, 46, 55)

In this scheme, the common good is served not by homogenization in the form of universal Westernization, but rather by diversity. As Konstantin Aksakov wrote in the 1850s:

Exceptionalism is an abuse. To avoid national exceptionalism, one does not need to destroy one's own nationality, but one must recognize all nationalities. [...] Yes, one must recognize every nationality, from the sum-total of which the general human choir is formed. [...] Let every people preserve its national appearance (physiognomy), only then will it have human expression. Surely one would not want to make out of humanity some kind of abstract phenomenon where there are no living, individual national features? If you remove individual and national colors from humanity, it will be a colorless phenomenon. [...] No, let all nationalities in the human world freely and clearly flower; only they will activate and energize the common labor of peoples. Long live every nationality!

(Brodsky 1910, 110)

In his 1893 lecture, Milyukov considered the Slavophile way of thinking unsustainable, and felt that later Russian conservatives had abandoned it in favor of crude nationalism. In fact it continued to exert a powerful influence on Russian conservative thought. Aksakov's statement introduced an esthetic element—universalism would be “colorless.” This was also Leontyev's view. Although Leontyev denied the existence of the “universal good,” it is clear from his writings that he regarded cultural, social, and political homogenization as a bad thing *per se*, and as esthetically displeasing. Instead, he cherished the concept of “flowering complexity.” In this sense, he did identify a universal good, associated with diversity. And, like the Slavophiles, he felt that by promoting such diversity Russia could save Europe from itself. As he wrote:

Do we want, according to the ideal of our nihilists, to find our vocation in a destructive role, to outstrip everyone and everything in the field of barbarism, animal cosmopolitanism; or do we prefer [...] to turn this strength when the great and terrible hour, known to all, strikes, to the service of the best and most noble principles of European life, to the service of this very great, old Europe, to which we owe so much?

(Leontyev 1876, 66)

Danilevsky expressed very similar views, saying that, “[p]rogress consists not of everything going in one direction [...] but of pursuing the whole realm of humanity's historical activity in all directions” (Danilevsky 2013, 91). He wrote:

The actual, profound danger consists of the completion of the very order of things our Westernizers hold as their ideal: the genuine, not phony, reign of the all-human civilization they so admire. This would be the same as ending the whole possibility of any further success or progress in history, such as the introduction of a new worldview, new goals, and new aspirations. [...] [F]or cultural-breeding forces not to dry up in the human race in general, it is necessary for new agents, new peoples bearing these forces, to appear, with a different mental framework, different enlightening principles, a different historical upbringing. [...] It is not a question of whether the world is controlled by a republic or a monarchy, but whether it is controlled by a single civilization, a single culture, since this would deprive the human race of one of the necessary conditions for success and perfection: the element of diversity.

(Ibid., 366–7)

The universal and the particular were also linked by the late-nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox Church, which promoted the concept of “Orthodox patriotism.” This returned to the first method of reconciling the universal and the particular—stressing the existence of universal truths but seeing them as being preserved in Russia’s particular culture. According to John Strickland, Orthodox patriotism “suffered from a weakness embodied in the tension between Church universalism and national particularism,” and there was “a difficult, sometimes inconsistent, and even painful effort to fuse these two elements” (Strickland 2013, xix). Proponents of Orthodox patriotism argued that “[t]he universal Church [...] though by definition not limited to a particular nationality, was nevertheless centered upon the experience of particular peoples” (ibid., 9). As Archbishop Nikanor of Kherson said in a sermon in 1860:

[God] values the means of salvation, the right faith, more than we can. Yet he has assured that in a particular people it is preserved for all the world. Here is your world purpose, Orthodox Rus’—the preservation of your Orthodoxy for the whole world.

(Ibid., 72)

Vladimir Skortsov, editor of *Missionerskoe obozrenie*, argued in the first decade of the twentieth century that the universal must come before the national. But he wrote: “This universal human ideal cannot carry a denial of nationality. Nationality is the necessary form by which particular peoples travel toward a universal human ideal” (ibid., 141).

Many others have expressed the same idea. Ivan Ilyin, for instance, declared that “[o]ne can create something beautiful and perfect for all peoples only by confirming the creative act of one’s own people. The ‘world genius’ is always and above all a national genius” (Ilyin 1956, 273). Perhaps the clearest expression of this concept was a letter written by Fyodor Dostoevsky to the heir to the Russian throne, Grand Duke Aleksandr Aleksandrovich (later Tsar Aleksandr III) in February 1880. Dostoevsky wrote:

Embarrassed and afraid that we have fallen so far behind Europe in our intellectual and scientific development, we have forgotten that we ourselves, in the depth and tasks of the Russian soul, contain in ourselves as Russians the capacity perhaps to bring new light to the world, on the condition that our development is independent. [...] Without such an arrogance concerning our importance to the world as a nation, we will never be able to be a great nation and leave behind anything distinctive for mankind's benefit. We have forgotten that all great nations displayed their great powers only to the extent that they were arrogant in their assessment of themselves, and precisely in this way they have benefited the world, and each of them has brought something into it, be it only a single ray of light, because they have remained themselves, proud and steady, arrogantly independent.

(Dostoevsky 1986, 260)

Attempts to reconcile the universal and the particular remain an important part of Russian thought today, as can be seen for instance in the *Basis of the Social Concept*, which was published by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000. This states that “[t]he universal nature of the Church does not mean that Christians should have no right to national identity and national self-expression. On the contrary, the Church unites in herself the universal with the national” (Russian Orthodox Church 2000, II.2). The Church in essence follows the line of late-nineteenth-century Orthodox patriotism, stressing the universal nature of Christianity while seeing the Russian nation as being the particular carrier of the Orthodox truth. Associated with this is the idea of *katechon*, described by Egor Kholmogorov as “that which stands on the bridge between the Antichrist and the world and which does not let the Antichrist into the world” (Engström 2014, 368). Russia saved Europe from the forces of Satan during the Second World War, the theory goes; now its task is to save Europe in a cultural sense, from the forces of globalization, liberalism, and post-modernism. In effect, Russia is Europe's *katechon*. As a conservative manifesto entitled *The Russian Doctrine* puts it:

The defense of civilization from barbarism, its assimilation, this is the first function of *katechon*. [...] The *katechon* as an Orthodox kingdom defends Christians against forces hostile to the salvation of the soul. [...] It is clear that the crisis of the Western project inevitably gives rise to the question of a new world leader. The integrationist potential of Russian civilization [...] is once again demanded by history.

(Russkaya doktrina 2016, 70–71, 78)

Russia, according to this theory, has a mission to serve the world as a whole by maintaining the universal truths of Orthodoxy against the forces of evil. This is, however, not the only approach. Some modern Russian conservatives instead return to Danilevsky's approach and argue against universalism while contending that in doing so Russia serves the universal good.

Many (although not all) contemporary Russian conservatives are highly critical of globalization, which they equate with efforts by the United States to impose what they consider a destructive neoliberal economic agenda on the rest of the world. The struggle against neoliberal globalization is said to require individual nations to reassert their sovereignty and their right to separate paths of development. The creation thereby of a more multipolar, “polycentric,” or “pluricultural” world will ultimately benefit everybody. In this way, the particular and the universal come together. As one of Russia’s leading conservative intellectuals, Mikhail Remizov, says, “Russian nationalism must grow up into a fully-fledged political ideology. [...] We must clearly define Russian interests, and secondly, be able to make them *universally significant*” (Remizov 2007, 200).

Remizov draws a distinction between “universalism” and “universality.” The former is undesirable, the latter not. As he says: “I associate conservatism with an anti-universalistic scheme of projecting values. And the fact that this type of projection of values can be done successfully in different countries doesn’t contradict this. Anti-universalistic thought can be universally accepted” (Robinson 2017). Conservatism, in effect, promotes the anti-universalist value of diversity and the right to be different, both of which can be accepted by all. To put it another way, anti-universalism is an idea which possesses universality.

In practical terms, this means that by resisting the universalistic claims of modern Western globalism, and by being “arrogantly independent,” as Dostoevsky put it, Russia serves the world as a whole. According to this logic, the imposition of a Western version of universalism is actually harming humanity. The latter would better be served by promoting diverse forms of development. A multipolar balance of power, involving a stronger, more independent, Russia, would help to preserve international peace and stability. It follows from this that promotion of the common good requires the West to recognize Russia’s separateness. Another leading conservative intellectual, Boris Mezhuev, therefore says:

Either a new American administration will regard Russia as a distinct civilization marked by its own value code and special rights sanctified by history, or it will treat Russia as just a target. Today both Americans and Russians need to refrain from inane theorizing and debating about social and cultural advantages of our country to be regarded as a distinct civilization. We both need to understand that the language of civilizational geopolitics guarantees Europe’s survival.

(Mezhuev 2016)

The two methods of reconciling the particular and the universal mentioned above are not always clearly distinguished. Some conservatives contrive to follow both lines of argument at the same time. It is not always obvious in the case of Eurasianist thinkers such as Aleksandr Dugin which line they truly believe in, whether they think that Russia is the bearer of some universal truth or that universal truths do not exist. This indicates that the efforts to reconcile the universal



and the particular are not always completely successful. However, Russian conservatives approach the problem, Mezhuev's last sentence above neatly summarizes a view which most Russian conservatives have in common: defending national particularities serves the universal good.

## **Conclusion**

The French philosopher of the New Right, Alain de Benoist, who is said to have exerted an important influence on modern Russian neo-Eurasianists, remarked in 1986 that:

Already on the international level the major contradiction is no longer between right and left, liberalism and socialism, fascism and communism, "totalitarianism" and "democracy," it is between those who want the world to be one dimensional and those who support a plural world grounded in the diversity of cultures.

(Clover 2016, 176)

The current tensions between Russia and the West are sometimes described as being a conflict between democracy and authoritarianism, or between liberalism and conservatism. The analysis above suggests that de Benoist's framework might be more accurate. As Nicolai Petro writes:

The moral contours of the present East-West conflict should now be readily apparent. Russia opposes the adoption of any single set of cultural values as the standard for international behavior. Many in the West counter that Western values are not just a lone cultural standard, but the de facto universal standard. Russia labels this unilateralism and advocates a multipolar world order based on pluriculturalism as a better alternative. Pluriculturalism argues that there is an inherent ("God-given," according to Vladimir Putin) value to diversity among nations. [...] By contrast, Western states more typically prize diversity within nations (the rights of the individual), whereas among nations they seek to subordinate national cultural differences to standards, such as human rights, that express modern Western values.

(Petro 2015)

In an article published in March 2016, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov wrote that:

There are many development models—which rules out the monotony of existence within the uniform Western frame of reference. [...] [L]ong-term success can only be achieved on the basis of movement to the partnership of civilizations based on respectful interaction of diverse cultures and religions.

(Lavrov 2016)

This is a classic conservative repudiation of universalism in favor of national particularism.

However, Lavrov then added that “[w]e believe that human solidarity must have a moral basis formed by traditional values that are largely shared by the world’s leading religions” (ibid.). This points in a different direction—toward the existence of universal truths.

To reconcile the apparent contradiction, Lavrov ended his article by citing the following words from Ilyin: “A great power is the one which, asserting its existence and its interest [...], introduces a creative and meaningful legal idea to the entire assembly of the nations, the entire ‘concert’ of the peoples and states” (ibid.). Contrary to Milyukov, the synthesizing of the universal and the particular remains alive and well in the modern era.

This should come as no surprise. Returning to Freedén’s definition of conservatism, it is clear that a tension between the universal and the particular is inherent within conservative ideology. Reconciling the two is thus an essential task not just for those who study conservatives, as Freedén says, but also for conservatives themselves, wherever and whenever they may be found.

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## 4 Against “post-communism”

### The conservative dawn in Hungary

*Aron Buzogány and Mihai Varga*

#### Introduction

In August 2014 news of Viktor Orbán’s “secret Bible” made headlines in the Hungarian media. Journalists claimed that the “political science gossip” was true and that the “Orbán system” closely followed the ideas of Tilo Schabert’s 1989 book *Boston Politics: The creativity of power* (Tóth 2014). In this book Schabert presents the approach to politics of Kevin White, the mayor of Boston from 1968–84, to support his own theory of the “primacy of persons”—and not of institutions—in politics (Gontier 2015). The information that Viktor Orbán could be the follower of a Western (German) political theorist was, to say the least, sensational: earlier analyses concluded that Orbán and his party Fidesz were rather opportunistic and idiosyncratic in their political choices and cannot be easily pinned down to any political current. These analyses referred to Orbán and Fidesz as following a loosely defined form of “socially conservative” (Kiss 2002, 745) populism (Egedy 2009). The information also turned out to be grossly inaccurate and exaggerated: not only was it difficult to verify what books Orbán “kept on his bedside table,” it also turned out that *Boston Politics* was not so much Orbán’s favorite, but rather a book (along with works of Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss) that some of his aides read and considered the best description of the prime minister’s approach to politics. The story about Schabert’s 1989 book connection to Hungary is nevertheless far from trivial: it helped draw attention to the political ideas supported by leading figures at the Fidesz-allied “Századvég” think tank, who had been trying since the 2000s to formulate the key ideas driving the Fidesz agenda in the case of a return to power.

After eight years as the leader of the opposition, former (1998–2002) Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán returned to power with a sweeping victory in 2010. Not only did this victory earn, for the pre-electoral coalition between Fidesz and the small Christian-democratic party KDNP, the “supermajority” needed for constitutional changes, the entire Hungarian party system, which was regarded as one of the few consolidated ones in East Central Europe, collapsed as a result. The main opposition party, the post-communist “Hungarian Socialist Party,” in power between 2002 and 2010, lost more than half its voters and earned a historical low of 21 percent of the vote. Orbán won with the promise of

a new social contract that emphasized populist paternalism, national sovereignty, and economic nationalism. The landslide victory of 2010 gave Orbán the opportunity to realize this vision. Backed by a constitutional majority during its first term (2010–14), Fidesz passed a new constitution, eliminated a large part of checks and balances, weakened the parliament’s prerogatives (and halved its size), challenged the independence of the judiciary (Halmai 2015), and installed a new, controversial media oversight authority (Kornai 2015). Adding to this, a new electoral code was introduced which included heavily gerrymandered voting districts and voting rights for Hungarians abroad. Following these changes, Hungary took a deep dive in all measurable and quantifiable indicators of democracy. As Kim Scheppele argues, though many of the new institutional arrangements—media authorities, high courts, or electoral systems—are not untypical for established democracies, it is the combination of these that makes Hungary into what she terms a “Frankenstate” (a pun on “Frankenstein,” Scheppele 2013).

In this chapter we introduce the main center-right intellectuals or “conceptive ideologists” (Marx and Engels 2010 [1845]) lending support to Viktor Orbán, either as his personal advisors or via the Századvég think tank. These “ideologists” either directly engage in constructing the ideology of Fidesz or—in the case of Századvég—lead the process of spelling out conservatism, and emphasizing its relevance for Hungary. We present their ideas and place them in the wider context of conservative thinkers in Hungary (not all of whom actually support Orbán). In the next part, we discuss the main contributions in the literature on the nature of the Orbán regime, and delineate our own approach of looking, not so much at what Fidesz politicians say and write, but at how intellectuals close to Fidesz define and seek to address the problems of Hungarian politics and society. Our argument is that one main common denominator in the position of these intellectuals is their focus on the post-communist “political elite” and “institutional arrangements” as deeply problematic and illegitimate, elements that they want to be replaced by those of a state that is first and foremost “normative,” that is, capable of recognizing and pursuing national interests (a state referred to by two of these intellectuals as “neo-Weberian”). These ideas—and in particular those they claim to be the very essence of politics—occur in parallel with and help us to understand the essence of the Fidesz political project.

### **Interpreting the Orbán project: the role of ideational foundations**

For a relatively long time, post-communist Hungary was considered a success story of democratic consolidation. It featured a stable party system and strong governments; it was the leading country in the region in attracting foreign direct investments and eventually became one of the front-runners considered for EU membership. However, shortly after EU accession in 2004, Hungary entered into a spiral of interlinked crises which in effect reshaped the political system to a

large extent. The landslide electoral victory of Fidesz<sup>1</sup> under Viktor Orbán in 2010 was followed by constitutional changes which have moved the initially consensual system toward a strongly majoritarian one. This development was sharply criticized by the European Parliament as a departure from democracy toward authoritarian rule (Tavares 2013). After a second sweeping electoral victory of Fidesz in 2014, the democratic rollback became even more accentuated and was complemented by strong anti-EU rhetoric and closer ties to global and regional authoritarian powers.

In a public speech at a summer university in Transylvania in 2014, Orbán praised “illiberal democracy” and declared the Western economic model dead. Tracing economic success to illiberal political systems, he cited the authoritarian regimes of Russia, China, Turkey, and Singapore as templates to follow for Hungary, declaring that “We have to abandon liberal methods and principles of organizing a society. The new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state.”<sup>2</sup> Speeches held before the 2010 elections also foreshadowed the political system that Orbán envisioned. The emerging system he referred to in 2009 as the “central field of power” (*centrális erőter*) places Fidesz at the center of the political system, and cements its position for a longer period of time, making “unproductive” political debates unnecessary (Bátory 2015). The emphasis on power in Orbán’s statements has been a recurring theme:

Cooperation is a question of force, not of intention. Perhaps there are countries where things don’t work that way, for example in the Scandinavian countries, but such a half-Asiatic rag-tag people as we are can unite only if there is force.<sup>3</sup>

Such claims—declaring Western liberalism and individualism alien to a country with an authoritarian history—can be seen as the call for a centralized, strong, and paternalist state. The new government followed the (self-termed) ideal of a “neo-Weberian” state to replace the “sell-out” of public assets and excessive embracement of the ideas of “new public management” by previous socialist governments. Instead of a market-oriented, “lean” government, which was seen by Fidesz to have served foreign business interests to the detriment of the public good, a new, centralized core executive was installed, halving the number of ministerial departments, replacing ministry staff with Fidesz loyalists, and strengthening the prime minister’s office (Gallai and Molnár 2012). Regional decentralization efforts carried out during the last decade to accommodate EU regional policy demands were also largely reversed (Buzogány and Korkut 2013).

The literature has mostly focused on determining what enabling factors paved the way for the backlash against democracy in Hungary. Such explanations range from problems related to institutional engineering in 1989/90, including overly strong checks and balances, the lack of “lustration” and a real exchange of elites (Pridham 2014), the dynamics of the party system (Enyedi 2016a, 2016b), political polarization (Palonen 2009, 2012; Buzogány 2011), elite

populism (Korkut 2012; Palonen 2009; Enyedi 2016a, 2016b), negative effects of patrimonial capitalism (Csillag and Szelényi 2015), democracy’s lack of societal support (Herman 2015), to the weakness of external support for democracy (Sedelmeier 2014; Müller 2015).

Yet, capturing the essence of Orbán’s “revolution” is a more difficult exercise than establishing the factors behind Orbán’s 2010 return to power. The usual interpretation ignores the self-positioning of Orbán and Fidesz as conservative, and treats the “Orbán project” as a “populist” undertaking. Nevertheless, many authors feel the need to further qualify populism. Zsolt Enyedi, for instance, writes of “paternalistic populism” in Hungary, that is, a populism that, although claiming to be on the side of “the people,” criticizes “the lack of self-discipline in the lower classes” in order to cut welfare spending (Enyedi 2016a, 15). Agnes Bátory also argues that the populism of Fidesz is directed toward changing the country and its inhabitants fundamentally, and qualifies it as “nationalistic,” “Christian conservative” and, after the 2004 Eastern Enlargement of the European Union, increasingly “Eurosceptic” (Báatory 2015, 286).

What is less known is how Orbán and Fidesz came to position themselves as Hungary’s main *conservative* right-wing formation. Csilla Kiss traces this development back to how Viktor Orbán and Fidesz “read” the actions of other parties, most notably the “Hungarian Democratic Forum” (MDF) of József Antall and the alliance between liberals and socialists, Orbán’s main political opponents (Kiss 2002). Thus, Orbán interpreted the defeat and demise of the MDF in the early 1990s as an appropriate reminder of the dangers of a conciliatory style of politics, and he perceived the socialist-liberal governments as betraying national interests. Viktor Orbán appears as an opportunistic actor who learned from his defeat in the 1994 elections on a liberal agenda that liberalism has to make way for a “national-conservative catch-all party” (Lang 2005). The weaknesses and conflicts on the spectrum of conservative parties provided the opportunity to rebrand Fidesz from a liberal-alternative party into a conservative one and win subsequent elections (Szabó 2011; Machos 1993; Fowler 2004; Egedy 2009). Thus, Orbán’s political ideas are best understood as “strategic choices” in reaction to the political environment around him (Báatory 2015).

We argue that Orbán’s political ideas should be seen in a wider context of an anti-liberal milieu that became visible around 2002 to 2006 (when Fidesz lost parliamentary elections). Although playing a leading role in this milieu, Orbán was by far not the only one to grow disillusioned with liberalism. In what follows we map the relevant thinkers and in particular the “conceptive ideologists,” non-party organizations (such as think tanks), and publications that have provided a background to the intensifying criticism and rejection of liberalism in Hungary and the ideational foundations of the “Orbán project.” Building on the work of Karl Mannheim, we see the rise of conservatism (a current to which Fidesz and Orbán claim to belong), not just as a strategic re-positioning in the political field, but as a social current developing in opposition to and with growing irritation over the perceived dominance of liberalism. It is through common experiences—a “community of experience”—that intellectual currents

take shape (Mannheim 1955 [1936], 31). In Hungary a key unifying or crystalizing experience for conservatives (whether they used this term then or not) was the 1994 political alliance between liberals and post-communists that conservatives perceived as a liberal betrayal of the central unifying right-wing principle of anti-communism.

Intellectuals, “individuals whose only capital consisted in their education,” play a central part in processes of “ideology production” (Mannheim 1955 [1936], 156). In Hungary this is perhaps best documented by the intellectuals’ relevance to the 1989 regime change and transition period (Bozóki 2007). More recently there has been increased interest in the intellectual traditions of Hungarian liberalism (Korkut 2012) and the radical right, with social scientists asking about the role of political ideas in the making of the Hungarian radical right, and in particular in the “Movement for a Better Hungary,” also known as “Jobbik” (Gyurgyák 2007; Paksa 2012). In the meantime we are also witnessing a growing interest in the political and intellectual history of Hungarian conservative traditions (more generally and including pre-war times; see Csizmadia 2013; Wéber 2010; Enyedi 2016a, 2016b).

What is lacking, however, is not only an engagement with the ideas of the intellectuals, but also with the field in which they have developed and circulated their ideas: while most of the actors we study in this chapter had turned to conservatism already by the early 1990s, that which has intensified since then is the network of venues in which they develop and circulate conservative ideas—from university departments to think tanks, institutes, and a growing number of publications. In other words, what has changed over the last decades is the conservative “knowledge network” (Bluhm and Varga in this volume), understood as loose groups of conservative intellectuals, think tanks, media outlets, politicians or factions within political parties, university departments or holders of single university chairs, who engage in the production and dissemination of ideology—a “political conception of the world” (Mannheim 1955 [1936]). In Hungary, this has developed from a first generation of university-based scholars into a second generation with numerous and active publishing outlets, as well as important public positions in think tanks, universities, media, and research institutes. Although Hungary’s well-developed “knowledge network” is far from unitary, we present its different facets by focusing on the main figures, think tanks, and publications who share as a common denominator the conviction that the post-communist, constitutional-institutional arrangements were deeply problematic, and who yet differ in the solutions envisaged as well as in the causes identified behind the “dysfunctional” post-communist institutions.

We distinguish between two positions that have been highly active in shaping Hungary’s conservatism and that welcomed Fidesz’ 2010 return to and record in power. The positions are each embodied by a key figure in Viktor Orbán’s 1998–2002 prime ministerial office. The first position is composed of intellectuals often pursuing university careers devoted to the study and dissemination of conservatism. It is best represented by the former minister and head of the prime ministerial office István Stumpf, who traces problems of post-communism to



“flaws” in European thinking about institutions, in particular in liberal thinking, and envisages solutions in the realm of what he calls neo-Weberian thinking about the state. Others who could be included in this position are most notably the political theorists András Láncezi and Gábor G. Fodor, who added to it critiques of European modernity based on the writings of Carl Schmitt, Eric Voegelin, and Leo Strauss. The second position is composed of intellectuals holding Fidesz membership or government jobs as early as 1998, best characterized by Gyula Tellér, the head of the “internal affairs” political analysis unit of the prime ministerial office in 1998–2002, and who would later become chief policy advisor to Viktor Orbán from 2010 onwards. Tellér approaches problems of post-communist institutions in Hungary as the outcome of direct, unfriendly actions of external powers, going back to at least the 1970s, when Hungary fell into the “debt trap.” Privatization processes unleashed throughout the 1990s only deepened the dependency on external powers and robbed the Hungarian state of the material means needed for pursuing autonomous action. Before going into a more detailed discussion of these ideas, we first explain the wider conservative context from which these positions, particularly the first one, emerged.

### **A conservative network of knowledge**

During the early 1980s, an underground opposition scene was thriving in Budapest and became influential after regime change (Szabó 2010). The intellectual debates taking place during this period had important implications for the future of Hungarian political development after the fall of communism (Falk 2003). One of the most important groups in the democratic opposition was the “samizdat” movement of the liberal intelligentsia that published the underground journal *Beszélő*. This samizdat journal brought together intellectuals of different political leanings, many of whom still regarded themselves as leftists, while others were in the process of re-defining themselves as “liberals.” The *Beszélő* circle continuously tested the limits of state oppression not only by publishing a journal without the consent and censorship of the ruling party, but also by engaging in several initiatives that directly or indirectly called for more democracy (Bozóki 2007). Along with Adam Michnik in Poland and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian writer and sociologist György Konrád became one of the most well-regarded dissident intellectuals in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s. His essays centered on utopian ideals of democracy and the role of civil society, which he regarded as being largely non-political (Konrád 1989). At the same time his political philosophy was built on the idea of “anti-politics” that defined civil society in terms of resistance to an oppressive state. His “ideology of civil society” became an instrument for 1980s’ dissidents propagating an alternative to both communism and Western capitalism.

This “anti-political” tradition of the Hungarian and ECE liberal intelligentsia became the dominant discourse of regime change in 1989. Political discourse strongly influenced by liberalism was converging with the global liberal discourse of that time, with a strong emphasis on checks and balances, individual

rights, and judicialization (Mándi 2015). These directions had important implications in the founding years of the new Hungarian state, in preferring for example a consensus versus majoritarian model of democracy (Ágh 2001), a strong and independent constitutional court (Sólyom 2003; Scheppele 1999), and the chosen liberal economic transition model (Stark and Bruszt 1998).

It was in this intellectual climate—one of a later felt liberal domination—that the first conservative intellectuals appeared in Hungary in the early 1990s. This “first generation” hardly used the term “conservative,” but nevertheless focused on the dissemination of Western conservative thinking through translations of Leo Strauss, Edmund Burke, and Michael Oakeshott, as well as its own theoretical work in political philosophy, studying and developing conservative ideas. During the early 1990s, the members of the “first generation” secured teaching positions at the larger universities in Budapest. András Láncki, perhaps the most prolific intellectual figure of conservative convictions and the author of the “Conservative Manifesto” (2002), began teaching at the university later named “Corvinus” from 1991, heading the political science department there from 2002 and becoming rector of Corvinus in 2016. Láncki wrote his dissertation on Leo Strauss in 1993. Throughout the 1990s, Tibor Navracsics, another key conservative figure, who would later introduce Láncki to Orbán, also taught at Corvinus in the 1990s and, according to Teczár (2016), worked closely with Láncki to further refine their common ideas.

Navracsics later worked at the Political Science Institute of Budapest’s largest university, ELTE. At this institute there was a slow strengthening of positions critical of liberalism around figures such as István Stumpf and István Schlett. Some staff members there have since been connected with Fidesz directly as politicians: Navracsics served as department head in the Prime Minister’s Office (1998/99), as Minister of Justice (2010–14) and of Foreign Affairs (2014–16) under the second and third Orbán government before he went on to become European Commissioner for Culture and Education. Another prominent figure, Orbán’s professor at the Bibó Kollégium, István Stumpf, served as head of the Prime Minister’s Office under the first Orbán cabinet (1997–2001) and since 2010 has been the Fidesz-appointed member of the Hungarian Constitutional Court. András Körösényi was another scholar, teaching at ELTE in the 1990s, and one of Hungary’s best-known political scientists abroad, interested in Hungarian conservatism, and at least until 2010 often described as close to Fidesz. After the Fidesz victory in 2010 he became the head of the Political Science Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, but, in a way similar to Stumpf, became increasingly disillusioned by the Orbán regime.

At the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, another member of the “first generation” and ELTE graduate in sociology and history, Attila Károly Molnár, worked on the writings of Edmund Burke and other conservatives and defended there his habilitation in 2005. Molnár issued in 2004 together with Láncki another programmatic statement of Hungarian conservatism, entitled *Hungarian Conservative Speculations: Against Post-Communism* (Láncki et al. 2004). In 2012 he became director of the newly created Thomas Molnar Institute

at the National Public Service University established by Fidesz in 2011 (apparently on the initiative of then-minister Navracsics).<sup>4</sup>

The 2000s saw the gradual rise of a “second generation” of conservative authors who had been students of the first generation, but it is fair to say that what caused their adoption of conservatism was not just the influence of teachers such as Láncki or Molnár, but also their collective political experiences during the decade’s two major events: the 2002 and 2006 electoral defeats of Fidesz. According to Rényi and Vári (2011), most of the second-generation members share features such as: being predominantly born in the 1980s; studying under members of the first generation; holding membership in the Fidesz youth organization “Fidelitas”; writing for UFI<sup>5</sup> (the organization’s publication); and sharing a deep resentment over the course of events in their country, in particular after the electoral defeats of Fidesz and the leak of socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyürcsányi’s 2006 admission of lying to the public over the country’s finances. The activities of the second generation materialized in an active blogosphere and multiplied the number of conservative periodical publications. During the 1990s the publication landscape was restricted to *Konzervatív Szemle* (which folded in 1994), *Magyar Szemle*, and the homonymous publication of the Századvég foundation (which in fact dedicated a fair amount of space also to liberal positions). The 2000s brought UFI, which later changed into the *Reakció* blog and then to the *Mandiner* blog and news portal; the Navracsics-close *Jobbklikk* blog and news portal; the blog (and later journal) entitled *Kommentár*; the *konzervatorium* blog (its authors acknowledged Molnár as their mentor; established in 2007, inactive since 2015, its editor-in-chief Gergely Szilvay moved to *Mandiner*); the newsportal 888; and a new journal issued by Századvég, entitled *Nemzeti Érdek* (National Interests).

Though the members of the first generation published only occasionally in the blogosphere, it later spawned a host of prolific young authors who also gained access to institutional positions. Most central was Gábor G. Fodor, a graduate of two political science institutes at ELTE and Corvinus, and who came to symbolize the success of the second generation: after completing a PhD on early twentieth-century Hungarian critiques of liberalism with István Schlett, he proceeded to work on the history of political ideas focusing on Voegelin. He was regarded as one of the most original and promising political scientists of his generation (winning several awards, including the prestigious Hungarian Science Academy Youth Prize in 2005). Fodor, a co-author with Láncki, served as the Századvég director for research (until 2010) and then for strategy, and established the 888 news portal. Other well-known representatives of the second generation include Tamás Láncki from the *Jobbklikk* blog (the son of András Láncki), later to serve under Navracsics, and Márton Békés (also from the *Jobbklikk* and *konzervatorium* blogs) to become the head of research at the Terror Haza Museum (the museum for the victims of “20th-century dictatorships,” established by the Fidesz government in 2002), and the journalist Bálint Ablonczy, one of the editors of the Fidesz-close *Heti Válasz* (a weekly publication established by the Fidesz government in the early 2000s).

Over a period of two-and-a-half decades the conservative milieu has grown diverse with a strong presence at universities but also in the form of think tanks, foundations, and media outlets. Some of the most important manifestations in terms of continued visibility in public life have emerged in close relationships with political parties: Századvég with Fidesz, and the Batthyány Lajos Foundation with the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Others have been rather short-lived, such as the Hayek Society established in 1999, of classical, laissez-faire liberal leanings (this initiative was brought back to life in 2014 as the fiercely anti-Fidesz Hayek Club). The 2000s also brought the more loosely-knit intellectual circles of the second generation, such as those that run different blogs: *Mandiner*, *Jobbklikk* or *Konzervatorium*. A recent addition is the Danube Institute founded in 2013 by the conservative Batthyány Foundation, which has had unprecedented success, mainly on issues relating to regional cooperation. It openly subscribes to classic liberal and conservative ideas, and is producing a blog which surveys international theoretical literature in this field. The institute is also closely connected with the *Hungarian Review*, which together with US and UK conservative think tanks with Thatcherite and Reaganite leanings, such as the Centre for Policy Studies or the Social Affairs Unit (London), try to counter the massive critiques that Orbán's reforms have received in the Western world. To be mentioned is also the Common Sense Society, which organizes regular events and regularly invites Western speakers to Hungary such as the British conservative thinker Roger Scruton of the American Enterprise Institute and Tilo Schabert, author of *Boston Politics*.

In what follows we study the ideas developed around two positions of central importance to Fidesz and its political project; the first one is relatively easy to identify, as it emerged from around the Századvég (Hungarian for “fin-de-siècle”) think tank and traces the problems of the country back to flaws in European, “institutionalist” thinking. The second position is hardly traceable to any organization and consists of intellectuals who joined Fidesz out of disillusionment with the liberal SZDSZ party (Alliance of Free Democrats) and its political alliance with the post-communist MSZP. The most prominent exponent of this second position, Gyula Tellér, sees Hungary's problems not as having arisen from Western-influenced thinking, but from the outright enmity of international forces vis-à-vis the country.

### *The Századvég group*

Századvég was founded in the early 1990s and earned the reputation of a respected think tank, initially only loosely affiliated with conservative politics. At the same time, its links with Fidesz have been intimate. Fidesz was founded in the dormitory of the University of Budapest's elite graduate law school, which established the social science journal *Századvég* that was highly critical of the communist regime. During the late 1990s, when Fidesz first came to power, this collaboration became more obvious. The think tank offered various consultancy-related work and started a postgraduate program in political management

intended to be mainly a conservative recruiting pool—even if its graduates were employed also by other parties (László 2012). During most of the 2000s, Századvég remained critical of Fidesz’ political activities, but after the 2010 Fidesz landslide election victory it became a major co-producer of governmental policies on the basis of consultancy contracts of close to 5 billion forints.<sup>6</sup>

The founder of the Századvég think tank, István Stumpf, was the head of the prime minister’s office from 1998–2002. In 2010 he left his position as head of Századvég to become the Fidesz appointee to the Constitutional Court. Stumpf was followed as head of Századvég by András Láncki, a political science professor at the Corvinus University in Budapest (Láncki became rector there in 2016). Láncki dedicated an important part of his academic career to the study and dissemination of the work of Leo Strauss, defending his dissertation on Strauss in 1993 in Budapest and publishing it as a monograph in 1999, under the title *Modernity and Crisis*. In 2002, already as head of the political science department at Corvinus, he published his *Konzervatív Kiáltvány* (conservative manifesto or proclamation), one of the few programmatic statements of Hungarian conservatism, and perhaps the only one written by a figure of Láncki’s public standing. The reception in Hungary’s intellectual circles was wide, with numerous reviews and comments in leading journals, most importantly in Hungary’s *Élet és Irodalom* (2002), the most prolific liberal weekly.

Láncki’s most important connection with Fidesz prior to 2010 was to Tibor Navracsics, currently Hungary’s European Commissioner, himself a political scientist at Corvinus University in the 1990s who served in the first Orbán government as head of the communications department in the prime minister’s office (under Stumpf again). Depicted as “the Right’s spiritual leader” (Teczár 2016) during Fidesz’ opposition years (2002–2010), Láncki claims that he only met Orbán once, in 2002, in Navracsics’ Fidesz office, when after an hour-long conversation Láncki came to believe that Orbán was a person who was “sad in light of the 2002 electoral defeat, but implacably eager to understand” (Teczár 2016). In 2007, Láncki established the Center for European Renewal, a pan-European organization of academics and politicians publishing the journal *The European Conservative*. Láncki currently chairs the Amsterdam-based organization that includes members such as Roger Scruton and former university professor and current MEP representing the Polish party PiS, Ryszard Legutko.<sup>7</sup>

As head of Századvég, Láncki was joined by another political scientist with an interest in political philosophy, his former student and colleague Gábor G. Fodor. Together they published in 2009 an edited volume entitled *A Dolgok Természete* (The Nature of Things, 2009), which attracted the participation of the most important names associated in Hungary with intellectual conservatism (not necessarily, however, also with Fidesz), such as Ferenc Horváth Hörcher, András Karácsony, Gergely Egedy, István Schlett, Márton Békés, and Balázs Ablonczy. Since 2010 Fodor has led the Századvég think tank as its strategy director; he is also in charge of the newly issued Századvég journal *National Interests* (a bi-annual publication, supplementing the Századvég think tank’s decades-old

homonymous publication). Fodor's social and political theory interest lies especially in the work of Eric Voegelin, an interest he shares with Láncki.

Stumpf, Láncki, and Fodor (the Századvég group) are perhaps the most important names associated with efforts to give the Orbán project a theoretical footing since the early 2000s. Far more than Tellér, who mainly published in a Hungarian-language journal, the Századvég group published widely (also in English) long before the 2010 elections. In what follows, we offer a summary of their ideas, arguing that there is a difference between Stumpf on the one hand, and conceptive ideologists Láncki and Fodor on the other. The difference concerns how radical their critique of liberalism is, and whether they spell out their preferred alternative, conservatism. Stumpf's articles (including the ones he co-wrote with Fodor) are still reconcilable with the broad and diverse set of ideas on institutional reforms present in West European academic scholarship. In contrast, Láncki and later also Fodor explicitly reject "institutionalist" solutions which they see as an ineffective approach to politics, not just in the case of Hungary, but also in Europe, and openly advocate for a different ideology, conservatism.

### *The "normative" state*

Stumpf approaches the Hungarian state as an organization that has lost its "normative" credibility and is incapable of tackling problems such as corruption and poverty because the wider public deems it incompetent and immoral, which undermines its efforts. This reading of the state applies to the time periods when Fidesz was in opposition and the country was run by the "left-liberal" coalition between the liberal SZDSZ and the post-communist MSZP. One project in particular that these parties pursued and that Stumpf considers harmful was the concentration of power around the Ministry of Finance, leading to a situation of a "two-headed" government, that is, led by the prime minister and the finance minister. In contrast, Stumpf claims that the first Orbán government (1998–2002) tried to counter this situation by strengthening the prime-ministerial office—at that time, under the leadership of Stumpf himself—to become the real and single center of government (Stumpf 2009). After their return to power in 2002, the left-liberals again reversed these efforts, much to the disdain of Stumpf, who, in writings authored together with G. Fodor, calls his conception of the state "neo-Weberian," and further states that the concern with "normativity" is crucial to his approach, to be differentiated from and contrasted to that of New Public Management (NPM), which was strongly supported by the left-liberal Gyurcsány government (Fodor and Stumpf 2007).

This "neo-Weberian" conception is largely in line with mainstream developments in contemporary Western public administration scholarship emphasizing the necessity of a post-NPM paradigm (Ongaro 2015; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Dunn and Miller 2007; Randma-Liiv 2008). If this were the only ideological footing of the Orbán project, it could hardly explain the Fidesz preoccupation with power that is evident in the notion of the "central field of power" and,

in particular, notions about the place, role, and legitimacy of the opposition. It should also not come as a surprise that Stumpf, despite being appointed by Fidesz to the Constitutional Court, grew increasingly critical of Orbán, often giving his support to the Court’s indictments of Fidesz-initiated legislation.

*Against post-communism’s “flawed” modernity*

Lánczi introduces a far more critical discussion of the political forces opposed to Fidesz. Stumpf’s critique of the left-liberals basically consists of mismanagement accusations, and he traces the negative record of left-liberals back to the institutional arrangements reached in the “Round Table” negotiations of 1989. For Lánczi, the left-liberals not only mismanaged the country but are also wrong in principle. Their negative record cannot be explained by references to the Round Table accords but should be traced back to the problematic aspects of these forces’ ideological underpinnings—liberalism and socialism (in its softened, social-democratic version). For Lánczi, these are political projects without moral guidance, but with ambitions of changing the world, and therefore are, unsurprisingly, bound to fail. Lánczi’s proposed solutions go in the direction of returning politics to its moral grounding, to be sought in “rules of custom, tradition, and authority” (Lánczi 2013). The country’s problems can be solved by such a reorientation, rather than by “institutionalist” projects, an approach he criticizes at length. Both Lánczi and Fodor have worked on placing these ideas in politico-philosophical contexts—that of the Straussian and especially Voegelinian critique of modernity and “modern” political projects such as, most importantly, liberalism, communism, and national-socialism, all projects promising and trying to achieve “paradise on earth.” “Modernity,” as manifested in the “twin projects” of liberalism and communism, becomes the central frame for condensing everything that for these conservatives is wrong about the present day in Hungary and Europe.

Radical critique and rejection of the Hungarian version of modernity can also be found in the writings of Fodor, the Századvég director for strategy, who wrote his PhD thesis on early twentieth-century Hungarian critiques of liberalism and went on to work on the history of political ideas, focusing on Voegelin while also addressing state theory and questions relating to political power (Fodor 2008). Together with István Stumpf and András Lánczi, he authored a series of articles describing the “strong state paradigm,” or the concept of “hard government.” A common denominator here is the critique of the “governance” paradigm of the West, which diffuses power and depoliticizes what are essentially political decisions. In contrast to the governance paradigm, G. Fodor proposes redefining the state around a moral, political leader, acting as a self-secure, masculine “Prince of Chaosmos.” A central concern—the same as for Lánczi and Molnár—is post-communism. In the 2009 volume co-edited with Lánczi, G. Fodor argues that post-communism is best understood as the continuation of communism (an idea previously shared and formulated by Lánczi, also in English), using Marxism to depict the commonalities of the two periods—before

and after 1989. Thus, what is Marxist about the twin liberal projects of democratization and marketization is the almost religious *belief* in the power of reforms and progress (Fodor 2009); instead of “reforming” the state, G. Fodor argues for “renovating” and returning to the “ancient” meaning and responsibility of politics: government, a responsibility that he argues is increasingly diminished or even negated in liberal thinking.

Importantly, there are notable commonalities between many of the ideas of Századvég intellectuals and the content of the “National Cooperation Proclamation” and the “National Cooperation Regime,” two programmatic Fidesz documents adopted by the newly elected, conservative-dominated Hungarian Parliament in 2010. The “Proclamation,” requiring its mandatory display on the walls of institutions such as military barracks, clearly distinguishes the period that started in 2010 from previous decades, the 45 years of communism and the “tumultuous” transition years (1989–2010). The result of the 2010 elections is praised as yet another “revolution,” comparable to 1956. The “National Cooperation Regime” makes repeated use of such concepts as “bad government [or governance]” to describe the years of liberal and socialist rule, a key concept in the 2007/08 writings of Fodor and Stumpf. The parallels between “National Cooperation” documents and Századvég writings (including a defense of these documents by Fodor and other authors on the Századvég website, entitled “The End of Ideologies”) lead some commentators to talk of the Századvég group as the “theorists” of the National Cooperation Regime (Böcskei 2013), although the authorship of the National Cooperation documents remains unclear.

### ***Right-wing advisors***

While G. Fodor’s media presence and provocative verve has earned him a cynical Machiavellist reputation, newspaper reports suggest that his or Lánctzi’s personal influence over or appeal to Viktor Orbán are difficult to support with evidence. Although Századvég clearly provides important consultancy services to the government, the closeness of Orbán’s positions to some of Lánctzi and Fodor’s ideas are possibly more an instance of ideational alignment than of influence of the latter over the former. This seems to be different in the case of Gyula Tellér, a sociologist and renowned poetry translator. As Orbán’s “chief ideologue” (Enyedi 2016a), Fidesz’s “main ideologue” (Mándi 2015), the “grey eminence” behind the prime minister (Ripp 2010), Tellér clearly stands out as a prominent conceptive ideologue and as the most experienced figure among the prime minister’s five chief advisors and closest advisor from the mid-1990s on.

Tellér served as the head of the political analysis department of the Stumpf-led prime minister’s office during Orbán’s first (1998–2002) term in office and was a Fidesz MP in 2006–10. His conception of a “civic Hungary,” of central importance to Fidesz’ success in 1998, is still considered important by members of the Orbán government as it is a unique amalgam of classic liberalism and conservative thought (Mándi 2015, 29). This system defines the citizen as a self-responsible, but socially empathetic person striving for the common public good



in a way very much in line with classic liberalism. Tellér rarely labels his political positions and more often uses the term “right-wing” rather than “conservative.” He perceives Hungary, before the return to power of Fidesz, to have been the victim of international forces, from the US to Russia, the World Bank and the EU, and in particular what he sees as these forces’ local representatives—the communists and the liberals. Tellér’s analyses are imbued with mythical elements, as he sees such forces responsible for “centuries- or even millennia-old” subordination of local communities (such as “nations”). Tellér, though exceptional in terms of his personal influence on Orbán, is far from alone in his positions and is part of a wider current of intellectuals who joined the first Orbán cabinet as advisors.

For these intellectuals, the formation of a coalition government between liberals and post-communists in 1994 represents a key formative (but negative) experience; following the formation of that coalition, they either joined Fidesz or extended it their support, as they perceived it as the main “anti-communist” force. Key exponents of this group are Mária Schmidt, a historian based at the Pázmány Catholic University who also served as main advisor to Orbán in 1998–2002; or László Tóth (another Orbán advisor during the same years), author of numerous books taking issue with the continued presence in public life of figures close to or participating in the pre-1989 regime.<sup>8</sup> Only few share Tellér’s mythical approach to world politics, tracing international conflicts back to millennia-old conflicts between good and evil, but one prolific author popularizing similar views is economist László Bogár, yet another former colleague of Tellér in the 1998–2002 Orbán cabinet.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Schmidt and Tóth in 1998 published a volume, which Tellér also contributed to, that offers a good overview of the contours of this group (Schmidt and Tóth 1998). The unifying theme for the authors of the 1998 volume is the preoccupation with the “survival” of communism (that is, the continued public and political involvement of former communist officials) and the “anti-national” bent of the communists’ and liberals’ policies ranging from the economy to education.<sup>10</sup> Tellér’s analysis in 1998 stands out for its radicality about the post-communist regime, accusing it of being even more successful than Stalinist communists of the 1950s in “breaking the nation’s back.”

Tellér’s later political writings have been increasingly radical critiques of liberalism, which he calls either “(neo)liberalism” or even “SZDSZ liberalism” (using the pejorative Hungarian formulation *szadesz*). In a 2014 pamphlet, Tellér provides an in-depth analysis of the Hungarian political development of the last two decades, which he describes as a fight between “post-communism” and “regime change.” At Orbán’s request, Tellér’s pamphlet was distributed to Fidesz MPs as a hands-on *vademecum* to help them make sense of the allegedly numerous accomplishments in Orbán’s project of recent years (Tellér 2014). Tellér’s 2014 essay was intensively discussed in the Hungarian press as the inspiration for and even the source (Csuhaj 2014) of Viktor Orbán’s famous speech about the desirability of an “illiberal state.” The claim that Orbán took inspiration from Tellér’s essay seems to be true: Orbán’s June 2014 speech

indeed takes an entire passage from Tellér's March 2014 essay. This passage is also what caused the international media's initial attention to Orbán's speech, namely the critique of the liberal vision of society, as a reductionist vision that celebrates the individual and limits all individual duties to the sole one of respecting other individuals' freedom. For Tellér, individuals should act out of "deeper motivations" such as, most importantly, obligations toward the community.

In real societies [author's note: for Tellér, liberalism abolishes the notion of society] such motivations commit since ancient times the members of the community to [positively] relating to life, children, the elderly, property, neighbors, the opposite sex, and to truth.

(2014, 358)

Tellér's conception combines a quasi-Marxist perspective on structures such as the class of "large estate owners," with a focus on strengthening the middle classes that is congruent with classical liberal conceptions. Marxism nevertheless is guilty of undermining the moral foundations of the country: Tellér sees in Marxism—particularly the "Frankfurt postmarxist philosophical school" (Tellér 2014, 352)—a destructive and still relevant intellectual force. In contrast to Fodor, he does not trace the workings of "postmarxism" to flawed ideas of "reforms" and "progress," but instead discusses at length its destructive effects on society. As Enyedi notes, for Tellér "Globalization, neoliberalism, consumerism, privatization to foreign investors and cosmopolitanism" are all "interrelated and carefully managed processes aimed at establishing the world dominance of certain economic and political powers" (Enyedi 2016a, 11).

Yet in his 2009 text Tellér is quite explicit about these "certain external forces": "Israel, USA, EU, Russia, 'The Symbolical Investor' and 'his' international organizations: WB [World Bank], IMF [International Monetary Fund], WTO [World Trade Organization] and so on" (Tellér 2009, 984). Tellér adopts a mythical perspective, from which an ideal-typical actor—the "Symbolic Investor"—moves history over "hundreds, perhaps even better to say thousands of years" (Tellér 2009, 987). History thus becomes a mythical battle between the good (i.e. "national communities") and the evil deeds of the "Symbolic Investor" and the forces that represent him and enslave countries by using, in particular, the tool of the "debt trap," put to use against Hungary from the 1970s (Tellér 2009, 987; 2014). In an almost textbook example of anti-Semitism, another 2009 text depicts "Jews" as playing a central part in this conflict by bringing Stalinist communism to Hungary, and then "reforming it" against János Kádár (Tellér 2009, 349; 2014). His analysis recalls the almost century-old debate between cosmopolitan urbanists and populists in Hungary of the 1930s (Körösiényi 1991) but extends it by applying the same categories of analysis also to the communist and post-communist periods and by framing "Jews" as an "anti-national" presence undertaking to enslave the country.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusions

In this chapter we have portrayed two intellectual positions that strove to formulate the ideational and ideological footing of the Orbán regime. On the one hand, there is what we called the “Századvég group,” a group that is well anchored in the wider “conservative” scene in Hungary and partly also internationally and has attempted roughly since 2002 in a long series of publications to formulate new political ideas for influencing the decades to come. On the other hand, more right-wing intellectuals, serving in the first Fidesz cabinet as advisors to the prime minister, represent the other pole of Fidesz-aligned right-wing thinking. Tellér, Orbán’s main advisor since 2010 and a key figure for the Fidesz program also before 2010, best represents this latter position that features no common formal affiliation except for Fidesz membership. Tellér seems to have less interest in influencing public or academic debates than does the Századvég group but is all the same credited with considerable influence over Orbán.

These two positions share one important feature: their point of departure is “post-communism,” understood as a *deeply problematic political system or regime*. The authors of these two positions differ in their explanations of how far back and how deeply the roots of post-communism go: Stumpf only dates them back to the actual start of the post-communist period—the “Roundtable Accords.” Láncki and Fodor dig deeper and trace them to the very beginnings of “modernity.” Going even further, Tellér sees post-communism as one side in an eternal battle between good and evil. The latter three intellectuals all emphasize that the liberal celebration of individual rights and freedom needs to be replaced by an order that commits individuals to community-based virtues, be they of Christian (Láncki, Fodor) or more “ancient” (Tellér) origins. In this sense, these positions are indeed conservative and similar to those of authors elsewhere in Europe who seek to formulate a conservative consensus (see for instance the paleoconservative thinking of Roger Scruton, Goss 2006). And similar to conservative positions elsewhere, at least in this respect (Lakoff 2010 [1996]), the Hungarian conservatives’ attack on “post-communism” is basically a moralizing frame: liberals and post-communists are guilty not so much of designing faulty interventions with false aims, but of ignoring questions of the morality of such interventions, and about the character of the interventionist design itself. Only a “normative” state, willing to and capable of recognizing and formulating normative issues, can deal with the country’s problems. Tellér and the associated wider group of right-wing advisors and intellectuals disillusioned with liberalism go further, to make the nation into the central victim of dangerous liberalism.

It is striking that Századvég intellectuals’ discourses mainly feature Western references. In contrast to the claims made about the “Eastern roots” of Hungary’s illiberal democracy, as defined in Orbán’s infamous illiberalism speech (Müller 2014; Simonyi 2014; Zakaria 2014), there is no evidence of an Eastern imprint on the ideational foundations of the new Hungarian regime. The reference sources of the Századvég group, consisting mostly of lawyers, historians, and political theorists, exhibit Western, conservative-leaning influences more

than even autochthonous Hungarian sources. Many of these influences relate to questions about the “quality of democracy” and the necessity of a “hard government” (Fodor and Stumpf 2007). Another interesting, often-cited reference is Norwegian sociologist Stein Ringen’s work that develops an outcome-focused definition of democracy versus a procedural or liberal one (Ringen 2009). In this way, the mentioned Hungarian positions might in fact be seen as part of an international debate on the role of the state and contemporary representative democracy in the Western world.

Yet the Western conservative lineage that Hungarian intellectuals seek is a special one. With Leo Strauss and especially Eric Voegelin and Thomas Molnar, a lineage is constructed that allows Hungarian conservatives to critically distance themselves from conservatism in the form of classical, laissez-faire liberalism that in Hungary is best embodied by the Hayek Society (currently the Hayek Club that claims to be the right-wing “capitalist” opposition to the ruling Fidesz). Their preoccupation is not so much with the founding father of capitalist laissez-faire thought (Adam Smith) and its later advocates (Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman), but, in line with Strauss, Voegelin, and Molnar, with the legacy of ancient Greek statecraft and in particular the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. This preoccupation translates into a rejection of “modernity” understood as the Enlightenment challenging central political and religious authorities and culminating in the 1789 Revolution. Given this approach, it is no wonder that their writings are particularly at odds with the idea of an “open society” as posited by Karl Popper, that is, as an achievement to be defended precisely against the “Spell of Plato” (the subtitle of Popper’s first volume of *The Open Society and its Enemies*). From this perspective, the Századvég intellectuals’ unequivocal support for an “active” state looks less reconcilable with (Western) conservative ideas highly skeptical of strong states. Yet importantly here, the debate is not so much about the limits of the state, but about addressing a problematic situation in which the liberal state was very far from the conservative intellectuals’ notion of the public good, and incapable of giving society a normative orientation. In contrast to such a situation, conservative intellectuals portray the ideal Hungarian state as a “neo-Weberian” state model thought best to replace the “wholesale sell-out” of public assets and the excessive embracement of the ideas of “new public management” by previous (socialist) governments (Stumpf 2009). Instead of a market-oriented, “lean” government, espoused but never really implemented by the socialists, which was seen to have served foreign business interests to the detriment of public good, Hungarian conservatives envision a new, centralized state which should follow the ideal of an effective, “hard government.”

## Notes

- 1 Fidesz is the acronym for *Fiatl Demokraták Szövetsége*, which translates as the “Alliance of Young Democrats.”
- 2 For a full English transcript of the speech, see <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/10592>.

- 3 For a discussion of the context in which Orbán made this statement, see Balogh (2012).
- 4 Thomas Molnar (1921–2010), a Hungarian-born American conservative and Catholic philosopher, friend of Russell Kirk and admirer of Eric Voegelin, was as committed to criticizing liberalism as he was to taking issue with socialism. Perhaps most interestingly for the Hungarian conservatives studied here who generally oppose liberalism, Molnar also criticized American conservatism of the “optimist[ic]”—the “what-can-we-do-about-it...” type—as being just “an updated copy of nineteenth-century liberalism,” and basically committing the same error of “assum[ing] that man is free to shape [his] destiny”; Molnar argued that Voegelin shared exactly the same positions (Molnar 1981, 383).
- 5 Short for *Utolsó Figyelmeztetés* (“The Final Warning”).
- 6 The governmental contracts with Századvég in 2016 were valued at 38 million euro in total and were shrouded in mystery. It took a lengthy trial for the press to get a glimpse into the 77,000 pages delivered by Századvég to the government in 2012–14 for 12 million euro; see Erdélyi (2016) and [http://index.hu/belfold/2012/04/02/a\\_bizalmas\\_think\\_tank/](http://index.hu/belfold/2012/04/02/a_bizalmas_think_tank/); <http://valasz.hu/itthon/az-onmerseklet-mindig-nagyon-jo-tanacsado-44957/>.
- 7 For more information see the Center’s webpage at [www.europeanrenewal.org/main/page.php?page\\_id=1](http://www.europeanrenewal.org/main/page.php?page_id=1).
- 8 Another well-known politician disillusioned with the liberals’ decision to form a government with the former communists is Péter Tölgyessy, a leader of the liberal SZDSZ party and of the parliamentary group, who, in a way similar to Tellér, switched from SZDSZ to Fidesz while a member of the 1998–2002 parliament.
- 9 Bogár often publishes in “traditionalist” outlets of the far right, promoting a vision of society uncorrupted by “modernity” and the return to an allegedly original religion of humanity, and praising such far-right thinkers as Julius Evola (a chief reference for Italian rightist terror groups of the 1970s). Yet long before the rise of the far-right party “Jobbik” and its traditionalist publication “Magyar Hüperión,” it was Fidesz that backed the creation of an institute dedicated to Béla Hamvas, Hungary’s key exponent of traditionalism. The institute, which still exists today, is headed by Fidesz politician Ágnes Hankiss and sees its central mission in researching the potential of “modern conservatism.”
- 10 For a sympathetic review of the book see Posá (1998).
- 11 For the framing of “Jews” as an anti-national force, which characterizes much of anti-Semitic discourse, see Weyand (2016).

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## 5 New conservatism in Poland

### The discourse coalition around Law and Justice

*Ewa Dąbrowska*

#### Introduction

With the victory of the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) in both the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015, Polish liberal media, among them *Gazeta Wyborcza*, turned their attention to the milieu of conservative intellectuals (Majcherek 2015; Czupryn 2016). These had discursively supported Jarosław Kaczyński's party during the election and provided it with some crucial concepts. Among them were: "subjectivity" (*podmiotowość*), meaning capability of the subject to act and develop and implying that the Polish nation should become a subject of its own history, "Fourth Republic," a conservative alternative to the post-communist Third Republic, or "pedagogy of shame" (*pedagogika wstydu*), denoting post-communist liberals' alleged policy to educate the society by imbuing it with shame for the nation's crimes and its backwardness. Until then, this milieu had attracted little interest in the mainstream media. The Law and Justice party and especially its chairman Jarosław Kaczyński were presented in it as a danger to democracy—not as a constructive political force with a set of ideas as to how to reform the Polish Third Republic, which was how Polish conservatives, the majority of whom supported Kaczyński politically, viewed themselves. Since the mid-1990s they were busy criticizing the form the Polish liberal democracy had taken and the particular kind of "political capitalism" and "post-communism" that had emerged in the early years of transformation. This initially small circle of intellectuals grew substantially during the 2000s, integrating a younger generation and developing a full-fledged political ideology of alternative conservative modernization that Poland should embrace, in their view. This ideology stood in opposition to the dominant narrative that Poland should catch up with the West by means of neo-liberal reforms.

This chapter turns to questions of the role of discursive organizations of conservatism in post-1989 Poland, how they were connected to political parties, in particular to PiS, and how they contributed to political change under PiS, both in 2005–07 and after 2015. It describes its organizational infrastructure, introduces its main concepts and storylines, and connects the latter to actual political and economic developments of the 1990s and 2000s.

By pointing to the elaborate discursive strategies of Polish conservatives, I argue that conservative intellectuals paved the way for the “conservative revolution” effected by Law and Justice. The former greatly contributed to recent political change by establishing a conservative discourse that was an alternative to the dominant neoliberalism in its post-communist variety. To enhance this argument, I elaborate on the conservatives’ links to PiS and to Kaczyński himself, emphasizing however that the conservative milieu should not be equated with the intellectual base of PiS, because it was split over the question of the legitimacy of Kaczyński-led institutional change since 2015, and in particular the dismantling of the independent Constitutional Court. Nevertheless, there is substantial overlap between Kaczyński’s political ideology and the broader discourse of Polish conservatives.

There is scant academic literature on the ideas behind the political change realized by PiS since 2015. The most popular explanation for the coming to power of PiS is populism and populist politics. Shields (2012, 2015) sees populism as a reaction to the neoliberalization of the Polish economy and society, a pattern that is common to all capitalist societies, and in particular peripheral ones. For Shields (2012, 360), Polish populism is based on the same rhetorical figure of thought as occurs elsewhere: a juxtaposition of the “corrupt elite” versus the “pure people.” Furthermore, Shields (*ibid.*, 363) argues that populism tends to contain contradictory ideas (conservative and revolutionary at the same time) because its actual content is less relevant than its function in a “neoliberalized” society. However, while Polish conservatives like to refer to the juxtaposition of “elite” versus “people” or “nation,” this does not comprise their entire argument as to why an overwhelming political transformation of the post-1989 order is necessary. The conservatives’ search for meaning and moral renewal encompasses more than a wish for replacing the post-communist elite and catering to the demands of the people (Kofta et al. 2016). Their ideational proposition is comprehensive, structured, and sufficiently well argued to be taken seriously. Below I explain the “added value” of the concept of conservatism vis-à-vis one of populism for enabling us to explain the radical change in Polish politics in more detail.

A further tentative explanation for the growing popularity of PiS and its electoral victory is in terms of an alternative or parallel civil society (Peto et al. 2016; Ekiert 2017). Accordingly, the Church, right-wing discursive agencies, and political organizations established a dense network of non-governmental organizations capable of mobilizing supporters of rightist politics. Until 2015 scholars of civil society tended to overlook those organizations and instead to focus on “liberal” civil society. The PiS electoral victory made them turn their attention to those overlooked structures. My explanation, in terms of conservative discourse and organizations producing it, relates to this tentative argument that could be framed as “an alternative civil society.” Indeed, conservative think tanks and research institutes do constitute a pro-PiS civil society that challenges the liberal concept of it. However, the focus here is on discourse-producing organizations and their relations to structures of power and omits the Church on the one hand

and nationalist and proto-fascist organizations on the other. While all of them share elements of a conservative discourse, the latter two kinds of organizations engage much less in intellectual production than think tanks and research institutes and are therefore outside of the scope of this chapter.

Bucholc (2016) and Bucholc and Komornik (2016) turn to ideas of Polish conservatives when explaining the crisis around the Polish Constitutional Court which has led to an exchange of judges and politicization of this institution. They refer to these ideas as “the conservative utopia” that wants to replace the society (the demos) by the nation. This nation—that the government claims to represent—rejects procedural democracy, behind which there is supposedly no substance. While Bucholc (2016) and Bucholc and Komornik (2016) describe well this utopia and its function in justifying the anti-democratic turn of the PiS government, they do not trace its discursive origins. The current chapter intends to fill this gap.

To explain the coming to power of PiS and its aftermath, this chapter argues that conservatism is the discourse informing politics and policymaking under PiS, and providing this party with a specific political ideology. Conservative discursive actors have been working on this ideology already since the mid-1990s. This does not imply a teleological vision of the world, according to which conservatism *had* to become a dominant political ideology through the discursive efforts of conservatism. A change in politics and policymaking did not need to happen: conservatism could have stayed just an alternative discourse to neo-liberalism and socialism, with its own believers and organizations, but without much affecting Polish politics. Nevertheless, the discursive efforts of conservatives contributed to the popularity of criticism of the Third Republic and with that, the notion of a “Fourth Republic” in 2005, making the electoral victory of Law and Justice more probable. In 2015 voters once again gave a chance to the set of ideas associated with conservatism, which was because of their disappointment with the performance of the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) that had been in power in 2007–15. Yet, here again, such a political development was contingent on many factors, not just on the production of conservative discourse.

In treating Kaczyński’s political ideology as an undercurrent of general Polish post-1989 conservatism, I argue that the latter is a much larger discourse and that the two should not be equated. Nevertheless, PiS chairman Kaczyński integrated many elements of the conservative discourse into his political ideology; especially criticism of the democratic-liberal Third Republic—as benefiting former communists and a part of the *Solidarność* elite that allied with them—was an element common both to PiS and to the larger conservative movement. Furthermore, both the narrower ideology of Kaczyński and PiS, and the larger conservative discourse, have implied that the state should be strong, sovereign and capable of pursuing national interest, not least in terms of the economy. Accordingly, the legal structures of the state, social and economic policy, but also the “politics of memory,” should all be subordinated to this interest, defined as if the nation were an all-encompassing entity.

Opting for the term “conservatism” and emphasizing conservatives’ search for meaning and morality in the social order does not mean that I doubt there is an authoritarian dimension to Polish politics under PiS. Indeed, I recognize an illiberal and even authoritarian character of the political solutions that PiS has been implementing since its victory in late 2015. This authoritarian drive is not least based on a sense of moral superiority that the Kaczyński faction feels vis-à-vis the remaining political elite. The conservative revolution à la Kaczyński does aim in essence at moral renewal and that is why its representatives feel entitled to an authoritarian turn. Those dimensions of Kaczyński’s rule not only do not contradict each other, they constitute two sides of the same coin.

In this chapter, I follow the theoretical-methodological approach of discourse analysis proposed by Hajer (2006). His clear and practical concepts help to structure Polish political debates of the 1990s and 2000s around a few main issues and to examine both debates and organizations at the same time. Thus, to follow Hajer (2006, 71), Polish conservatism can be defined as a discourse coalition. This term implies not only actors sharing a certain discourse, but also the discourse itself—a set of “ideas, categories and concepts,” as well as the social practices and institutions sustaining it. After Eggertsson (1990, 70), institutions are sets of “political and organizational” practices that are guided by cognitive schemata. Hajer’s definition of discourse coalition implies that there are competing coalitions representing different discourses. Since this is a chapter on Polish conservatism, other coalitions are mentioned only indirectly. The discourse itself is organized around “emblematic issues” that represent larger problems, but also “narratives” or “storylines” having a beginning, middle and an end, though these are not always formulated at length in a conversation or in a text, but sometimes just hinted at. Using cues instead of full story lines may risk actors’ being unaware that they are not always understanding them the way they are intended to be. Because of a variety of discourses in a certain society, an emblematic issue may mean different things to different actors. Even within the same speech, different discourses may come up. The following only deals with conservatives’ responses to “emblematic issues” discussed in Polish society in the 1990s and 2000s and the storylines they came up with, while paying little attention to other discourse coalitions. Related to this are instances of “discourse structuration”—identifiable moments when a particular discourse becomes dominant in the society. There occasionally also follows “discourse institutionalization” when discourses become ingrained in social practices and institutions and thus even more powerful (Hajer 2006, 70).

As concerns conservatism as such, it is discourse containing both universal and nationally specific elements. This means that Russian, Hungarian, and Polish conservatism should share a number of features but differ with respect to specific national traditions and values. The general features of conservatism (Freeden 1996) understands as not just glorifying tradition and rejecting change, but as accepting only a particular kind of change: one re-establishing the “natural order” that at the same time is a moral one. As if echoing Freeden’s specifications, Polish conservatives extensively discuss their attitude toward change in

their internal debates. Having faced first the communist system and then the post-communist Third Republic, they obviously demand changes, even major ones. As historical reference points they use the First Polish Republic (1454–1795), a romantic epoch extending from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, during which Poland was divided between Prussia, Austria, and Russia, as well as the early *Solidarność* period (1980–81). Referring to those periods in Polish history as well as to the national tradition in general, they construct a modern conservative order to be established in place of the post-communist one. Therefore, Polish conservatives' attitude to change is a counter-intuitive one. When the contemporary epoch is structured by institutions that conservatives deem unnatural and running counter to relevant traditions, a change or even a revolution in the name of conservatism is legitimate, in their worldview. And Polish conservatives certainly view communism and post-communism as unnatural and detrimental to the nation.

### **Development of conservatism as an alternative to liberalism and social democracy**

The following shows how conservatism developed as a discursive alternative to liberalism and socialism over the last two decades of communism and in the post-communist period in Poland. This continuity of an intellectual and political current of conservatism strengthens the main argument of this book: that the dominating political alternative to neoliberalism in Poland, Hungary, and Russia is not populism or nationalism, but conservatism. Conservative actors in Poland, beginning in the late 1970s and acting with much more resolve in the 1990s and 2000s, developed an intellectual and political infrastructure featuring cultural magazines, publishing houses, political clubs, and parties, and vigorously engaging in major political debates. These organizations existed parallel to liberal, liberal-conservative and social-democratic ones and were part of the organizational landscape of the Polish democracy. Conservative organizations intermingled to some degree with structures of the state as well as with those of the Church, but constituted at the same time a certain niche, since they promoted storylines about the post-1989 political and social order that were not reflected in mainstream media. This order was constituted by neoliberal political and economic ideology, and remnants of communist institutions and practices, therefore, conservative discursive organizations and their storylines were not much known to the general public. Polish conservatism was largely an intellectual phenomenon, and only gained larger attention in Polish society thanks to its occasional links with politics and the Church. Its impact on Polish politics was a discursive one. The following describes the intellectual infrastructure of conservatism in Poland and how it responded to major political developments of the 1990s and 2000s.

Polish post-war conservatism has its origins in the late 1970s and is partly connected with the opposition movement. The best-known conservative organization of that time was the Young Poland Movement (*Ruch Młodej Polski*) led

by Aleksander Hall, who later became an important Polish politician. Hall tried to politically resurrect the concept of the nation and rethink the state, not as opposing the nation, but as realizing national interest, referring thereby to the non-radical part of the legacy of Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), a Polish nationalist thinker and politician of the interwar period (Matyja 2015, 207). Such political ideas were ahead of their time; however, they were to some degree realized in the early *Solidarność* movement, which had a strong Christian and national component. In post-1989 Poland, the traditionalist legacy of the early Solidarity was one of the motives conservatives referred to in their discourse.

After the transition to liberal democracy, the intellectual milieu of conservatives began to form itself in the mid-1990s. This period of time was not accidental. The election of a post-communist candidate to the presidency in 1995, following the victory of post-communists in the parliamentary election of 1993, deeply troubled conservative-minded Poles. This double victory can count as emblematic for the society's disappointment with liberal democracy and with the liberal and conservative politicians that were responsible for the shape this democracy took. In particular, economic decisions of the former *Solidarność* camp led to high unemployment and institutionalized insecurity.

Following the shock of the victory of post-communists, conservatives decided to engage in discursive work to elaborate Polish conservatism as a full-fledged alternative to liberalism and socialism, and to promote their values in Polish society. The circle of the Warsaw Club of Political Critique organized regular readings of the classics of Western conservatism as well as of Greek philosophers, in order to refine its political philosophy. Conservatives from this circle wanted to “educate the children of those who took over the banks” in order to engender a change in the dominant cultural and political discourse in the future (Janek 2007, quoted in Stefanek 2013, 22). The circle met in the apartment of Marek Cichocki, who later became a consultant to President Lech Kaczyński. Tomasz Merta also belonged, a future undersecretary in the Ministry of Culture (2005–10) and consultant to PiS in cultural affairs and the project of the Fourth Republic. *Kwartalnik Polityczny* (Political Quarterly) was their main publication.

Another conservative milieu that emerged in 1993 in Cracow had ambitions similar to those of the Warsaw Club of Political Critique. It set out to offer an intellectual alternative to post-communism and liberalism and to mobilize those “25 percent of Polish society” representing conservative values who were outraged over the political comeback of the post-communists (Nowak [1996] 2005). Conservatives related to *Arcana*, a cultural magazine founded by Ryszard Legutko, perceived it as a strategic task to change the dominant political ideology in Poland and to imbue the new Polish democracy with their values (ibid.). The Center of Political Thought (*Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej*) that had been established in 1992, supported *Arcana* in this goal, attracting not only Andrzej Nowak and Ryszard Legutko, but also Rafał Matyja, Kazimierz Ujazdowski, Bronisław Wildstein, and Zdzisław Krasnodębski, all of whom were important figures in orchestrating the conservative-populist turns in Polish politics in 2005 and 2015.

Next to *Arcana*, a publication of younger conservatives with the title *Fronda*, represented by a generation of conservatives born in the 1950s and 1960s, emerged in 1994. *Fronda* was published by two charismatic editors-in-chief, Rafał Smoczyński and Grzegorz Górny, who made it a place of vigorous debate. According to conservative insiders such as Filip Memches, the years 1994–2001 represented a golden age in the history of *Fronda*, during which young Polish conservatism was still in the process of defining itself (Memches 2013). After 2001, when Smoczyński left its editorship, *Fronda* turned to the fight with “the civilization of death,” waging a campaign against abortion, homosexuality, and left-liberalism and losing its intellectual niveau, according to Memches.

Another milieu within the conservative discourse coalition that emerged in reaction to political and economic developments of the 1990s was related to the magazine *Debata*, published by Waldemar Gasper, in which the concept of “political capitalism” was formulated for the first time as a diagnosis of the malaise of the post-1989 political-economic system. The concept referred to elaborate links between business and politics in Poland and in particular to the post-communist political elite’s prominent role in the post-1989 economy. A local Warsaw newspaper, *Życie Warszawy*, employing many journalists with conservative views, described those links in 1995 as a “red cobweb” (Zaremba 2010, 182).

Criticism of “political capitalism” led conservative thinkers to propose a strategy for the renewal of the Polish state. A conservative magazine, *The New State*, which emerged in 1997, published shortly thereafter an analysis by Rafał Matyja in which the author demanded a break with the post-communist order and the introduction of a new one that he proposed to call the “Fourth Republic.” This discourse criticizing the post-communist elites for misusing their political position to take control of state enterprises and to establish companies likely to receive public contracts also appeared in the mainstream media. *Gazeta Wyborcza* still legitimized the “grey” system of post-communism, but the newly established conservative newspaper *Życie* published a series of articles in 1997 criticizing both the post-communist elite’s excessive involvement in big business and the lack of will on the part of the more general political elite, including the conservative milieu, to correct this state of affairs (ibid., 182–3). A similar turn to the right took place in public television, which employed in the mid-1990s several young journalists with conservative views, the so-called *pampersy* (“pampers wearers”). This changed the media discourse and paved the way for the victory of the Solidarność political elites unified in the party AWS (*Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność*, “Solidarity Electoral Action”) under the leadership of Marian Krzaklewski.

A further push was given to the discursive coalition of Polish conservatives by the Rywin affair in 2002. It related to an offer made by the Polish film producer Lew Rywin to the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Adam Michnik. The offer concerned a potential adjustment to the law on public television in the interest of the publishing house behind *Gazeta Wyborcza*, if the latter paid a bribe to the SLD (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, “Democratic Left Alliance”),



the post-communist party in power. The affair was an emblematic issue in the Polish political debate as it exposed connections between business, politics, and media in Poland and hinted at the existence of a “group holding power,” an expression that Rywin used in his conversation with Michnik. Conservative politicians have subsequently long tried to identify members of this group. The affair popularized conservative criticism of the Third Republic, making the period 2003–05 an apogee of conservative influence, according to one notable conservative, Rafał Matyja (2015). During this period, the Jagielloński Club (*Klub Jagielloński*) from Cracow, established already in 1994, became known for its fresh political perspectives in the style of an “avant-garde” or “revolutionary” conservatism (Rojek 2016). Most members of the Club were in their twenties and thirties. Since 2002 the Club has been publishing a magazine, *Pressje*, that offers deep and thorough analyses of the topics dear to Polish conservatives, such as Catholic political thought, Catholic social ethic, nationalism, the politics of submission and subjectivity, and others.

Also in 2002 the conservative St. Nicholas Foundation (*Fundacja Świętego Mikołaja*) emerged, establishing the magazine *Teologia Polityczna* (Political Theology). While Polish conservatism as a whole is devoted to the promotion of Christian values, a few publishing initiatives have been particularly close to the Polish Catholic Church and have engaged in the elaboration of a Polish political theology and a Polish version of messianism. Among these, *Teologia Polityczna*, *Christianitas*, and *44/Czterdzieści i Cztery* (44/Forty and Four) stand out as the most important and ambitious. *Christianitas* was established in 1999 and was published initially by the Club of the Catholic Book and from 2005 by the St. Benedict Foundation. *44/Czterdzieści i Cztery* was initiated almost a decade later (2008) by journalists related previously to *Frona*. All these cultural magazines are devoted to political and religious philosophers such as Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), Eric Voegelin (1901–85), Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936), and to elaborating the spiritual foundations of a new political and social order for Poland.

Conservative discursive organizations did not cease to emerge after 2005. With the coming to power of PiS following the 2005 election, conservative think tanks, discussion clubs, and other organizations mobilized to accompany the emerging Fourth Republic. The Sobieski Institute (*Instytut Sobieskiego*) was established to advise the government on political and economic matters. While initially striving to unite conservatism and liberalism, this institute was more and more inspired by ideas of a strong and efficient state, and effective and elaborate social and economic policies, and turned away from the idea of deregulation. Its director, Paweł Szalamacha, wrote four years later a book called *The Fourth Republic* and in 2015 took a post in the PiS government. But even after the re-election in 2007 of the opposition party PO, conservative discursive organizations continued to develop and refine their arguments. In 2007 the discussion platform “Ronin’s Club” (*Klub Ronina*) was established, and in 2009 the Republican Foundation (*Fundacja Republikańska*).

The following are the main tenets of the conservative discourse, which show how Polish conservatives have reflected real experience of the post-1989

transformation, and what positive vision of Polish modernization they have since had in mind, also with reference to Christianity.

### **The conservative discourse**

Polish conservatives felt unease with respect to the emerging Third Republic from 1989 onward. According to them, the democratic-liberal order was not based on values and tradition, but instead, selected elements of tradition were used in it instrumentally with the purpose of legitimating the status quo (Cichocki 2013, 9; Gawin 2013, 18). There was no grand project behind the Third Republic that would draw on the Polish tradition of “Sarmatian Republicanism,” romanticism, and the early *Solidarność* movement, references that conservatives would have wished for (Mazur and Rojek 2012; Stefanek 2013, 54). The Sarmatian Republic, sometimes called the “First Polish Republic,” was a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth featuring proto-democratic institutions governed by nobility. For conservatives, all those periods in Polish history were characterized by a strong value-orientation that they missed in post-1989 Poland. Instead, in their view, the new order was “post-communist” above all. Here follow the main weaknesses of the post-1989 order according to Polish conservatives.

### ***Criticism of the Third Republic***

The conservatives’ main criticism of the Third Republic is the continuity they see between the elites of the old and the new system. The new elites were to a large degree people who had already held high positions in political, military, and secret service structures in communist times. This new-old elite entered a pact with a part of *Solidarność* elites to keep an order in place that served their interests. Jarosław Kaczyński often uses the catchword *układ*, meaning an arrangement between former communists and left-liberal *Solidarność* elites that covers politics and business. This arrangement served in reality as a sort of political strategy on the part of selected *Solidarność* members to persuade communists to share power with the opposition. The policy of drawing a line under the communist period by renouncing on the prosecution of communist political elites was considered a realist strategy to be able to transition to democracy at all. This strategy was discussed in *Solidarność* circles already in the early 1980s and found its expression in the roundtable negotiations from 6 February to 5 April 1989, as well as in the first democratic election on 4 June 1989, followed by the second round on 18 June 1989. According to the conservative historian Andrzej Nowak ([1996] 2005), both the communists themselves as well as the part of the *Solidarność* elite that was in favor of the arrangement were surprised by the smashing victory of the *Solidarność* camp, which they saw as a certain break with the arrangement. For Nowak and other conservatives, the non-communist part of the emerging political elite ignored the voice of the nation as expressed in the election on 4 June on the grounds that it did not fit the

arrangement. That is why they decided in favor of a second round of elections designed in a way to assure the communists of more seats in the Parliament than they would have had following the first round (*ibid.*).

While the *układ* argument resembles the populist juxtaposition of “corrupt elite” versus “pure people,” it refers to a very particular kind of corruption—a supposedly morally doubtful collusion between a part of the Solidarność elite and communists/post-communists that inhibited a true de-communization of the Polish society and politics in supposedly free Poland. This failed de-communization had consequences for the quality of the system that was built after 1989, transforming what was thought to be a new order of liberal democracy into “post-communism.”

The essence of this collusion was—according to the conservative narrative—the choice of a procedural legal structure that supposedly inhibited the effectiveness of the state and comprehensive political action. “Procedural” means in this context that democracy is defined by procedures making up a system of checks and balances and separation of powers between the parliament, government, and courts. The preference of the post-communist elite for procedural structures of checks and balances in a liberal democracy was explained by Kaczyński as being in this elite’s alleged interest in weakening the state. The inefficiency of the post-communist state was thus regarded by this political formation not just as a structural problem inherited from communism, but as the result of a lack of political will on the part of the post-communist elite to reform it, which was related to this elite’s interest in keeping both political and economic power in the new order. That is why conservatives demanded a break with the Third Republic and the establishment of the Fourth Republic. They criticize the (present) 1997 constitution, which was approved as a compromise between the dominant political forces of that period, with the post-communist president Aleksander Kwaśniewski setting the conciliatory tone of this highest state document. Kwaśniewski was (and is) one of the figures most hated by the conservative milieu. He represented for conservatives a lack of values and an exclusive interest orientation that they saw as typical of post-communist politicians. Anyone who pursued a political career during communism becoming a liberal democrat after 1989 was for conservatives highly suspicious. Consequently, a constitution that is made in the spirit of the post-communist period would not be of any value to conservatives. From the early 1990s they called for a moral renewal and rejection of post-communist values and practices, which would culminate later in their notion of the Fourth Republic.

The most salient aspect of the storyline about elite continuity between communist and post-communist times that supposedly resulted in the moral decay of the early post-communist period was the alleged crucial role of secret services in orchestrating the political and economic transformation and in securing the (post-)communist elites’ interests in the new order. One of the most important conservative intellectuals—Andrzej Zybertowicz—wrote already in 1993 a book suggesting that a major role was being played by these secret services in realizing the transition to democracy and capitalism (Zybertowicz 1993). Zybertowicz

works today as a consultant to President Andrzej Duda and discursively accompanies the PiS-made “good change” agenda with his commentaries in the media. According to Zybertowicz, there was a conspiracy among the ruling elite of communist times—including a consensus with a part of the *Solidarność* elite—to share the spoils gained with the new economic system. This argument captured a feeling of frustration with the results of economic reforms of the early 1990s that stole the promise of prosperity that democratic capitalism had supposedly offered.

The narrative of post-communism as affected by the disease of communism because of the continuity of the elite between two epochs was told not only by the political scientist Zybertowicz, but also by the sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis, who also initially supported the rise of Law and Justice in becoming a major political force, but dared to criticize its authoritarian style in the post-2015 period. Staniszkis’s theory of post-communism equally implied that employees of the communist secret services had anticipated a system change in the 1980s, and were clever enough to materially secure their survival in the new system (Staniszkis 1999). With their institutional privileges, they could gain the most profitable assets of the state enterprises that underwent first spontaneous, and then regulated privatization. While this theory is based on some evidence, it can nevertheless be challenged. The argument of the excessive role of former secret service members in the early transformation can be weakened by pointing to the fact that the Ministry of Domestic Affairs had only 24,000 employees on the eve of transformation. These were just a drop in the sea of newly emerged Polish entrepreneurs and owners and could have hardly collected all the rents generated by the economy of that time.

Rejection of post-communism was not just based on economic frustration and envy. Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński were a part of a milieu that offered a moral perspective on communism. They fought it on moral grounds and could not tolerate remnants of it being incarnated into a new system that was supposed to be more just and free. In their narrative, widely shared in Polish society and even in milieus not related to PiS, communism is on the one hand responsible for Poland’s backwardness.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, as in Andrzej Nowak’s account, conservatives treat communism as a disease that is deteriorating social life and undermining civilization. Communism implies the absence of respect for private property and is driven by anarchic and destructive forces, as Nowak and colleagues argue. They would never forgive a Polish intellectual who flirted with communism in the interwar period or in the 1940s and 1950s. Such intellectuals’ contribution to Polish culture after their defection from communism is not valued by conservatives, as they perceive such intellectuals’ oeuvre as irreversibly contaminated by communism. For the Kaczyńskis and their supporters, only an authentic moral renewal would bring the communist epoch to an actual end.

Yet, these conservatives criticized not only remnants of communism in the new political and socio-economic system. They were equally against the neoliberal model of the economy. As Andrzej Nowak ([1996] 2005, 35) put it in his programmatic text “Our principles, our nation”:

Poland is not [...] a barbaric community, on which socio-economic reforms following models elaborated at the interface between the ‘Institute for Basic Problems of Marxism Leninism’ and the ‘Harvard University School of Economics’ should be tried out. Poland is grounded in a mature national culture, with particular principles of social life that are anchored in history, tradition, culture and prejudices.

This quotation summarizes conservatives’ perspective on an appropriate political, social, and economic order. Such an order should emerge from within a nation and be consistent with this nation’s values and not be imposed from above with reference to supposedly universal principles and procedures. Thus, a neo-liberal approach to economics ignores the essential needs and potential of the Polish economy.

A neoliberal model of economic policy, as was dominant in the 1990s and 2000s, implied for instance that capital has no nationality. In line with this model, a specific industrial policy in support of the national economy was not necessary. Such a policy would only have inhibited the dynamics of the market that yield the most efficient allocation of resources. As the Polish Minister of Industry in the years 1989–91, Tadeusz Syryjczyk, said, “the best industrial policy is none at all.” Accordingly, no government support was given to numerous state enterprises, including shipyards, the workers in which particularly opposed communism and participated in strikes and in the *Solidarność* movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Even relatively prosperous enterprises were denied preferential credit and subsidies in the early 1990s, which would have given them necessary time to adjust to market conditions (Wójcik 2015). Big enterprises of the early transition period were either forced to go bankrupt or taken over by foreign investors, many of whom forced those companies to produce minor elements in their production chain or go bankrupt (*ibid.*). Thus, economic foundations of the new Polish democracy were politically highly controversial, a fact that especially young conservatives used to their advantage by capitalizing on discontent with neoliberal reforms in Polish society.

On the whole, within Polish conservatism there was an equally strong pro-market and anti-state current that, however, gradually faded away in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (2008–09), even though the Polish economy proved surprisingly resilient in the face of that crisis. Polish conservatives were not against liberalism as such, since they value private property and economic freedom, but grew disappointed with the economic model that offered countries on the economic periphery or semi-periphery little room for bending the rules of the market, supporting national companies and redistributing national wealth. Growing to value the market and the state simultaneously, conservatives of both the younger and the older generations increasingly turned to heterodox economic theories. For older conservatives, however, non-economic topics such as state reform or the “politics of memory” have always had ideological priority.

In the view of a younger generation of conservatives associated with *Pressje* and *Nowa Konfederacja*, the absence of support to the domestic economy during

the years of economic transformation—and reliance on foreign investors instead—led to the Polish economy’s “neo-colonial” dependence on the West. This argument significantly grew in force during the 2000s, when Poland entered the EU, as the dependent status of the Polish economy became more visible after accession, though it was present in the debate already before. Polish conservatives bemoaned the lack of sovereignty of the Polish economy, which they saw as subordinated to foreign companies, many of which used price transfers, which is when enterprises manipulate prices in transactions between companies belonging to the same holding, and other accounting tricks to evade Polish taxes (Wójcik 2015). As concerns the level of Polish salaries, they were kept artificially low and did not reflect the dynamics of productivity gains, which conservatives also interpreted as characteristic for a neo-colonial economic arrangement (*ibid.*).

Conservatives equally criticized the general model behind liberal economics, according to which Poland should “catch up with the West” (Nowak [1996] 2005). In their perception, the main neoliberal storyline of the 1990s and 2000s was that Poland should compete with Western economies by keeping its labor costs low in order to create economic growth and eventually catch up with the West. Conservatives treated this exclusive orientation to the West as unworthy of Polish culture, which they considered rich enough to deliver its own political and economic templates. Furthermore, conservatives saw the idea of having to catch up as humiliating and preferred instead a value-orientation for the economy. In their narrative, the economy is moral, too, alongside the state and the law, and so should be subordinated to considerations of what is just.

The post-communist period was, according to conservatives, based on a wrong political and economic model and suffered from the persistence of morally doubtful, “communist” practices such as corruption and collusion between political and business elites. Those features were not the only ones criticized by conservative intellectuals, who were equally concerned with the symbolic dimension of the post-1989 order. In their view, the politics of memory chosen by the post-communists amounted to the propagation of shame and guilt over Polish crimes and Poland’s supposed backwardness, while it denied Poles the right to national pride. In particular the debate over events in the town of Jedwabne in northeast Poland, where Poles killed Jews during the last world war, led to a discursive division over the question of remembering Polish war crimes. Jedwabne became a further emblematic issue in the Polish debate. Conservatives have shown a tendency to see uncovering such historical truth as an anti-Polish act, since it challenges the representation of Second World War Polish victimhood. In his 2001 essay “Westerplatte or Jedwabne” in the conservative newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, Andrzej Nowak criticizes the preoccupation of the Institute of National Remembrance of that time with Polish crimes during the Second World War, such as Jedwabne, and argues for a policy of promoting Poles’ heroism, such as at the battle of Westerplatte or in the Warsaw Uprising. Nowak’s and his supporters’ storyline is that highlighting heroic parts of Polish history gives the society a sense of pride in belonging to the Polish nation. In the supposed emphasis on deeds of the other kind, Nowak sees a political choice

intended to instill in Poles a “culture of shame” that is overall consistent with the pitiful social order that emerged under post-communism. In the domain of historical memory, as in other policy areas, a reorientation toward the moral education of the nation is needed, in the conservatives’ view.

### ***The positive political theology of the new conservatism***

Having examined conservatives’ main storylines with respect to the Polish Third Republic, I now turn to their positive vision of the social order. This vision has been constructed not only in response to existing problems of the post-1989 political and socio-economic system, but also with reference to the Polish and international classics of conservative thought. At the bottom of it is the concept of “conservative modernization,” understood as a project to liberate the Polish nation and to enable its self-determination and capability of action. Psychological vocabulary, in particular terms such as “subjectivity” (*podmiotowość*) and “agency” (*sprawczość*), intermingles in descriptions of this modernization with references to Christianity. Christianity is proposed to be considered the actual source of agency of the Polish nation, as in the philosophy of the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev or in the late work of the Polish philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski (1878–1911), who turned from humanism to religiosity. The reference to Berdyaev and representatives of Russian messianism is not as surprising as it seems—Polish conservatives actually share with their Russian counterparts a number of values and a desire to proselytize other nations (Herman 2014). Besides, as an author of the conservative magazine *Pressje*, Jan Maciejewski (2015) points out, Berdyaev was popular among Polish nationalists of Christian and messianic orientation in the interwar period as well. According to this worldview, the social order and the state need to be constructed on Christian values and resemble thereby the “Christianitas” order of the Middle Ages. At the same time, the new order should include freedom and not oppose modernization but foster a specific form of modernization that serves Christian values and does not challenge them.

An emancipated nation that is able to modernize the state and the economy on its own terms is at the center of the conservative construction of the social world. It is the nation that determines the law and institutions of the state, so that they best serve its interest. The procedural understanding of the law is to be replaced with a substantive one. In the conservatives’ view, a procedural order of democracy can by definition not be a carrier of values that are dear to the nation. Democracy is defined, in their worldview, by its orientation to the public good, and not by a system of checks and balances.

The draft of the constitution of the Fourth Republic is a surprisingly close realization of principles dear to Polish conservatives. First formulated as a concept in 1997 by a moderate conservative writer, Rafał Matyja, it was extensively discussed within the conservative, but also the liberal-conservative, milieu following the Rywin affair in 2002. Jarosław Kaczyński was not the first who reacted enthusiastically to it, yet he managed to appropriate the concept and the

idea behind it shortly before the election in 2005. Pushed by Kaczyński, an actual project for the constitution of the Fourth Republic was worked out in 2004 by the Polish conservative politician Kazimierz Ujazdowski (Zaremba 2010, 230). This actually existing constitution project was not per se anti-democratic, as pointed out by the Polish journalist Piotr Zaremba, an author of Kaczyński's political biography, but it might well have heralded such a turn. First of all, this constitution project invoked God in its preamble. Second, it contained stipulations concerning lustration and de-communization, for which the state Institute of National Remembrance would have been responsible. Third, it intended to establish a "Commission for Truth and Justice," a peculiar invention in a presumably secular and pluralist state. The intention to set up such an institution shows thus the Kaczyński camp's opposition to democratic values of secularism and pluralism. The constitution project conveyed this camp's disdain for procedural democracy and its preference for a "value-based" order, supposedly better catering to the needs of the nation.

The subjectivity of the Polish nation that the new legal order should secure is to be realized in the economic realm as well. Thus the Polish economy should not be a mere colony of Western countries, but be able to develop independently. Mistakes that were made during the privatization period cannot be easily corrected, but a well-conceived economic policy could make a difference in the Polish economy in the course of one or two decades. Support for both producing and financial capital is a part of the program, as well as the readjustment of social and housing policy to the actual needs of the nation. In general, the economic part of the conservative political vision is the least developed, and conservative thinkers still discuss which economic institutions and instruments are in the spirit of "Christianitas" (Kędzierski 2012). Rafał Łętocha recalls, in his contributions to *Teologia Polityczna* as well as the progressive *Nowy Obywatel* (New Citizen), some of the forgotten classics of Catholic social teaching, in particular, works by Leopold Caro (1864–1939), a founder of the economic school of "solidarism" (Łętocha 2010, 2012). Kędzierski and Łętocha's arguments partly intersect with progressive ones, for instance where they see social cooperatives as an embodiment of a just economic order. In sum, economic reflection is an emerging part of conservatives' philosophy and theology. However, given that the Catholic religion has an extensive tradition of social ethics, conservatives have a lot of material to refer to.

The psychology of subjectivity finds its expression not least on the level of meanings and sense-making. Conservatives reject the supposed discourse of the left-liberal elites, who are ashamed of Poland's institutional and economic backwardness and traditional Polish mentality (Nowak [1996] 2005; Nowicka 2015). Furthermore, those elites present their shame over Poland and disdain for the Polish people as a sign of good taste—in the perception of conservatives (Nowicka 2015). The latter call it the "pedagogy of shame" and prefer instead to be proud of Poland and its traditions. Conservative thinkers emphasize instead Poland's heroic deeds and the achievements of its culture as a more effective type of patriotic education, than the critical approach to Polish history espoused



by the camp close to *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Conservatives perceive their approach not least as more consistent with promoting the sense of Poland as acting in history (Nowak 2014). Conservatives strive to eliminate the supposed Polish tendency to subordinate itself to more mighty neighbors, to the EU, the US, or the West. The Cracow magazine *Pressje* devoted a whole issue (number 43) to this Polish “sin” of “submission” and promoted “subjectivity” and “agency” instead. A discourse on this theme in the media took form just before the 2015 election (an example of Hajer’s “discourse structuration”), making the PiS political message more convincing.

## **Conservatism and the rise of Law and Justice**

Having presented the main tenets of the new Polish conservatism, I now turn to the question of the relation between brothers Kaczyński and the political parties set up by them, first the Center Agreement (*Porozumienie Centrum*, PC), 1990–2001, and Law and Justice from 2001 on the one hand, and the broader discourse coalition of conservatism on the other hand. Related to this is whether and how discursive efforts of conservative actors paved the way for the PiS victory in both 2005 and 2015.

During the 1990s, when Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński were the leaders of the Center Agreement party, they represented a peculiar position within Polish conservatism, and did not yet even identify with a particularly virulent conservative political current (Matyja 2015). At that time, they avoided nationalist and Christian rhetoric, and their main political idea was a rejection of post-communism and reform of the state. Already then, they identified with the “sanation” (*sanacja*) tradition of the interwar period, as represented by Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), a Polish field marshal and statesman who staged a coup-d’état in 1926, introducing an authoritarian regime to supposedly morally heal the Polish state. Among the multiple right-wing parties of the 1990s, PC did not have a strong position. However, the message of Jarosław Kaczyński was always recognizable and sometimes included by other parties in their programs. Both Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński were known politicians; however, Jarosław had a reputation as a difficult person, both among colleagues and the electorate. Both belonged to the conservative milieu, but were somehow at the fringes of it. They contributed to the establishment of the magazine *The New State* and tried to popularize the idea of a moral renewal of the state, but the Polish Right was initially too fragmented and conflictual to pay heed to it. Later, the political formation of the Kaczyński brothers played a minor role in the unified rightist party AWS. The decline of AWS after four years of rule (1997–2001) gave the Kaczyński brothers a chance to reconstitute their political project under the designation of PiS.

Both PiS and PO—the other party that emerged in the wake of the AWS demise—represented the conservative milieu. They had many programmatic similarities in the initial period of their existence. As already outlined in the section on the organization of conservatism, both parties became popular

following the Rywin affair in 2002. To investigate that affair, a parliamentary commission was set up in which representatives of both PiS and PO played an important role, in particular Zbigniew Ziobro from PiS and Jan Maria Rokita from PO. In the years 2001–05, a period of the rule of the post-communist party SLD, the idea of a moral renewal of the state order, framed as the establishment of a Fourth Republic, became relevant yet again. However, the debates in the election runup were less about intellectual issues than carrying on the political fight between PiS and PO. It is true that the catchword “Fourth Republic” might have had some influence on the election campaign, but so did mutual accusations and PR tricks on the part of both parties. Nevertheless, it was clearly PiS that emerged as an idea-driven party, in spite of its populism, and not PO. A further difference between these parties was that PO clearly embraced economic liberalism, whereas PiS—having however liberal members in its ranks as well—began to experiment discursively with the idea of solidarity as the opposite of liberalism.

During its period of rule in 2005–07, PiS implemented a few policy solutions related to their idea of the renewal of the state, especially as concerned anti-corruption policies and institutions. During that period, PiS was supported by conservative intellectuals such as Ryszard Legutko, Jadwiga Staniszkis, Jarosław Rymkiewicz, Andrzej Nowak, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, and others, who believed that PiS was introducing an authentic “change of climate” in Polish politics (Krasnodębski 2006). However, its coalition with the populist parties *Samoobrona* (“Self-Defense”) and the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*) led this party away from conservatism and in the direction of nationalist populism. It was equally during that time that Jarosław Kaczyński allied PiS with the Catholic cleric Tadeusz Rydzyk, who runs an influential Catholic media empire including the infamous ultra-Catholic radio station “Radio Maryja.” This political turn by PiS made it easier for liberals in the media and politics to mobilize against the party, which led to the electoral victory of PO in 2007. There followed eight years of PO rule during which PiS, and conservative think tanks supporting it (out of the lack of another conservative party but also their opposition to PO, and because PiS genuinely represented some conservative ideas), had time to elaborate fresh policy programs.

The process of further development of conservative thought went in parallel with the radicalization of the Polish political debate, which soon became known as the “Polish-Polish war.” From the perspective of the left-liberal camp, Kaczyński’s party represented right-wing populism, Catholic fundamentalism, and had authoritarian tendencies. While PiS surely had its radical aspects and forged alliances with radicals during its brief period of rule, those diagnoses missed the constructive part of the PiS political ideology, inspired by the wider conservative current of thought. However, the PiS milieu radicalized even further after 2010, when in the Smoleńsk jet catastrophe many renowned conservatives, including then-president Lech Kaczyński and Tomasz Merta, died, profoundly shocking the conservative milieu and especially people closer to PiS. The air crash became a sort of tipping point that led to a political and discursive

mobilization of both supporters of PiS and representatives of the conservative discourse coalition, who had often stood behind the party. However, even in the polarized political situation that followed, conservatism was still a variegated phenomenon in Polish society that could not be unequivocally equated with nationalism or populism and was not in its entirety radical.

### **Conservatism and the post-2015 “good change”**

After the parliamentary victory in 2015, PiS set out to implement the conservatives’ positive vision of the social order. This does not mean that conservative think tanks provided PiS with elaborate policy programs. Rather, writings of conservative intellectuals provided PiS with grand narratives on which this party could structure its approach to policy. Some of those intellectuals, such as Prof. Andrzej Zybertowicz from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań or Krzysztof Mazur from the Jagielloński Club, became consultants to the new political team and legitimated PiS politics with their very presence in those consultative bodies. Others, such as Paweł Szalamacha, author of the book on the Fourth Republic, even temporarily entered the government. Having ideologically paved the way for the victory of Law and Justice in the 2015 elections, think tank conservatives have since then engaged in legitimating the PiS government’s actions.

Even though they do not unequivocally support the anti-democratic posture of PiS, in particular its measures affecting the Constitutional Court and the judiciary, a large number of conservative ideologues nevertheless provide justifications for such policies. In line with the general ideology of Polish conservatives, Krzysztof Mazur of the Jagielloński Club justifies the PiS policy of reducing the power of the Constitutional Court by pointing to the Court’s role in consolidating the post-communist Third Republic (Mazur and Puczejda 2017). For Mazur, judges secured the interests of the post-communist elites, and if one wants to break with post-communism, “post-communist” judges should be replaced by new ones. At the same time, he criticizes the policy of completely disempowering the Court. In the same vein, conservatives comment on other policy measures in support of the PiS government.

Some conservatives of the older and younger generation, however, do criticize PiS politics, and even substantially. The famous conservative politician and thinker Aleksander Hall published a book entitled *A Bad Change*, referring to the PiS election slogan (Hall 2016a). In that, as well as in his journalistic contributions, Hall describes the PiS political stance as “national-revolutionary” and criticizes in particular the dismantlement of democratic institutions (Hall 2016b). Hall represents an undercurrent within Polish conservatism that does value procedural democracy, perceiving the political order that PiS strives to establish as illiberal. Similarly, Staniszkis, who in the past strongly approved Kaczyński’s political arguments, shows herself disappointed with the style of post-2015 political change. Being in favor of PiS in principle, she stresses that democracy not only requires a system of checks and balances, but also a certain style of political

culture that PiS does not represent (Staniszki 2016). Younger conservatives from *Nowa Konfederacja* have dared to criticize Kaczyński as well, losing in this way their budget support (Grzesiczak and Nurek 2017). Similarly, conservatives from *Klub Jagielloński* criticize selected aspects of PiS policy or discourse, or the discourse of its supporters. In particular, *Jagielloński* members have condemned hate speeches directed at refugees (Mazur and Puchejda 2017). Even with the change in the dominant political ideology following the election of PiS and its candidate for president, Andrzej Duda, and the subsequent opportunity to realize a conservative program of reforms, the conservative milieu is divided.

## Conclusion

This chapter traces the development of the conservative discourse coalition in Poland after 1989, and how the Kaczyńskis' political party Law and Justice relates to it. My argument is that the main theoretical tenet of Polish conservatism is criticism of the phenomena of post-communism and political capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Major events of the Polish transformation such as the political victories of post-communists of 1993 and 1995, or the Rywin affair in 2002, which exposed corrupt connections between Polish politics, business, and media, led to reinforced conservative criticism of the Polish Third Republic. Demonstrating the development of the conservative discourse, I have shown how changes in the organizational infrastructure of conservatism have affected it, and in two subsequent sections, elaborated on conservative criticism of the post-communist order and analyzed what positive vision of a social order emerges from the writings of Polish conservatives. Those intellectuals propose a fairly consistent vision of an order based on Christian values, in which both the market and the state assume important roles. Though this serves as an inspiration for Law and Justice and the government, both of these are also eagerly integrating nationalist and illiberal elements into their policies and political actions, and challenging by the same token the worldview of those conservatives who still value freedom. Importantly, conservative think tanks are still “allowed” to criticize the current positions of the government under PiS rule, and emphasize that they are not just serving as an “intellectual back office” for PiS (Trudnowski 2015).

## Notes

- 1 What is omitted is that Poland used to be a peripheral country before communism and that the latter significantly modernized Polish society and the economy. Contrary to the evidence, the interwar period is constructed in this narrative as a golden epoch, which ignores the grave socio-economic problems of that time.
- 2 It is still a major element of the political agenda of PiS, justifying dismantling the independent Constitutional Court on the grounds that it has served post-communist interests.

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# 6 The national conservative parties in Poland and Hungary and their core supporters compared

## Values and socio-structural background

*Jochen Roose and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski*

### Introduction

The world seems to be experiencing a political turning of the tide. National conservative forces have become increasingly influential in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Often, they appear as populist parties or movements, condemning the formerly governing political elite and claiming to give political power to the people or to the “real people” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, 2017; Müller 2017). They tend to receive an increasing number of votes in elections or even gain power directly by taking over the government, sometimes forming single-party governments as in Hungary and Poland. The temporal proximity of these changes points to common causes and diffusion effects, and thus invites a broad perspective analyzing the developments in various countries in a comparison (Brubaker 2017; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Wodak et al. 2013). Unquestionably, such a perspective is necessary and fruitful. However, it is in the nature of broad perspectives to focus on common influences and trends, leaving aside variety and more specific constellations. It therefore remains important to consider specificities as well as to take different backgrounds and developments into account which are otherwise overlooked. Regions and countries might differ considerably from each other, even though they are subject to similar trends. In this chapter, we focus on two East Central European countries in which national conservative parties came to power in 2010 and 2015 respectively: Hungary and Poland.

These two countries are valuable cases for a comparison, since in both countries national conservative parties came into government only recently, with Hungary being the forerunner of the development. Also, both countries have been heavily criticized for political measures damaging the rule of law character of the political system (Ágh 2016; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Buzogány 2017). They are prominent in the EU’s debate on how to react to rule of law violations and the so-called other democratic deficit of the EU, that is, the democratic deficit in the individual EU member states (Kelemen 2017). Our aim is to understand the character and support basis of two national conservative parties

in comparison, namely *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (“Law and Justice,” PiS) in Poland and *Fidesz (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége—Magyar Polgári Szövetség, “Alliance of Young Democrats—Hungarian Civic Alliance”)* in Hungary. For this purpose, we combine a qualitative assessment with quantitative data on their respective core supporters and electorates. This analysis provides information concerning the respective parties’ political approaches and ideologies not only based on their public statements, but also on the socio-structural background and orientation of the people supporting them. With this combination, we sketch a more nuanced picture which shows the similarities and differences of the two parties and their rise to power.

### **The political turn in Hungary and Poland**

The political victories of the national conservative *Fidesz* in Hungary in 2010 and 2014 as well as the *PiS* in 2015 in both the presidential and parliamentary elections in Poland have raised the question of a more general political turn in East Central Europe toward not only conservative, but also anti-liberal politics. Some observers point to the right-wing populist nature of both *Fidesz* and *PiS*, in particular in light of institutional changes introduced by both parties once in power (Foa and Mounk 2017; Arato 2017; Sadurski 2018). In Hungary, the *Fidesz* won the 2010 elections with 52.7 percent of votes, which gave the party a constitutional majority in the parliament allowing it to change the constitution, carry out controversial Constitutional Court appointments, and change electoral laws. In particular, the so-called fourth amendment to the constitution provoked international criticism. According to some observers this amendment limited the independence of the judiciary, brought universities under governmental control and opened the door to political prosecutions while weakening human rights guarantees (Scheppele 2013; Pech and Scheppele 2017). Heavy criticism was also expressed by the European Union, in particular the European Parliament (Tavares and Engel 2012) as well as the Venice Commission (Grabenwarter et al. 2011). The 2013 report of the European Commission (Tavares 2013) admonished the Hungarian government

to implement as swiftly as possible all the measures the European Commission as the guardian of the treaties deems necessary in order to fully comply with EU law [...] [and with] the decisions of the Hungarian Constitutional Court and [...] the recommendations of the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe and other international bodies.

(Tavares 2013)

Despite the international criticism, *Fidesz* won the parliamentary elections with 44.9 percent in 2014, this time missing the constitutional majority. At the same time, the *Fidesz* government introduced a number of social measures aimed at improving living standards for average citizens. The government resorted to taxing banks, retail sales networks, and energy and telecommunication



companies on an equal and proportional footing, while increasing family support and introducing a flat income tax. More generous welfare benefits followed suit. In 2013, electricity, gas, and central heating prices were reduced by 20 percent, and the energy price reduction has become the leitmotiv in Fidesz's campaign ahead of the election in April 2014 (Benczes 2016; Enyedi 2016).

In Poland, the PiS's candidate, Andrzej Duda, unexpectedly won the Polish presidential elections in May 2015 against the incumbent President Bronisław Komorowski with 51.6 percent. This electoral success was repeated in the following parliamentary elections. The PiS won in October 2015 with 37.6 percent and was able to form a one-party government (which happened for the first time since 1989 in Poland, given that the electoral law and rather fluid party system favors multi-party governments) but missed the constitutional majority. Shortly after the government was formed, a series of political measures were hastily pushed through the parliament, including the controversial media law and the counterterrorism law. New controversial appointments at the Constitutional Court also followed, leading to a paralysis of the institution. A new law from December 2015 changed the set-up of the Constitutional Court and its decision-making rules, forcing it, among other things, to make decisions exclusively by a two-thirds majority (Karolewski and Benedikter 2017a). Some observers argued that this made it *de facto* difficult for the court to act at all, which amounted to disempowerment of the checks-and-balances principle vital to democratic pluralism (Sadurski 2018; Freudenstein and Niklewicz 2016). In 2016, the Constitutional Court had been functionally disabled, as the PiS was able to put party loyalists on the bench. Against this background, newer PiS reforms of the Supreme Court and the lower courts in 2017 have been viewed by critics as the next stage in the suspension of the rule of law (e.g. Łazowski 2017; Sadurski 2018).

Like the Fidesz, the PiS came to power with promises of new welfare benefits and support for the economically disadvantaged. In 2016, a new instrument of child support was introduced while the medication refunding scheme for senior citizens was activated in the second half of 2016 (Karolewski and Benedikter 2017b). In addition, a state-sponsored program for apartment construction aimed at young families started in 2016. In order to finance these expenditures, a new banking tax was established and new measures to reduce VAT fraud were introduced (Benedikter and Karolewski 2016).

On 13 January 2016, for the first time in its history since the founding treaty of Rome in 1958, the European Union initiated a formal investigation against one of its member states: Poland. The investigation was intended to question whether new laws introduced by the PiS government are violating the rules of EU democracy, and whether these laws are in accordance with the rule of law and fundamental democratic values. With this, Poland became the second of the East Central European (ECE) countries after Hungary to raise fears of an authoritarian backslide in the region (Ágh 2015; Berend and Bugarcic 2015). Some outside observers have offered pessimistic readings of the situation at hand. For example, Kelemen and Orenstein (2016; Kelemen 2016) are counting

the days of democracy in Poland, while Kornai (2015) sees a clear retreating from democracy in Hungary.

### **Why did Fidesz and PiS succeed?**

One explanation for the political turn toward Fidesz and PiS is based on the specific socio-economic problems in Poland and Hungary. It refers to flaws in the transition to capitalism that was introduced in both countries at the historical peak of the neoliberal interpretation of governance in 1989–91. After two decades of neoliberalism, this led on the one hand to positive effects, including robust economic growth and an increase of average living standards. On the other hand, non-transparent privatization processes and lagging reforms of crucial sectors of productivity manifested specific governance pathologies in Poland, Hungary, and other ECE countries (Bruszt 1994; O’Neil 1996; Nölke and Vliegthart 2009).

This hypothesis suggests that after 20–25 years, the ECE version of governance still remained problematic in many ways, showing serious limitations in responding to the social needs of the region’s transforming societies. For instance, despite positive macroeconomic development, both young people and senior citizens in ECE countries have lived under existential pressure for many years with governments unable (and partly unwilling) to strengthen welfare systems and balance growing social inequality (Nesvetailova 2004; Milanovic 1993; Ost et al. 1992).

As a result, in the past 10 years more than 2.3 million Poles decided to emigrate to the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Germany (*The Economist* 2013). Today, the majority of Polish pensioners have to live on 500 EUR per month and must pay for their medicine in full (OECD 2017). In addition, Polish pensioners are heavily indebted; their accumulated debt burden was roughly equal to 1.5 billion euros in 2018 (*Business Insider Polska* 2018). The public health system operates at a low level due to chronic underfunding. Consequently, the majority of Polish citizens have to use private medical services, despite the fact that the average Polish household’s net financial wealth is 10,919 US dollars, while the OECD average is close to 67,000 US dollars (Karolewski and Benedikter 2017a).

In 2010, Fidesz took power in Hungary at a time when the country plunged into a deep political and economic crisis. Hungary had fallen into its deepest recession of the previous decade just one year earlier (its GDP fell by 6.8 percent in 2009). An agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was strongly criticized by Fidesz, which during its election campaign was making promises to end the austerity policy and make a new beginning in economic policy. Both the Fidesz and the PiS won elections shortly after a period of financial turmoil. In 2015, Poland’s currency lost its value drastically against the Swiss Franc (CHF) in 2015. While the economic situation was quite good in Poland, the so-called Swiss Franc shock squeezed homeowners who held CHF denominated mortgages (around 565,000 households), which played a role in the

PiS winning the elections, as the party promised to support the Swiss Franc losers (Ahlquist et al. 2018).

In both Poland and Hungary, broader parts of society shared the sentiment that numerous governments after 1989 used state agencies and enterprises for cronyism and politico-economic clientelism, draining financial resources from the state budget that otherwise could have been invested into higher education, research, health, and pension systems. Secret tape scandals documenting high levels of cynicism among ruling elites (in Hungary in 2006 and in Poland in 2014) precipitated the political change in both countries.

At the same time, foreign capital has not only been unable to substitute for many of these structural difficulties and for the chronic problem of the mismanagement of public funds, but also has produced its own problems, such as real-estate bubbles and problematic mortgages (Standing 1996; Orenstein 1995). According to some critics, while international corporations, banks, and consultancies have mushroomed all over Poland and Hungary (and other ECE countries), ECE countries have become virtual assembly lines for foreign producers that do not hold their research and development departments in these nations and, in many cases, pay their taxes in other EU countries because of a lower value-added tax (VAT). For instance, in Poland, 70 percent of the entire tax burden is carried not by European or transnational enterprises, but by small and medium-sized firms of local origin (Czerniak and Stefanski 2017).

Both the PiS and Fidesz came to power by criticizing previous governments as complicit in this unbalanced development, widely independent of their leftist or rightist inclinations, dragging their feet for decades on the necessary reforms of the health care, higher education, labor market, and pension systems.

### **The socio-economic background of supporters for PiS and Fidesz in comparison**

In order to explore the socio-economic and cultural orientation of a party, we can build on various sources. Some scholars have used party programs (e.g. Klingemann et al. 2006) or public statements of the party leaders or front people (Kriesi et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2009) to map out the ideological orientation of a party. In contrast, we take a different approach by focusing on the supporters of the parties. We expect a close link between publicly stated party positions and preferences by supporters. However, we assume that the supporters tend to focus on specific aspects they favor while leaving other parts aside. Thus, choosing supporters as the source of information places emphasis on those aspects of party positions which are particularly valued by supporters and thus informs us about the social and cultural basis of the parties.

To have comparable results, we rely on a European comparative survey, the European Social Survey,<sup>1</sup> of which we use the 2014 wave. Actual fieldwork was carried out in Hungary between 24 April 2015 and 26 June 2015 and in Poland between 17 April 2015 and 14 September 2015. The data thus covers the time period shortly after the election in Hungary (the date of the election was 6 April

2014), while in Poland the field work mainly took place between the presidential election (10–24 May 2015) and the parliamentary election (25 October 2015). We consider the timing appropriate for covering the social structure and the attitudes held by supporters of the respective parties.

In a first step, we look at the core of the parties' supporters who declare a feeling of close proximity to the respective party, and compare them with the supporters of the largest competing party (the PO, *Platforma Obywatelska*, "Civic Platform," in Poland and the MSZP, *Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt*, "Hungarian Socialist Party," in Hungary). This kind of analysis focuses on the politically most committed people, who are a comparatively small minority of the population.

The comparison of the two largest parties with the largest number of strong supporters shows various remarkable findings concerning their respective supporters (Table 6.1). We start with Poland and the comparison between the national conservative PiS and the liberal conservative PO. The most striking finding is that the socio-demographic differences between both party supporters are not overly large here. The binary-logistic regression identifies only very few significant differences. However, the low  $N$  has to be considered for this finding, thus potentially clouding the differences.

People feeling close to the PiS are slightly younger, less educated, live less often in families, and are found more in rural areas. They are less often unemployed or retired. Most striking is the difference in income. People feeling close to the PiS are found on average below the middle of the income hierarchy, while people attached to the PO are on average in the sixth decile of the income stratification. This difference is remarkably large.<sup>2</sup> The very highly educated individuals with a university master's degree and higher are much more frequently attached to the PO than to the PiS, but the number of respondents in this category is quite small.

The differences concerning the socio-economic background of people attached to the two largest parties in Hungary are somewhat different. The supporters of the national conservative Fidesz are also more often women than men and are more likely to not have children in their household. This tendency is identical to Poland but the income differences are negligible, contrary to the picture in Poland.

The difference in educational background that we spotted in Poland is practically non-existent in Hungary. In accordance with the lower age of the committed Fidesz supporters as compared with the MSZP supporters, the share of retired people is also significantly lower. Again, this is similar to Poland. The most obvious similarity between the two countries is the center periphery pattern. The national conservative parties gain more support in rural areas than large cities.

The differences between committed supporters of the national conservative parties compared with their largest more moderate counterpart are similar in Hungary and Poland with regard to their socio-economic background. Committed supporters of the national conservative parties are slightly more often

Table 6.1 Socio-economic differences among party identifiers of the two largest parties: Poland and Hungary

|   | Poland |         | Hungary |          |            |     |
|---|--------|---------|---------|----------|------------|-----|
|   | PO (%) | PiS (%) | (a)     | MSZP (%) | Fidesz (%) | (a) |
| Male                                      | 53.1   | 49.6    |         | 46.2     | 44.1       | +   |
| Lives with partner                        | 75.4   | 71.8    |         | 56.7     | 66.0       | +   |
| Child in household                        | 89.9   | 79.9    |         | 80.6     | 70.2       |     |
| <i>Education</i>                          |        |         |         |          |            |     |
| Less than lower secondary                 | 2.1    | 1.1     |         | 3.1      | 3.9        |     |
| Lower secondary                           | 29.4   | 49.0    |         | 18.7     | 21.1       |     |
| Lower tier upper secondary                | 10.4   | 14.2    |         | 31.0     | 27.3       |     |
| Upper tier upper secondary                | 15.9   | 20.4    |         | 26.4     | 23.6       |     |
| Advanced vocational, sub-degree           | 8.1    | 3.0     |         | 3.9      | 5.1        |     |
| Lower tertiary education,<br>BA level     | 5.7    | 4.2     |         | 11.2     | 12.7       |     |
| Higher tertiary education,<br>>= MA level | 28.4   | 8.1     |         | 5.7      | 6.3        |     |
| <i>Main activity</i>                      |        |         |         |          |            |     |
| Paid work                                 | 46.6   | 47.8    |         | 40.0     | 56.6       |     |
| Education                                 | 1.5    | 2.7     |         | 1.0      | 4.5        |     |
| Unemployed                                | 5.2    | 3.0     | *       | 4.8      | 1.9        | **  |
| Retired                                   | 42.0   | 36.5    | +       | 50.4     | 26.7       | *   |
| Housework                                 | 2.6    | 9.4     |         | 0.0      | 4.8        |     |
| Other                                     | 5.7    | 4.2     | +       | 3.7      | 5.5        |     |
| <i>Domicile</i>                           |        |         |         |          |            |     |
| Big city, incl. outskirts                 | 28.8   | 19.9    |         | 41.7     | 25.1       |     |
| Town, small city                          | 35.8   | 30.0    |         | 39.4     | 37.1       |     |
| Country village                           | 35.4   | 50.1    |         | 18.8     | 37.8       | **  |
| Age in years                              | 55.36  | 52.58   |         | 58.54    | 49.72      | *   |
| Income deciles                            | 6.18   | 4.93    | ***     | 6.59     | 6.67       |     |
| N (max)                                   | 145    | 186     |         | 118      | 265        |     |

Source: European Social Survey, Round 7, 2014, own calculation, with post-stratification weights.

Notes

(a) significance in binary-logistic regression. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.10$ .

women without children in the household; they are younger, less frequently unemployed and most strikingly they live in small rural areas. The most important difference between the two countries is the comparatively lower education level among PiS supporters which is not found among Fidesz supporters, both in comparison with the next largest party in the country.

### Values and attitudes of the neo-conservative parties' supporters

Considering the potentially different situation and the varying cultural traditions in both countries, similar attitudes and values on the part of national conservative

parties' supporters are not the only option. We could also assume that the parties are grounded in quite different value systems with only a small amount of overlap. In particular, their populist character, often associated with a "thin ideology" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Stanley 2008), would suggest a high level of flexibility with respect to value attachments. We will now consider this question in more detail.

The most obvious difference between the PiS supporters and the PO supporters in Poland is the different level of attachment to religion. Supporters of

Table 6.2 Differences in attitudes and values among party identifiers of the two largest parties: Poland and Hungary

|  | <i>Poland</i> |                |            | <i>Hungary</i>  |                   |            |
|--|---------------|----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
|  | <i>PO (%)</i> | <i>PiS (%)</i> | <i>(b)</i> | <i>MSZP (%)</i> | <i>Fidesz (%)</i> | <i>(b)</i> |
| <i>Values and attitudes</i>                    |               |                |            |                 |                   |            |
| National identification                        | 30.7          | 29.7           |            | 30.4            | 29.2              |            |
| <i>Religion</i>                                |               |                |            |                 |                   |            |
| How religious (1–10)                           | 5.93          | 7.64           | +          | 3.09            | 4.31              | *          |
| Religious attendance                           | 4.21          | 3.17           | *          | 5.90            | 5.54              |            |
| Praying frequency                              | 3.11          | 1.96           | *          | 5.48            | 4.71              |            |
| How happy                                      | 7.45          | 6.98           | +          | 6.25            | 6.88              |            |
| Trust people (10 steps)                        | 4.22          | 3.97           |            | 3.80            | 4.58              | *          |
| Meet socially                                  | 3.87          | 3.86           |            | 3.20            | 3.56              |            |
| Social interaction (5 steps)                   | 2.57          | 2.56           |            | 2.31            | 2.46              |            |
| Political interest (4 steps)                   | 2.30          | 2.41           |            | 2.61            | 2.61              |            |
| Able to be politically active (10 steps)       | 4.02          | 3.33           |            | 3.06            | 2.56              | ***        |
| Satisfied democracy (10 steps)                 | 6.30          | 3.73           | **         | 3.42            | 6.23              | ***        |
| Satisfied economy (10 steps)                   | 5.50          | 3.34           | *          | 3.23            | 5.39              |            |
| People have say in government (10 steps)       | 5.71          | 3.44           | ***        | 2.20            | 3.56              |            |
| Reduce income differences government (5 steps) | 2.16          | 1.71           | *          | 1.51            | 1.72              |            |
| Tolerance homosexuals (5 steps)                | 2.17          | 3.28           | **         | 2.91            | 2.69              | ***        |
| More EU integration (10 steps)                 | 6.29          | 5.31           |            | 4.67            | 4.17              |            |
| <i>Schwartz values</i>                         |               |                |            |                 |                   |            |
| Independence                                   | 0.20          | 0.17           |            | -0.08           | 0.23              |            |
| Hedonism                                       | -1.09         | -1.35          |            | -0.07           | 0.09              |            |
| Success  | -0.39         | -0.58          | *          | 0.23            | -0.24             |            |
| Power  | -0.76         | -0.58          |            | 0.38            | -0.44             |            |
| Security                                       | 0.80          | 0.84           |            | -0.39           | 0.62              | +          |
| Conformity                                     | 0.45          | 0.51           |            | 0.18            | -0.27             |            |
| Tradition                                      | 0.20          | 0.54           | *          | -0.11           | 0.02              |            |
| <i>N</i> (max)                                 | 145           | 186            |            | 118             | 265               |            |

Source: European Social Survey, Round 7, 2014, own calculation, with post-stratification weights.

#### Notes

(b) significance in binary-logistic regression, including also the socio-economic variables listed in Table 6.1. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.10$ .

the PiS declare a considerably stronger religiosity. Church attendance and frequency of prayer also differ significantly. Religiosity is a crucial factor for distinguishing the committed supporters of the two parties. The PiS supporters are a little less happy and trust other people less than the PO supporters. However, they do not differ in their level of social inclusion, measured by meeting other people or being socially active.

But the supporters of the PiS are less politically interested. This difference is remarkable, as the comparison only includes people who declare that they feel close to one party and thereby already indicate a political interest. Still, the political efficacy of the PiS supporters and their self-confidence in handling political matters is lower. In addition, they are less satisfied with democracy and the state of the economy. Additionally, the PiS supporters are more often convinced that they have no influence on government matters. With regard to this finding, we have to keep in mind that people were asked shortly before PiS came to power, so the response could have changed afterwards.

Two general political positions are covered in the European Social Survey (ESS) to mirror fundamentally different political approaches: the attitude toward state intervention with regard to income inequality and tolerance toward homosexuals. Both attitudes differ fundamentally between the PiS supporters and the PO supporters. People feeling attachment toward the PiS also support government intervention with regard to income inequality and reject homosexuality even more strongly.

Finally, the attitudes toward European integration differ, though not overly strongly. Even though the PiS favors less further integration, supporters of both parties are on average closer to the support of further steps toward integration than to the devolution of competences away from the EU.

Coming to Hungary, religiosity is also a factor clearly dividing the two contending parties, that is, the Fidesz and the MSZP. However, the difference is not as large as in Poland when it comes to self-assessed religiosity, religious attendance, or frequency of prayer. Fidesz supporters are a little happier and considerably more trusting than MSZP supporters, differences not found between PiS and PO supporters in Poland. The lower political efficacy among supporters of right populist parties also appears in Hungary. However, Fidesz supporters are happier with democracy, the economic situation, and their influence on the government. The four years of Fidesz government prior to the survey led to a firm belief in adequate representation among the strong supporters of the party. This is not self-evident, especially for populist parties. The reduction of income differences is not a specific concern of Fidesz supporters, while PiS supporters in Poland have an interest in such a government intervention. Finally, support for the EU is lower among Fidesz supporters than among MSZP supporters. However, both support EU integration less than the supporters of the two Polish parties.

The comparison of general attitudes leads to some similarities between the two countries. The importance of religiosity, low political efficacy, more skepticism with regard to the EU, and strong rejection of homosexuality are found in

both countries. In Hungary, the Fidesz government apparently produced satisfaction with democracy and the economy among its committed supporters. The link shows that the actual political action of the government complies with the expectations of its firm supporters. This effect is also possible in Poland after the PiS ascendancy to government, and is even to be expected.

Shalom Schwartz suggests a general configuration of fundamental values which are supposed to cover general human values across cultures (Schwartz and Bardi 2001; Schwartz 2007; Schwartz and Bilsky 1990). These values can also be compared for the parties' committed supporters in both countries.

These values show considerable differences between the two right populist parties. Hedonism tends to be rejected by PiS supporters, whereas Fidesz supporters are neutral on this value. Conformity is favored among PiS supporters, while Fidesz supporters reject it. Following traditions is regarded as positive by PiS supporters, while Fidesz supporters are indifferent in this regard. Furthermore, the differences between supporters of the two parties compared in each country mostly do not have the same direction. Only for the values "success" and "tradition" do the differences show the same direction; for the other five values, the direction of difference between the compared parties are different in the two countries. A general value basis among supporters of right populist parties in Poland and Hungary, indicating a broad consistent worldview, is not found. Against this backdrop, the assumption of a national conservative populism as a comparatively "thin ideology" can be supported by this analysis.

### **Committed party supporters as the core?**

Our empirical analysis is based on the positions of those people who say they feel close to the respective parties. Therefore, the analysis is focused on a comparatively small number of people who identify with a given party. We suspected among these people a core of those who most purely mirror the perception of the parties' political leaning. In this step, we want to test this assumption.

Based on the binary logistic regression using the socio-economic background as well as the attitudes and values assembled in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, we estimated the probability of supporting either the right populist party or the second largest more centrist party (PiS versus PO and Fidesz versus MSZP respectively). This probability is now compared with the actual vote in the last national election as reported by the respondent.

Our expectation is that the calculated probabilities should not only predict the vote by the identifiers, but that the model should also predict the vote by people who did not indicate an identification with a party. Furthermore, the other parties should indicate by the average probability of their voters a relative closeness to or distance from the two respective anchor parties, described by the committed supporters.

Table 6.3 shows the result for both countries. First, based on the information taken from committed supporters of the respective parties, we can correctly predict the voting behavior of the analyzed parties' voters. On average, the



Table 6.3 Average probability of closeness to party for voters of parties

| Party                                     | Average probability | N   |
|---|---------------------|-----|
| <i>Poland</i>                             |                     |     |
| Law and Justice (PiS)                     | 0.83                | 261 |
| Poland Comes First                        | 0.72                | 2   |
| Congress of the New Right                 | 0.68                | 17  |
| Non-voters                                | 0.64                | 588 |
| Polish Peasants Party                     | 0.62                | 47  |
| Civic Platform (PO)                       | 0.38                | 382 |
| Democratic Left Alliance                  | 0.26                | 48  |
| Palikot Movement                          | 0.25                | 16  |
| Other                                     | 0.25                | 5   |
| Polish Labour Party—August 1980           | 0.07                | 1   |
| <i>Hungary</i>                            |                     |     |
| FIDESZ—KDNP                               | 0.79                | 416 |
| Non-voters                                | 0.55                | 508 |
| Jobbik (Jobbik Magyarorszáért Mozgalom)   | 0.48                | 159 |
| LMP (Lehet Más A Politika)                | 0.44                | 48  |
| MSZP-Együtt-DK-PM-MLP (Kormányváltók)     | 0.27                | 223 |
| Munkáspárt (Magyar Kommunista Munkáspárt) | 0.24                | 6   |
| Other                                     | 0.00                | 3   |

Source: European Social Survey, wave 7, 2014.

Note

Prediction of party closeness based on a binary logistic regression, using all variables included in Table 6.1 and Table 6.2.

voters of the PiS and the Fidesz have a comparatively high probability of voting for their respective parties. An average probability of 0.83 and 0.79 is quite a clear indication that the core factors have been correctly identified by looking at the parties' supporters. This applies also to the counterparts. Voters of the PO and the MSZP are on average correctly predicted (0.38 and 0.27).

Interestingly, the prediction for the respective counterparts, the conservative liberal PO in Poland and the social democratic MSZP in Hungary, are less precise than for the right populist parties. Also, the right populist parties are at the outer poles of a spectrum. The PO and the MSZP are surrounded by other parties with similar prediction values. This indicates that the PiS and the Fidesz are polarizing parties with a relatively clearly identifiable electorate. In particular, for these two parties the most committed supporters describe quite clearly what also attracts the wider electorate.

Finally, in both countries the non-voters are closer to the right populist party than to the more centrist party. This finding is of course strongly influenced by the relative attractiveness of the two parties for people with low political efficacy. However, with respect as well to other attitudes, values, and aspects of the socio-economic background, the supporters of right populist parties tend to mirror the non-voters as well.

**How similar are PiS and Fidesz?**

There are numerous ideological affinities between the Hungarian governing party Fidesz and the Polish PiS, mainly with regard to their blend of national conservatism and proactive social policies. Also, the heads of both parties, Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński, have already met twice since the PiS came to power, in January and in August 2016. There was also the constitutional crisis in Poland in 2015–16 as well as further controversies surrounding the reform of the legal system—including the Supreme Court—in 2017, which raises questions about a concentration of power in Poland not dissimilar to the development in Hungary.

At the same time, the case of Hungary might be different from Poland despite some ideological commonalities and the joint initial focus on constitutional change, which the Orbán government introduced in 2010–14. Hungary’s political turn under Viktor Orbán could be viewed as more populist and authoritarian than the one in Poland since 2015. In 2010, the Orbán government had a constitutional majority at its disposal allowing for direct changes to the Hungarian constitution with regard to the Constitutional Court, both public and private media, limitations upon freedom of speech, as well as problematic changes to the electoral law favoring large parties such as Orbán’s own Fidesz party. Fidesz changed the constitution in many ways, but one of the key new provisions was the aforementioned “fourth amendment.” This is not the case in Poland (or not yet the case, as pessimists like to predict), as there is a free press (entirely private and largely international), substantially free TV and free radio outlets (with the exception of state media that have always been up for grabs after each and every election) and no limitations to civil liberties.

Furthermore, Orbán has not only heavily meddled with the constitution—in contrast to the Polish PiS, which is using ordinary laws for their controversial reforms— but also openly and actively advocated the term “illiberal state” as a positive legitimation of his politics.

In addition, the Hungarian government put pressure on private media owners to influence coverage through a new advertising tax that affected private television stations significantly. That is why Hungary scores relatively low in the Press Freedom Index of 2015 as only “partly free,” while Poland’s press remained classified as “free” in 2015 and 2016 (Reporters Without Borders 2016). According to the Freedom House report 2015, “[in Hungary] [d]efamation remains a criminal offense, and both defamation and related charges—for example, breach of good repute and hooliganism—are regularly brought against journalists and other writers” (Freedom House 2015). Again, this is not the case in Poland, as journalists are free to work and both private and state media compete against each other to attract as many viewers as possible. The leading information channel in Poland is the private and government-critical TVN24 followed by the state information channel TVP Info (Wirtualne Media 2016).

While following the path of populist nationalism, Orbán was able to establish a constellation with a much narrower spectrum of independent media than the

PiS in Poland and to silence critical voices, which in Hungary for a couple of years have seemed to be unable to present views different from the often-radical positions of Orbán to a broader public. In 2011, Dániel Papp, co-founder of Jobbik, the Hungarian radical nationalist political party, was installed as editor-in-chief of television news, and in 2014, he was put in charge of all news content on public media. All this is not the case in Poland, even though state media certainly became friendlier toward the government (as they often are after a change of government) and conservative with regard to their content. However, there has been increasing criticism in Poland about the fact that economic pressure on opposition-friendly outlets has grown, as the Polish government has canceled their subscriptions and state-owned companies have redirected advertising money to pro-government outlets.

## **Outlook**

Possible explanations for the success of the PiS and Fidesz are socio-economic reasons. Both the Fidesz and PiS governments came into power by embracing “neo-leftist” redistributive measures, common in Western welfare states such as Germany and France, which were largely omitted by previous governments in the ECE area. With this, to some extent the case of Hungary and Poland might continue one paradoxical mechanism of the late EU: the “leftist” governments seem to usually make cuts to the social safety net in order to introduce liberalization, competitiveness and efficiency reforms, and “rightist” governments then embrace policies mitigating social differences and inequality in order to retain popular consent and thus remain credible as “people’s parties.” An example for the first mechanism was the German social democratic chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s “Agenda 2010” of 2005, which has been later imitated, with 10 years’ delay, by the prime ministers of Italy (Matteo Renzi) and France (Manuel Valls). Both are representatives of leftist parties and alliances, but de facto have to enact a center-liberal program because of the needs of their countries, sometimes denominating it a contemporary neo-European “Third Way” approach. The Polish PiS and the Hungarian Fidesz are examples of the opposite: a conservative party that in many ways pursues a clear “socialist” agenda (Karolewski and Benedikter 2017a).

The picture that unfolds from this analysis of the electorate is ambivalent. In some respects, the electorate of the right populist parties is very similar, with regard to the orientation to the rural population, religiosity of the electorate, a strong security orientation, a low political efficacy, and a rejection of homosexuality. On the other hand, we find fundamental differences. The PiS electorate has a relatively lower level of income, while for Fidesz the opposite applies. The PiS electorate strongly favors tradition, while the Fidesz electorate is not overly committed to it. Especially with regard to fundamental values, the orientations of the PiS and Fidesz electorates seem to differ considerably, and this may also guide both parties in somewhat different directions beyond their similarities, which are time and again highlighted by distant observers and the parties themselves.

## Notes

- 1 For the data and detailed information on the method see: [www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org).
- 2 If we leave this difference aside, also the gender difference and the difference in having children in the household become significant in the binary-logistic regression.

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# 7 “Conservative modernization” and the rise of Law and Justice in Poland

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## **Introduction**

This chapter intends to characterize the ruling Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) party’s “conservative modernization” strategy as an attempt to respond to the new challenges facing Poland since late 2015 in the wake of the global finance crisis and its impact on East Central Europe (ECE). The chapter consists of four parts. The first presents the self-definition of the PiS government and its political roots, including the different terms used to describe this party by its leaders, the party’s main program, symbolic and identity-related references, essential elements of the party’s history, and specific patterns of its political activity. The second part characterizes the genesis of and main ideas in the PiS “conservative modernization” strategy, as presented as an alternative to the strategy of “modernization by Europeanization” of the previous Polish governments. The third part analyzes the new socio-economic policy and the institutional changes in the light of the varieties of capitalism approach (VoC) and its dimensions: the rules of economic governance, welfare state, corporate governance, and industrial relations. The fourth part outlines the major currents in the controversy over the “conservative modernization” strategy in Poland, especially in relation to its political, institutional, and economic consequences, and the internal contradictions of this strategy. The chapter concludes that the new Polish version of “state capitalism,” in spite of its short-term successes, is more likely to harden the semi-peripheral position of Poland than to change it.

## **The self-definition of the PiS government and its political roots**

PiS was established as a party in 2001 as an outgrowth of the Center Alliance party (*Porozumienie Centrum*, PC) which had been operating from the early 1990s and had plans to build a Polish Christian Democracy party based on the tradition of the Solidarity movement. Among PC’s founding members were also representatives of the Liberal-Democratic Congress party (*Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny*, KLD), whose two leaders were the later prime ministers Jan Krzysztof Bielecki and Donald Tusk. In combining these different structures, the



PC included Christian Democratic, neoliberal, and trade-unionist factions. The main slogan of the PC was the idea of an “acceleration” of political changes in Poland that had already begun with General Wojciech Jaruzelski’s stepping down, the holding of presidential elections, and the “de-communizing” of the state. PC activists ran the presidential campaign of Lech Wałęsa, and after his victory, the Kaczyński brothers took ministerial posts in the presidential chancellery (Ślōdkowska 1995). At the same time, an oppositional, post-Solidarity liberal-left camp was being built around Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the Democratic Union party (*Unia Demokratyczna*, UD) and the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*. After the liberals (KLD) and the smaller popular factions left the PC, the party collaborated with Solidarity unionists to criticize the economic reforms of Leszek Balcerowicz. Its position combined

the criticism of the state’s liberalism (a night-watchman state) with the concept of the state as an institution of widely understood security and, simultaneously, [...] of a moral quality [...] closely associated with a strong embeddedness in the national tradition.

(Kaczyński 2016, 311)

However, according to liberal critics, in the 1990s the PC did not significantly differ from the main pro-Western political currents in ECE aiming to secure market reforms, representative democracy, and a secular state (Smolar 2016). Regardless of later changes of position on many issues, several permanent tendencies can be observed in the political milieu of the PC that also characterize PiS. These concern mainly the party leadership, style of operation, confrontational attitude, tendency to escalate conflicts, moral rigor in the assessment of opponents, nostalgia for the “good old days” (pre-war Poland), anti-intellectualism, a tendency toward isolationism, an appeal to frustrated individuals, and treating democracy as majority rule not bound by procedural and institutional constraints.<sup>1</sup> Intellectuals identifying themselves with the party explain the political approach of PiS as necessitated by the dynamics of change and their resentments toward those holding power. In the words of one such intellectual, Marek Cichocki, an adviser to the late President Lech Kaczyński, PiS “got everything there was to gain. Nevertheless, it is still driven by a sense of injustice and exclusion which it previously experienced, even during the transformation period” (Cichocki 2016). The Polish combination of populism and conservatism is distinguished by the “national character,” rooted in the specifics of the local cultural background, the heritage of communism, and the weakness of democratic institutions. In turn, major changes in PiS, apart from the question of political tactics, occurred in the area of its ideological profile, intellectual basis, and theoretical inspirations.<sup>2</sup>

Representatives of the PiS government emphasize that they are part of the international trend of shifting public sentiment toward right-wing parties, and consider themselves defenders of Western traditions of culture and civilization, especially Christian values. PiS leaders refer to themselves as the “patriotic and

national camp,” the “independence” or “anti-system right” (Zybertowicz 2013), as well as the “social right,” along the lines of the British Conservatives after Brexit, Donald Trump, and the critique of liberal democracy by the German right-wing political theorist Carl Schmitt.<sup>3</sup> (Apart from Schmitt, the circles surrounding PiS regard the British conservative philosopher Roger Scruton as one of their intellectual influences.<sup>4</sup>) More concretely, they see PiS policies as an attempt to counter the globalization process, growing inequalities, and ideological threats, and party politicians often stress that they want to build relations with foreign partners on equal terms.

This new Polish mission in foreign policy rests on the idea that Poland—along with Hungary—can be at the forefront of activities enriching the EU with the greater participation of the countries located between Germany and Russia. One aspect of this concept is the reorientation of Polish foreign policy toward cooperation with the UK and the creation of an ECE alliance within the European Union as a counterweight to the domination of Germany and France. The core of this alliance is suggested to be the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Three Seas Initiative.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as a eurosceptic party, PiS supports the concept of a “Europe of homelands” and opposes Poland’s membership in the Eurozone.<sup>6</sup> They want to enrich European policy through the paradigm of national sovereignty and “a model of community based on greater diversity” (Szymański 2016, 1–6). A symbolic reflection of the changes in Poland’s European policy was the decision by the first PiS Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, to remove the EU flag from the background at her press conferences.<sup>7</sup> In reaction to the dispute with the Venice Commission and other EU institutions, the Polish parliament adopted on 21 May 2016 a resolution defining the EU as a threat to the sovereignty of the national state. In this interpretation, the myths and the consensus on which the neoliberal order in Poland had been built since the early 1990s, no longer applied, and a return to the previous status quo, sought after by the liberal elites, would no longer be possible (Cichoński 2016).

The chairman of the PiS parliamentary club regards the rule of his party as the most serious attempt to strengthen the Polish state in many years. He considers the long-running dispute over the Constitutional Court as a struggle for state sovereignty against an alliance of judges, political opponents, and Brussels. It is believed that the media in Western countries usually present a distorted picture of events taking place in Poland, equating the rise of PiS with the deterioration of democracy: “When the power goes to the conservative camp, the end of democracy is announced [by Western media]. There can be no approval of this” (Terlecki 2016).

The PiS emphasis on national sovereignty in foreign policy is combined with a different perception of the state–economy relationship and a refocus on national identity. The PiS-led government perceives the state mainly as an important tool for intervention in the economy and labor markets, for more redistributive power, and a reset of national self-awareness. The declared goal is to create more “comprehensive justice.” The most positive results of the government reforms so far they regard to be the introduction of patriotic education to

promote a “national vision” of the Polish past, the extension of redistribution mechanisms, and the open discussion about constitutional changes. In the words of Cichocki (2016),

a few years ago the question whether our constitutional order was correct, was a *faux pas* of the same type as criticizing the Balcerowicz plan at the beginning of the 1990s. [...] Sooner or later, we will have to construct a new system of our state.

The PiS proposals for institutional transformation are moving toward changing the entire political system of the country. The first unsuccessful attempt at this took place during the PiS-led coalition government of 2005–07. The core concept then was the appeal to create Poland’s Fourth Republic, justifying the creation of a series of new state institutions such as the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Institute of National Remembrance, the takeover of civil service positions by PiS-connected personnel, as well as reforms of the judiciary and the prosecutor’s office, which were to facilitate the exchange of the ruling elites and change the system rules. The term “impossibilism,” introduced then by right-wing politicians, was their popular critique of the legal and institutional constraints encountered by the PiS government in conflict with the Constitutional Court, the Polish National Bank, and most of the media. The current political and constitutional changes, including the conflict over the Court, the judiciary, and prosecutors, can be regarded as a continuation of the aborted reforms of that period (Kolarska-Bobińska 2017).<sup>8</sup>

The role model chosen by PiS for their national state rebuilding is de Gaulle’s early Fifth French Republic (Kaczyński et al. 2014). A consistent re-centralization of power and its concentration in the executive is regarded as a prerequisite for improving the quality of state institutions and democracy. PiS leaders also have two other role models in mind: Marshal Józef Piłsudski’s *coup d’état* of May 1926, which established in interwar Poland a semi-dictatorship and the authoritarian regime of *sanacja* (regenerative purge),<sup>9</sup> as well as Viktor Orbán’s government in Hungary from 2010, which often serves directly as a roadmap for Poland (see Dąbrowska et al. in this volume). In 2011, Jarosław Kaczyński stated that he is “deeply convinced that the day will come when we will have Budapest in Warsaw” (Góralczyk 2017, 93).

PiS leaders and supporters think that the previous governments pursued an anti-national policy which led to the Polish economy being controlled by foreign capital, large segments of the society being impoverished, the development prospects of youth being blocked by adverse changes in employment contracts, and the emigration of 2 million Poles. Reversing these anti-national measures, they say, justifies the use of forceful measures and the deterioration of democracy. The Constitutional Court, which in its unchanged form could block any laws passed by the new government, will serve as an example. “In order to implement reforms, the rulers must have their Court” (Kik 2016). PiS perceives itself as a party of protest—against the new political and economic system of Poland and especially against the Constitution of 1997.

Because of the dominance of its charismatic leader, its radical language criticizing the corruption of political elites, and the pathologies of the state as institution, as well as its animosity toward civil society, NGOs, and the like, this party should be described as authoritarian and populist in the area of political methods.<sup>10</sup> Its nationalist and xenophobic attitude toward immigrants, and the well-known patterns of sociocultural behavior rejecting the axiology of liberal, “cosmopolitan,” and left-wing elites, evidently bring PiS closer to the radical New Right parties of Western countries. Its strong conservative identity accentuating the close ties with most of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, advocacy of more religious education in schools, the radical criticism of “gender ideology,” the strengthened criminalization of abortion, and opposition to *in vitro* fertilization, prenatal testing, and the legalization of homosexual marriage (see Wiercholska in this volume) are unmistakable indicators of the PiS government’s ideology. And as the PiS replacement PM Mateusz Morawiecki in December 2017 was interviewed on the conservative Catholic TV station *Trwam* (“I endure”), he already underscored the need to “re-Christianize” a Europe that has betrayed its traditional values (Lipiński 2018).

At the same time, a critical attitude toward the neoliberal strategy of the post-communist transformation gives this party a certain left-wing appearance on the social and economic dimension. In the classification of 268 parties in 31 European countries by Inglehart and Norris (2016, 44), PiS is ranked as an economic left-wing party, similar to Orbán’s Hungarian Fidesz. The basis for this categorization is these parties’ focus on market regulation, state intervention in the economy, the expansion of the welfare state, and wealth redistribution.<sup>11</sup> As in many ECE countries, such drifting to the left on the economy is combined with a critique of the ruling elites and the liberal system. According to PiS leaders, the state is viewed primarily as an instrument or lever for political change and for redistributing wealth to the lower classes. With the level of national income lower than that usual in the West, and with the redistribution model that has been adopted, the PiS government has also taken on more pronounced class contours, finding expression in the mobilization of (and support from) the lower or working classes, small business, the poor, the excluded, and the inhabitants of rural areas, small towns, and provincial regions.

### **The “conservative modernization” strategy: genesis and main ideas**

Various circumstances have contributed to the rise of conservatism, populism, and rightist radicalism in Poland. On the cultural dimension, the patterns of behavior of the new conservatives and right-wing populist attitudes favor the marginalization of institutions in political life, and appeal to the values embodied in the general watchwords of the “anti-political” philosophy of dissidents and the Solidarity movement in the period of communist rule. These patterns are manifested in the radically instrumental treatment of the principles of the rule of law and disregard for democratic norms and procedures presented by politicians

of different political orientations. The consequence of such attitudes is conducting politics as a struggle *against* something, not *for* something, a Manichean battle between good and evil which does not accept compromise. The resulting atmosphere of polarization and conspiracy favors the rhetoric of the “stolen revolution” of 1989, seized by former or imagined communists and secret service agents (Mudde 2002), as well as by interest groups in a system of “multi-level clientelism” (Zybertowicz 2013).

Poland’s accession negotiations with the EU became a catalyst for the right-wing criticism of the neoliberal strategy of economic development. This strategy of “modernization through integration” with the West (Przeworski 1995) assumed that, because of the weakness of the development stimuli from the internal market, state, and middle class, the main driver of change in Poland should come from the outside, mainly the EU and its institutions, and foreign investors. However, the resulting “fast Europeanization” process created an atmosphere favorable to various fears (loss of cultural identity, or the “colonization” of the economy by foreign capital), as well as to the radicalization of the political scene. Institutional compulsion to implement the *acquis communautaire* formed a new matrix of interests and thereby, new terrain for ideological division. In Poland, this “EU effect” was strongest in the area of institutional adaptation and regulations supporting democratic procedures, but weaker in the normative area and in political culture. However, with the structural predominance of the EU, Poland was “Europeanized” primarily in its role as the recipient of EU policy (*policy-taker*) and not as one of its creators (*policy-maker*). This situation confirmed the thesis about the place of Poland on the “internal periphery” of the Union (Jasiecki 2008, 2013). Even before accession, right-wing elites began to see “potential long-term hazards which would transform Poland into a supply base of raw materials and cheap labor for the EU countries” (Rządowe Centrum Studiów Strategicznych 1998, 231).

Among right-wing politicians and experts, concerns were also raised about further reproducing Poland’s peripheral position in its relations with the “old” EU states. These concerns were expressed through critical references to theories of “modernization,” “dependency,” “world-system” and “regionalism” (Szczepański 2006; Zarycki 2016). Since the late 1990s some observers of political change have pointed out the difficult circumstances of European integration and the global capitalist system experienced by Poland and other countries of the region. Sociologists for example compared it to a greater-than-zero-sum game in which some (the “center states”) gain more and strengthen their advantage, and the “periphery states” gain less or lose out (Wnuk-Lipiński and Ziółkowski 2001, 34–5). Poland, like most ECE countries with a relatively low level of development and limited development potential for relations with Western states, entered a “semi-periphery,” similar to its situation before the Second World War (Berend 1996; Krasnodębski 2003; Kochanowicz 2006). Referring to dependency theory, PiS representatives argue that when public institutions, the economy, and civil society are weak, elites easily become structurally alienated and work as compradors for external headquarters (Szczepański 2006).

Some of these arguments are taken from international research on the emerging new versions of capitalism in ECE. In applying and modifying the varieties of capitalism approach of Hall and Soskice (2001), the political economy literature studying post-communist Europe has coined varying terms: foreign-led capitalism (Myant and Drahokoupil 2011), dependent market economy (Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009), or dependent liberal capitalism (King and Szelenyi 2005). Although also stressing the success of the foreign-led catch-up strategy, this literature points to the extremely high degree of transnationalization of the economy that appeared as foreign investors took over the largest Polish companies and core sectors, particularly in the financial, telecommunications, retail, and export sectors, as well as in the automotive industry. One key argument in this literature is that the fast integration into transnational value chains has limited the opportunities of Polish firms to upgrade their skills and technology, and to innovate (see Bluhm et al. 2014; Jasiński 2013).

Tomasz Żukowski (2005), a sociologist who advised the PiS leadership for many years, distinguished already in the mid-2000s two strategies for the development of Poland that represent two competing systems of values and economic interests. He termed the first one—dominant in the 1990s—“imported modernization,” carried out by the liberal and center-left groups including the majority of the intellectual elite, businesses that serve as intermediaries between the political class and foreign capital, the intelligentsia, most then government officials, and young professionals, all of whom are concentrated mainly in the larger cities. These elites aimed at combining Western values—individualism and liberalism—with values from the period of communist rule. This paradigm of modernization accepted only Western countries as the frame of reference (Offe 1996; Przeworski 1995). Designing and creating new institutions was considered primarily the transfer of existing Western solutions; a highly developed market society became the model of change.

The second strategy, crystallizing during the final stages of EU accession, rejects the strategy of an “imported modernization”; Żukowski calls it the “Polish road to modernization.” Within this framework, attempts are made to modernize the conservative identity and values of the indigenous cultural code and republican tradition, including the Solidarity movement. Its main proponents are leaders of rightist parties and intelligentsia rooted in the anti-communist and patriotic traditions, most of the hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Church, businesses fighting for their position in the domestic market (especially state-owned companies and small enterprises), the pro-family lobby, large parts of rural areas and small towns, and conservative youth. This mode of modernization not only intends to subordinate the domestic elites under national goals, but also to give the death blow to the spiritual and institutional legacy of communism (see Dąbrowska in this volume).

For the success of the new conservative model of modernization, its adherents see the urgent need for a new sense of loyalty toward the state. That is why they see the need for renewing the elite by changing its behavior and establishing new recruitment mechanisms, as well as reforms to the law and diligence in its

application, and the strengthening of the society’s normative structure including national remembrance structures and ceremonies (Krasnodębski 2005, 22–6; Gawin 2005, 34–5). With the global financial crisis, the influence has also increased of conservative concepts for strengthening domestic public institutions and businesses as important factors limiting the risks associated with turbulence on international markets. Therefore, PiS adherents see the new approach to economic development as a response to the crisis of neoliberalism itself. After the experiences of the first PiS government in the years 2005–07, the party presented voters with a new version of the “Polish road to modernization” in the two elections of 2015.

Mateusz Morawiecki, previously deputy prime minister and the most important person managing the economy in the PiS-led government, set forth the core idea of the new program even before he replaced Beata Szydło as prime minister on 11 December 2017:

[...] a sort of binary approach to economic theories, with total antagonism between centrally planned and neoliberal economies, resulted in the uncritical adoption, in Poland, of a development model which originated in Western European countries, with no account taken of historical and social specificity of Central and Eastern Europe. The fundament upon which we used to develop Polish capitalism and welfare until recently consisted of set of rules known as the Washington Consensus. The weakness of this model was that it seriously underrated the nature [...] of the post-communist reality. This classic neoliberal theory failed to really work in countries of our region. [...] The economic crises of 2009 became [the] occasion to revise all commonly recognized theories. I believe the 21st-century Poland should rely [...] upon a solid and sustainable economic growth achieved through re-industrialization of the economy and healthy development of innovative small and middle-sized enterprises, accompanied by socially-sensitive and territorially balanced development, as well as upon an efficient state and its institutions. All these things and intents assume an active role played by the state administration—in far-reaching opposition to *laissez-faire* concepts. [...] One of the most serious weaknesses of political economy in Poland after the transformation was the lack of synchronization between the growth of GDP and the growth of wealth of all social groups in the country. Economic growth, high as it was, was not adequately experienced by families and households, thus resulting in the sense of disappointment, frustration and hostile attitudes toward political elites. It was a mistake to believe, following the statements of the Washington Consensus, that [a] neoliberal economy would lead to alleviation of differences in the level of development.

(Morawiecki 2017b, 15–16)

Among the theoretical inspirations Morawiecki refers to are the Chinese economist Justin Yifu Lin, Mariana Mazzucato (author of *The Entrepreneurial*

State), and Thomas Piketty. “The myths have fallen [...] that capital has no nationality, that inequalities are good, that [...] industry is a relic of the 19th or 20th century, [...] [and] that the state is no longer needed by anyone” (Morawiecki 2017a, 11). The above quotations can be regarded as the ideological credo of the PiS government’s economic and social policy. However, their implementation is closely linked to the radical political and institutional changes characterized earlier, such as the reform or even dismantling of the checks-and-balances system, public media autonomy, civil service, prosecutors and judiciary, and even local governments and NGOs in the spirit of anti-liberal backlash, nationalistic populism, and centralization of power in a single decisional center (Chapman 2017; Pakulski 2016).

### **The PiS government approach to socio-economic policy**

The institutional expression of the new economic policy was the act of subordinating the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Finance, and the largest state-controlled banks and insurance companies under the then-cabinet minister Morawiecki. This restructuring was inspired by the idea that public institutions have the major task of stimulating innovation and that large companies are the most efficient type for accumulating capital and triggering technological progress, as was once seen in France or South Korea. The inspiration stems from Justin Yifu Lin (2012), a former chief economist and senior vice-president of the World Bank. The Polish response to his conception of the “New Structural Economics” can be found in the government position paper *Strategy for Responsible Development* (SRD), adopted officially by the government in February 2016 (Morawiecki 2017b, 16). SRD defines the state as the crucial agent in economic development, with a role going beyond that of regulation and supervision, and commits the government to greater support of large-scale infrastructure projects and selected industry sectors such as aviation, automotive, rail vehicles, and shipbuilding. Other important elements in the SRD are its flagship programs, such as “Electromobility,” “Polish Industry Platform 4.0,” and the “Capital Building Platform,” which are to include new employee pension funds.

A body that plays a major role in the implementation of the SRD is the Polish Development Fund (*Polski Fundusz Rozwoju*, PFR), which integrates many state-owned financial institutions such as the Industrial Development Agency (*Agencja Rozwoju Przemysłu*, ARP), the National Development Bank (*Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego*, BGK), the Export Credit Insurance Corporation (*Korporacja Ubezpieczeń Kredytów Eksportowych*, KUK), the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (*Polska Agencja Inwestycji i Handlu*, PAIH), and the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (*Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości*, PARP). Among the development tools they have at hand are financial guarantees, insurances, export credits, a fund for investments outside of Poland, and others. The priorities of the PFR group include infrastructure investments, innovations, development of entrepreneurship within Poland as well as the diversification of export destinations (away from Germany and the EU),



foreign expansion of Polish businesses, as well as handling foreign investments in Poland. For their implementation was earmarked in all about 60 billion Złoty (PLN). The focus, however, lies on the extension of support to export-oriented companies, so-called “national champions,” and large, state-initiated projects. A spectacular example of this ambitious development plan of the PiS-led government is the announced creation of the so-called Central Communication Port near Warsaw to be operational in 2027. The project comprises the construction of a new hub for intercontinental airlines and a railway center to facilitate the creation of a global metropolis, the Warsaw–Łódź binary city of 5 million residents. The cost of this public–private partnership—estimated at 30 billion PLN (7.5 billion euro)—indicates the inclination of the PiS toward large projects.<sup>12</sup>

Another important task of the PFR is its active participation in the “re-polonization” of strategic industries of the Polish economy such as financial services and the energy sector. PFR has already invested nearly 10 billion PLN in the Polish economy. The Ministry of Development also initiated a program of investment projects located *outside* larger agglomerations: 85 percent of the strategic investments supported by the government were made in Poland’s small and medium-sized towns. The same ministry has prepared a comprehensive reform of Polish economic law, a Business Constitution (a catalog of principles for running businesses, as well as rules that regulate the relationship between an entrepreneur and state bodies), and took steps to eliminate barriers to investment. The Ministry of Finance introduced a reform of the state treasury administration and is preparing, for the near future, a simple and transparent tax system to restore fair competition and marginalize the gray economic zone.

From the VoC perspective, it is still too early for an assessment of the outcomes of this new economic policy and the accompanying institutional changes, partly because they vary in pace and nature. In the economy, many processes are delayed and cumulative. Their impact is, therefore, hard to project. The interaction of different measurements in particular requires substantial research. However, after two years of rule by the PiS-led government, I can identify some major changes of the Polish capitalism. They mainly apply to: (1) the rules of economic coordination; (2) corporate governance; (3) the welfare state; and (4) industrial relations. In terms of economic coordination, there is a strengthening of the role of the state in the economy similar to that of other former communist countries like Hungary, Croatia, and Estonia (Voszka 2016, 620).

### *The rules of economic coordination*

Many right-wing politicians believe that Poland will gain with a better coordination of market actors a new tool for raising the country’s position in the international division of labor, while reducing dependence on and costs of foreign capital (like the cost of servicing investors).<sup>13</sup> They hope to achieve stronger cooperation among indigenous companies and sectors that can add more value nationally, develop new ways of domestic capital accumulation and financing innovation.

A more effective and intense coordination of economic activities can be reached in different ways. Liberal economies focus on the improvement of the quality of institutions and on organizational innovations. Coordinated market economies seek social dialogue, workers' participation, and collective agreements on a more consensual road to development (Williamson 1985; Hicks and Kenworthy 2003). A characteristic feature of the PiS government policy is, in contrast, the acquisition, centralization, and consolidation of the state's economic power. Poland has a strong tradition of statism and economic nationalism, resulting from both the period of the communist system and the reconstruction of the country after the partitions and the First World War. Despite its anti-communism, PiS favors a model of "state capitalism" based on a high proportion of state ownership and vertical, state-centered coordination of the economy and other spheres of social life (such as social policy, housing, civil society, local government, or media) in the hands of central government executives.

A manifestation of this development is the recentralization of state power and the partial reversal of privatization, which significantly reduces horizontal coordination among economic actors. Following the idea of a unitary state, central authorities cut back competences of regional and local bodies, as for example with the central takeover of *voivodship* environmental protection funds (in large part EU-sourced), and government opposition to regionalism (such as in Upper Silesia).

Poland already has a large state-owned sector, among the largest in post-communist ECE.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the government introduced additional restrictions on the sale of publicly owned assets (companies, health care, land, water, etc.). For instance, having taken over the Alior Bank from French owners and Bank PKO SA from the Italian Credit Union Group, domestic capital (controlled mainly by the government) now owns more than 52 percent of the banking sector.<sup>15</sup> Also, over 60 percent of electricity in Poland is currently produced by the state energy sector (Błaszczuk 2016, 536). In addition, state-owned companies often serve as a means to buy other business entities in order to promote "national champions." Large state-owned energy companies finance the start-ups with seed money coordinated from within the government.

### ***Corporate governance***

Poland's state-owned companies are small in number but large in size. State-owned companies dominate the "Top 100" list of national companies. As a consequence, the government's involvement in price determination, and its involvement in network sectors (banking, energy, railways), has also had a growing impact in the operation of private companies. State-owned companies are "islands" that serve—as the governments in Poland and Hungary have recently suggested—"as models for expanding the state's role in the economy" (Pula 2017, 23).<sup>16</sup> An important dimension of the new economic policy is corporate governance. The government's new regulatory and ownership policies change corporate governance rules, adversely affecting the entire economy,

including the private sector. The right-wing parties have set out to fill positions not only in state-owned companies and civil service with political loyalists, but also in state economic administrations and business institutions (government agencies, economic diplomacy, etc.).

There has been an increase in the politicization of the public sector, weakening the role of meritocratic and market criteria in the decisions of economic actors. Such a government policy led by a party can introduce great chaos and confusion into the economy (Błaszczuk 2016; Kozarzewski 2016). Large state monopolies, as legacies of state socialist industrialization, are being rebuilt with unclear interdependencies, thereby increasing the uncertainty of business conditions. The importance of meritocracy is declining, and the role of political rent and the influence of business interest groups that take advantage of companies for the benefit of the political elite and the creation of clientele relationships are increasing (Błaszczuk 2016, 550–51). The government prefers state-owned companies—not the private sector (Gomułka 2017, 5). A manifestation of this phenomenon are regulations that have blocked the development of wind farms by state-owned energy companies.

### *Welfare state*

PiS won two elections in 2015, which is mainly attributable to its promise of a planned radical change in social policy—the largest social transfers since 1989. A social policy focused on providing support to large families (in the form of monthly financial allowances for a second and each subsequent child in the family, approximately 125 euro or 135 dollars) became a priority for the government. It also restored the possibility of early retirement (back to 60 years for women and 65 for men), raised the minimum wage and minimum pensions, introduced free medications for people over 75, and initiated a program of low-cost social housing. The PiS-led government has confirmed the thesis of Tavits and Letki (2009) that right-wing governments in the ECE engage in greater social spending than left-wing and liberal parties. These policies are being implemented by the government with the support of trade unions (especially Solidarity), who have approved the changes undertaken by the government and the parliamentary majority. According to liberal critics, the government is trying to enlarge the PiS electorate through social transfers, an electorate seen as made up mainly of the “losers” in the transformation—the lower social classes, laborers and farmers, residents of rural areas, small towns and villages, who are the government’s main base of social support.

However, even left-wing critics of PiS admit that the social policy of the government is a clear step toward reducing income disparities and equalizing prospects and opportunities for all Poles, especially children (Jarosz and Kozak 2016).<sup>17</sup> The index of financial inequalities within Polish society has decreased. “[...] [C]ompared to September 2015, by April 2017 the difference between the wealthiest 25 percent and the least well-off 25 percent people in Poland fell from a level of 5.9 to 4.4!” (Morawiecki 2017b). Polls show that over 40 percent of

Polish people evaluate the country's current economic situation as good, and recent economic data indicate economic growth above 4 percent GDP per annum, wage increases, a drop in unemployment to 5–6 percent, and a more effective value-added tax (VAT) collection policy producing 28 percent more budget revenue than in 2016. Most Poles support the active role of the state in both the economy (including public ownership) and social policy. PiS emerged as the largest political party after opposing PO's liberal economic reform program and presenting the first, seemingly alternative “anti-reform” government program since the beginning of the post-socialist transition (Rae 2015). Its implementation to date is yet another attempt to redirect the path of dependence shaped by the recent history of Poland.

### ***Industrial relations***

The Eurofound (2016) report depicts Poland as having a fragmented and state-centered industrial relations (IR) regime of increasing government unilateralism, a leading role for the state in IR, and an irregular and politicized role for social partners in public policy. Polish business associations and trade unions are regarded as weak because of their pluralist mode of interest-group/government interaction in addition to industrial fragmentation, which makes it difficult to reach common positions. Employer associations' density rates have been below 20 percent and trade union density rates at around 15 percent—among the lowest in the EU. Collective bargaining coverage in Poland is at 15 percent, while the EU average is 60 percent (see Wenzel 2016; Trappmann et al. 2014). The weakness of social and civil dialogue facilitates the implementation of the PiS neo-etatist policy. The close coalition of PiS with Solidarity suggests that the processes of politicization and neo-etatization of IR are likely to continue. The PiS government has seized on the earlier institutional “abandonment of employees” (*porzucenie pracowników*) by companies and power elites to now claim to be the “protector” of the working world, showing that it “does not like to share power on key issues” (Gardawski 2016; Mrozowicki et al. 2015). The government has increased the minimum wage (exceeding the demands of trade unions), restored the former retirement age, reduced the scope of the interim agreements and flexible job contracts (“junk” jobs), and begun a gradual reduction of retail commerce on Sundays. Under such circumstances, the government aims to gain significant employee support, while the tripartite Social Dialogue Council has been marginalized, and unions and business associations, ideologically and politically divided, are weak.

### **The fundamental controversy over the “conservative modernization” strategy**

The ideology, objectives, and methods of PiS leaders have caused major tensions and conflicts in Polish society among elites and experts, as well as with some member states and EU institutions. The fundamental dispute about the model of

the state seems to apply not only to the specific institutional solutions, but also to the two visions of democracy. The first one is liberal democracy, covering issues such as the protection of individual rights, the protection of minorities against arbitrary domination of the majority, the principle of the rule of law, and the system of restrictions on arbitrary power. The second vision is associated with the statist concept of the state, whose representatives, chosen in general elections, are given the legitimacy to carry out autonomously the implementation of their policies, and are only to a small extent subject to social control (Hausner et al. 2015, 118–19). The exercise of PiS authority vis-à-vis state institutions, and in its economic policy, follows the second vision. The main declared economic goal of the PiS government is to overcome the peripheral dependence of the Polish economy on Western countries and thereby avoid a stagnating “middle-income trap.”

Some economists and business circles believe that the diagnoses and goals of the government’s Responsible Development Strategy largely correspond to the needs of the current stage of Poland’s development. It is an ambitious, innovative concept, partly corresponding to the methods of stimulating economic initiatives by means of EU funds (Nowak 2017; Ryć 2017). The arguments against the concept of “conservative modernization” mainly find fault with the role of the state and the choice of role models for development. Comparison with the examples set by developing Asian states, or the Hungarian government of Viktor Orbán, raises many doubts. The Asian model, based on the strong role of the state and its active industrial policy, is rooted in a different system of values and in the authoritarian institutions of those political systems. It has a specific character that would be difficult to apply in Poland. The distinguishing features of this successful model are an efficient and substantially adjusted state administration, a society not having strong democratic aspirations (at least initially), and widespread agreement over the direction of modernization activities. None of these distinguishing features are found in Poland (Góralczyk 2017; Jędrzejczak and Sterniczuk 2017).

Similarly, attempts to transfer Hungary’s established patterns of autocratic state governance (Mihályi 2016; Voszka 2016) to Poland will continue to generate political and social conflicts, often threatening government plans. An example is the arbitrary exchange of personnel in the public sector, as well as the social protests erupting in reaction to PiS policies on the judiciary and women’s rights (Wierzcholska in this volume). Hungarian–Polish comparisons indicate a similar growing role of political rent and business groups taking advantage of companies for the benefit of the political elite, and an increase in the creation of clientele relationships. Regulatory actions strengthening the state weaken the capital market, diminishing the role of minority shareholders in state-owned companies and leading to the hybridization of ownership, fuzzy ownership structures and unclear interdependencies between state-owned subsidiaries. Such changes worsen the quality of institutions, manifested in the emergence of cronyism, state capture, and systemic corruption (Martin 2017; Błaszczuk 2016).

Even conservatives who previously supported PiS argue that the strategy and mode of operation adopted by party leaders after the elections will make it impossible for the government to reach the declared objectives, while the escalation of conflicts leads to drastic social divisions, raises legal uncertainty, and lowers the guarantee of citizens' rights. They too conclude that this kind of government policy, together with distrust toward independent institutions, reduces the chances for modernizing the state and impairs the position of Poland in the international arena (Ujazdowski 2017).<sup>18</sup>

The PiS mode of operation centers around two poles of authority: a non-constitutional political headquarters with the PiS leader in charge, and the government, headed by the prime minister with a limited "personal decision-making ability." Such a duality weakens the efficiency of coordination of the state administration, which is important under conditions of high political tension in the country and in international relations. There are also conflicts among interest groups within the government, as well as tensions between Poland's president and some ministers in the government. PiS politicians already demonstrated, in the years 2005–07, the limited efficiency of such a model of a governing party's new version of a nomenclature system (Szałamacha 2009).

Other controversies result from the methods of implementing the PiS "conservative modernization" and from tensions between its short- and long-term consequences. Morawiecki's development plan is formulated at a strategic level, but so far the government has not presented instruments suitable to achieve the announced goals (Gomułka 2017; Wojtyna 2017; Czerniak and Rapacki 2017).<sup>19</sup> Few elements have been implemented because of insufficient means of finance. Moreover, the government's top priority is social and political goals, while economic policy mainly targets consumption and is treated as an instrument for changing the state institutions, not for upgrading the economy.<sup>20</sup> The recent growth in spending and consumption has been favored by a continued good economic situation, a housing boom, high consumer optimism, rising employment and wages, and a drop in unemployment. Large social transfers put into effect since 2016 have brought PiS public support of about 40 percent of respondents in polls. The boost in consumption triggered a short-term GDP growth (probably until around 2019), but many economists and business associations criticize the excessive redistributive public spending at the expense of development. Stimulating household consumption by significantly increased budget outlays has created a strategic contradiction between social policy and an increase in the rate of domestic savings on the one hand, and the announced investment in economic development, national innovation capacity, and domestic capital rates on the other.

Government actions to stimulate private investment are not statistically noticeable. Scholars trace the lack of success in this regard to numerous regulatory changes (Osiatyński 2017) and political uncertainty (Gomułka 2017; Jasiński 2017). The two most important government social programs—the "500+" program and lowering the retirement age—will have significant economic consequences in the longer term. The "500+" program supports current economic growth, but its pro-development role will decrease. Lowering the

pension age already has caused a rapid increase in budget expenditure and has a negative effect on the labor market. The programs limit investment opportunities in Poland, especially with the prospect of the economic slowdown forecasted by international economic organizations and reductions in EU funds in the coming years. They will permanently deplete the rate of domestic savings and will necessitate more borrowing abroad or tax increases. In turn, higher tax revenues resulting from an increase of over 4 percent in GDP in 2017 and VAT receipts, do not eliminate the medium- and long-term need to limit public finances (especially with the needed increased spending on pensions and health care in an aging society).<sup>21</sup>

The future of the Polish energy industry is also controversial, particularly as analyzed in the context of climate policy. The government has not presented a coherent vision of the development of the Polish energy sector. It is unknown what the structure of the energy mix after 2030 and later will be. The construction of nuclear power plants has been announced, while there has been a simultaneous distancing of policy from the promotion of diversified and renewable energy sources. The government declares that future energy production will be based mainly on Poland’s hard coal reserves (Ruszkowski 2018).

The main challenge for the strategy of “conservative modernization” is, however, the new Poland–EU relationship, both in political and economic terms. According to government estimates, half of the investments in Morawiecki’s plan are to be financed from EU structural funds. It is unknown whether and how the political problems between Poland and the EU concerning the EU’s standards on the rule of law in member states may affect foreign investment in Poland, as well as the size of the EU budget after 2020 (the European Commission’s future payment of structural funds may depend on Poland’s compliance with rule-of-law standards). Brexit, too, may cause a significant reduction in the EU budget, including money for Poland.

## Concluding remarks

Many researchers point out that the success of PiS is based on the (often) accurate diagnoses of weaknesses in Poland’s development, especially in social policy. But also, the global financial crisis, Eurozone crisis, Russian military expansion, and the massive influx of migrants into the EU have increased the importance of such issues as national sovereignty, constitutionalism, and self-determination, which are usually characteristic of the ideology of right-wing parties, including PiS. These coincided with the erosion and ideological emptiness of the liberal elites, the disintegration of the Left, as well as a wave of social protest of patriotic-nationalist and religious-conservative nature. The effects are a growing anti-liberal, euroskeptical, and nationalistic movement in Polish society, with catchy slogans—such as “good change” (*dobra zmiana*)—calling for the defense of national interests and continued “conservative modernization.” Supporters believe that, in strengthening the state, a new social community can be forged based on a traditional Polish identity and the mobilization of domestic

capital. PiS has proved itself the most influential faction in this movement, with the results of the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections (and subsequent opinion polls) giving it still more momentum.

PiS leaders believe that under the conditions of the global crisis of capitalism (including the Eurozone and EU institutions), the concentration of political and economic power around the leadership of the ruling party gives greater opportunities for the country's development than market liberalism. The "conservative modernization" strategy (or the "Polish road to modernization") is meant as a "grand plan" to break out of the "dependent market economy," the middle-income trap, and Poland's position on only the "inner periphery" of the EU, which the PiS government fears will be a lasting threat without a radical shift in politics. This shift they perceive will be even more needed in order to prepare for a new "Europe of homelands" (*Europa ojczyzn*) in which they would like to see Poland play a crucial and not just peripheral role.

"Conservative modernization" means, in Poland as in Hungary, that the central state administration becomes the major agent in coordinating economic interaction and development, which includes the renationalization of private property in areas crucial to the "national interest." Thus, Poland is moving toward a model of "state capitalism" that combines an intervening central state in the economy (based on extended state ownership) with an expansion of the redistributive state. This has made PiS—along with the nationalist Fidesz in Hungary—one of "the most popular ruling parties in Europe" (*The Economist* 2017).

From the perspective of historical sociology, Polish "conservative modernization" represents part of an international counter-movement to market fundamentalism characterized, in Karl Polanyi's analysis, by xenophobia, nationalism, and the spectacular rise of radical right-wing populist parties, as in the "fascist situation" of the 1930s (Bohle and Greskovits 2012, 270–71). PiS leaders have an anachronistic vision of the state. In many policy fields, they look backwards: in environmental and climate policy, women's rights and education. They under-rate the importance of the quality of institutions, dismantle autonomous institutions, degrade (or radically modify) the established checks-and-balances system, the rule of law, and minority rights. Trusting only in itself, PiS weakens capabilities in society that are developing toward the horizontal coordination of economic, civil, and political actors and the participation of social partners (unions, employer associations) in the regulation of labor markets and conditions, while escalating conflicts. At the same time, it feeds the formation of clientelistic networks and patronage. The PiS leadership cares little about the tensions between economic and social policy, nor whether their methods of implementation fit their ambitious goal of innovation and a fast upgrade of the economy. Contrary to their intentions, therefore, they are putting Poland in danger of sinking even deeper into the middle-income trap and of losing the development and position the country has already achieved, while exacerbating the social anomia they have allegedly been trying to overcome through their notions of conservative morality and social justice.



## Notes

- 1 Referring to PiS, its leader compares it to a Leninist party of a new type, composed “of people prepared, proven, capable of disciplined action” (Kaczyński 2016, 382). As pointed out by one of the former associates and competitors of Jarosław Kaczyński, in his political activity he is “a kind of romantic and populist *tout court*.” However,  

Kaczyński has decided that he must expose to the people yet another enemy [...] feeding the low passions of the masses became a new way of doing politics [...] which is ready to sacrifice everything else, including the state, in order to mobilize the[ir] collective passions.

(Rokita and Krasowski 2013, 272–8)
- 2 The new shift toward populism, conservatism, and rightist radicalism among young people in V4 countries is described in the *Aspen Review Central Europe* (no. 02/2017).
- 3 Not coincidentally, the conservative philosophical yearbook *Teologia Polityczna* (Political Theology) refers with its title to one of Carl Schmitt’s most famous books. This yearbook focuses on well-known figures in the academic world and societal groups, some of whom have become part of the new political elites and media (see Dąbrowska, this volume).
- 4 On 21 June 2016 at the “Congress Poland—Great Project,” organized under the patronage of President Andrzej Duda, Roger Scruton received an honorary prize named after President Lech Kaczyński.
- 5 The Three Seas Initiative is the joint Polish–Croatian political and economic project representing 12 EU member states located between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) which cooperate in the field of transport infrastructure, energy security, roads, and railways. This initiative was supported by the Donald Trump administration during his visit to Warsaw on 6 July 2017.
- 6 In 2017 public opinion polls, the largest part of Polish respondents (32 percent) agrees that PiS aims to reduce integration and increase the role of nation states in the EU. The belief that the ruling party wants Poland to leave the EU is expressed by 17 percent of respondents (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2017).
- 7 PiS politicians justified this decision by the failure to officially establish the flag and the anthem of the EU as a result of the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. Ryszard Legutko, chairman of the PiS delegation to the European Parliament, has consistently refused to rise during Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, considered to be the anthem of the EU (Legutko 2015).
- 8 “In order to reform the Polish judiciary, it is necessary to change the constitution.” For more on the demands for political and system changes in Poland according to the PiS concept, see Kaczyński (2011).
- 9 Piłsudski’s new Polish constitution (1935) provided for the massive extension of presidential powers, including a suspensive veto, dissolution of the legislature, dismissal of the cabinet and of individual ministers, the authority to issue ordinances with the force of law, and the appointment of one-third of all senators. This was to become a partial model for Gaullist France’s charter of 1958 (Rothschild 1998, 69). The official motto of the PiS government’s economic strategy quotes Piłsudski’s words—“Poland will be great, or it will not be at all.”
- 10 The rhetoric of PiS politicians reminds one of the concept of the “leader democracy” or “electoral autocracy,” which marginalizes the separation of powers, rule of law, the right to opposition and minority rights. Ágh (2015) shows, on the example of Hungary, the establishment of such a system with a reference to the concept of the *Führerdemokratie* of Max Weber. See also Lengyel and Ilonszki (2016).

- 11 For Poland and Hungary's similarities and differences in their political situation and institutional changes, see Chapman (2017), Pakulski (2016) and Błaszczuk (2016).
- 12 The initiative "Central Communication Port" refers back to the construction of the port and city of Gdynia, one of the largest Polish investments of the 1920s and 1930s. The development of Gdynia became the symbol of a new Poland, revived after the First World War.
- 13 According to Morawiecki (2017a, 8), annually around 4.5 percent of Poland's GDP is revenue accruing to foreign capital interests.
- 14 In various estimates, the state's share in all sectors of the Polish economy ranges from 16 to 25 percent (Kozarzewski 2016, 559). Of all ECE countries Poland has the greatest number (15) of state-owned firms in the top 100 firms by country. On the role and scope of state ownership in ECE, see Pula (2017).
- 15 Proposals to "repolonize" financial institutions purchased by foreign investors in the framework of privatization began being put forward and implemented by the PiS government from 2015. The dominance of foreign investors brought about the transfer of costs of stabilization by the global banks to their subsidiaries by reducing those banks' capital, increasing dividends, or transferring deposits to the parent companies. Business models of foreign capitalization proved in many cases unsuitable to the needs of Polish economic policy (Jasiiecki 2013, 289–309).
- 16 See the results of a joint project of the Polish and the Hungarian Academies of Sciences, *Development pattern of CE countries after the 2007–2009 crises, on the example of Poland and Hungary*, Economic Studies no. 4 (XCI) 2016.
- 17 From 1 April 2016 the government introduced the family program "500+" (a 500-PLN child benefit). By July 2017, 3.8 million children were enrolled in this program. All parents, regardless of income, receive it for a second and subsequent children—benefit is provided to over 57 percent of children under 18 years of age. In the countryside it is 64 percent of children, in urban communes, up to 51 percent of children, and in urban-rural communes, 60 percent of children (Raport 2017).
- 18 Some sociologists have defined the behavior of PiS as "anti-communist Bolshevism" for replacing the law with the political will of the ruling party which seeks the depreciation and later arrogation of the autonomous institutions of the system of balance of powers. One of them calls the party's actions
 

an attempt to carry out a revolution in the majesty of law through taking advantage of legal loopholes [...], reinterpreting the regulations and taking over the competences of some bodies by others. All this to carry out something that could not be done through abiding by the rules, that is, to control or to depreciate the Constitutional Court.

(Staniszki 2016)
- 19 Poland has the lowest propensity to save and the lowest investment rate of the ECE countries. Contrary to the government's announcements that the share of investments in GDP would increase from 18 to 25 percent, this share in the last two years has decreased to around 17 percent (Gomułka 2017, 6).
- 20 The PiS economic policy resembles the rule of Edward Gierek in the early 1970s, when the investment development was largely financed by foreign debt (Gomułka 2017, 9). This similarity of the PiS economic policy to that of the early 1970s is also underscored by the former head of E. Gierek's economic advisors, Paweł Bożyk. He cites the centralization of economic management, and authorities who ignored the opinions of experts (Bożyk 2017).
- 21 According to the European Commission, the structural deficit in Poland is expected to reach 3.3 percent of GDP in 2018 (compared with 2.3 percent in 2015), which will be one of the worst results throughout the EU (Czerniak and Rapacki 2017, 114).

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**Part II**

**Translations**



# 8 The limits of conservative influence on economic policy in Russia

*Irina Busygina and Mikhail Filippov*

## Introduction

This volume argues that in recent years “conservatism” has become a new meta-frame and an “ideology” for those who challenge the liberal order. As Katharina Bluhm shows in her chapter, the conservative turnaround in Russia has two main sources: the first is the support for conservatism “from above”—from the centers of power around President Putin; and the second source is the conservative movement by intellectuals and political activists who do not belong to Russia’s political establishment. For both groups, a “conservative” view on economics and economic policy is an important element. In our chapter, we will focus on the economic and public policy positions of Russian conservatives. Analyzing the ideas of several of the most influential groups and individuals, we label them “Russian conservative economists,” though not all of them are economists by education or occupation. We also use the term “conservative” in the sense of a self-definition by these actors; that is to say, Russian “conservative economists” are those who publicly identify themselves as supporting anti-liberal principles and propose alternative economic and public policy programs. The self-identification criterion leaves many prominent individuals outside the camp of conservative thinkers even if their views are very similar to the views of self-proclaimed supporters of “Russian-style” conservatism. Still, in Russia the camp of self-identified conservatives unites not only ideologists of the extreme right or left, but many mainstream public figures and well-known intellectuals seeking to influence public policies.

Most importantly, Russian President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev belong to the self-proclaimed “conservatives.” Thus, in fall 2009, Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party held its convention in St. Petersburg, where “Russian Conservatism” was declared to be the party’s official motto. The party declared its intention of combining conservatism with a program of economic modernization, while the party’s principal task, as both Putin and Medvedev told convention delegates in St. Petersburg, was to bring about Russia’s economic and technological modernization without tampering with the country’s political regime (Trenin 2010). In a 2013 interview Vladimir Putin (2013) described himself as a “pragmatist with a conservative bent.” In Putin’s view,

conservatism certainly does not mean stagnation. Conservatism means reliance upon traditional values, but with a necessary additional element aimed at development. It seems to me that this is an absolutely essential thing.

In 2018, the year of Putin's re-election to another six-year term, practically all Russian conservatives publicly supported (and increasingly so over time) his incumbency.<sup>1</sup> None of them was in open opposition to Putin. Even those belonging to communist groups claimed that there was no alternative to Putin as the political leader of Russia. However, at the same time it was quite common to criticize the Putin government and, in particular, to blame some officials for the neoliberal economic course promoted by the pro-Western economic block of the government. While the political leaders of Russia are self-proclaimed conservatives, since the 1990s the official economic course had been largely determined and implemented by a group of "liberal" economists. These economists were strongly influenced by the ideas of neoliberal economics, political science, and development studies.

Thus, while supporting Putin as the political leader and rejecting liberalism in politics, Russian conservatives have proposed a variety of alternative economic programs. The alternatives advocated by them have been aimed at persuading Putin to change official economic policies, as all of them insist that their alternatives are fully consistent with Putin's conservative political agenda, but could serve it better than the current status-quo economic course.

In this chapter our main claim is that the influence of conservative ideology on economics in Russia is likely to remain limited. The liberal economists have gradually accepted and adopted conservative political ideas, but continue to promote liberal economic policies. The conservative politicians and public intellectuals are increasingly interested in developing "conservative" alternatives to liberal economic policies, but their proposals are unlikely to be acceptable to Putin. At most, Putin could adopt some elements of the alternative economic politics offered by the conservatives. The status quo in economic policies is therefore likely to prevail as long as Putin's regime is relatively stable.

There is significant heterogeneity of economic platforms within the Russian conservative camp. One segment of this camp advocates conservative anti-liberal ideas in political, social, and cultural life while continuing to support "liberal" economic policies. Most importantly, they argue in favor of a *limited economic role for the state*. In that respect, the Russian "liberal" conservative economists share the economic views of their conservative counterparts in Europe and the US.

Another group of conservatives advocates a more consistent combination—anti-liberalism in all spheres of social life, including economics. They all favor a greater role of the state in the economy, though disagree concerning the specific economic priorities of the state. In this respect, some differences between socialists and nationalists are noticeable.

Yet another small (though often quite vocal) segment of conservatives in modern Russia presents itself as seeking an economic alternative to both

socialism and liberalism (belonging to this segment in particular are Dugin and Prokhanov). These claim to promote the “third” or even the “fourth” economic alternative to capitalism, socialism, and all their various combinations. For instance, Dugin presents his agenda as

radical de-urbanization and a return to agricultural practice, to the creation of sovereign farmers’ communities [...]. This isn’t about the building of a system of economics that is more effective than liberalism [...] but a religious, eschatological battle against death.

(Dugin 2012)<sup>2</sup>

Overall there is a very significant variety of positions among the economists with anti-liberal political views—from those promoting the neoliberal economic principles of “liberal conservatism” and “liberal empire” to the advocates of protecting the Russian economy from global competition and the supporters of the “Fortress Russia” model. It is also worth noting that the diversity of economic views among Russian conservatives largely reflects (though not exclusively) their differences regarding the evaluation of the Soviet and post-Soviet experiences. This diversity also reflects the instrumental, “catch-all” character of conservatism for Putin’s administration (Laruelle 2017).

Despite many differences and disagreements among them, practically all self-identified Russian anti-liberals share the view that Russia urgently needs economic and technological modernization, economic reforms being crucial to restore Russia’s geopolitical status and military capability, as well as strengthening state capacity. Thus, all Russian conservatives are in favor of economic reforms and modernization.<sup>3</sup> Their particular concern, however, is the choice of an appropriate economic model that would serve as a basis for economic modernization. They all advocate some form of unique or special “Russian path” of economic modernization that would not provoke a transition to liberal democracy in Russia. Thus, rejection of liberal democracy is *the marker* of all conservatives in Russia. Specific segments inside the conservative camp would also like to avoid many other “by-products” of economic modernization—for example increasing Western cultural influence or challenges to the influence of the Orthodox religion. More generally, as Chebankova noted: “conservative thinkers do not reject modernity as a project, but rather propose to develop a culturally specific Russian version” (Chebankova 2013, 287).

For some conservatives, Russia is not yet ready for liberal democracy; yet most conservatives would prefer to avoid liberal democracy in Russia forever. All of them emphasize various shortcomings of liberal democracy and, especially, the risks of *transition* to democracy. In the view of Russian conservatives, liberal democracy is inconsistent with: (1) unpopular but necessary measures of economic reform; (2) political stability; (3) a strong state; (4) territorial integrity; (5) measures necessary to upgrade Russia’s geopolitical status; (6) military buildup; (7) Russian culture; (8) family values; (9) the values of the Orthodox religion.

At the official level, the search for a special model of economic and technological modernization that would not lead to liberal democracy began with the promotion of the concept of “sovereign democracy” in 2006 (Krastev 2006). The concept had to shield Russia from the influence of Western political models (Krastev 2006; Okara 2007; Hassner 2008). It became an official position by the end of the second constitutional term of president Putin (2004–08).

According to Urnov (2012), the first version of conservative modernization ideology had already been presented in the 2008 government’s “Strategic Concept 2020” and in Putin’s speech of the same year, on which it has been based (Putin 2008). In November 2009, United Russia has described itself as a “conservative force” promoting economic and technological “modernization” in Russia. “Conservative modernization [...] has become the leitmotiv of the Kremlin’s policy agenda” and the key element of such a conservative modernization was the preservation of the existing political model (Trenin 2010).

Since 2008, two distinct stages in the development of Russian conservative economic programs have been observable—a stage before and a stage after the drop in world energy prices. While these prices remained high, it was theoretically possible for the Russian government to implement economic and technological modernization in an orderly way using billions in revenue from energy exports. So it is no wonder that during that period the debates among Russian conservatives focused mostly on how much export revenue could be spent without losing macroeconomic stability (for example by provoking inflation). After the collapse in energy prices the main focus has shifted to the issue of where to get money, how much to borrow, and whether it would be possible to further lower the living standards of some sectors of the population. In the second period, options for economic and technological modernization that do not risk provoking political reforms have become much more restricted. In fact, the primary focus now is on alternative models of state-led technological development, which is arguably still feasible under a federal budget deficit and increasing military spending. The alternative conservative programs promise to provide successful development of military-related technologies with the limited resources available.

In the next section, we review theoretical explanations of the reasons why authoritarian regimes such as Russia seek models of economic modernization that avoid the development of liberal democracy in their nations. We then detail the conservative economic modernization that has been implemented by Putin’s regime. Finally, we consider some details of major economic alternatives offered by conservatives in Russia.

### **Theory: instrumental value of conservatism for authoritarian regimes**

As stated above, from an economic perspective, Russian-style conservatism is essentially an attempt to launch economic and technological modernization without liberal democracy. The most important constraints of such a type of

modernization lie in the question of how to avoid developments that would provoke societal demand for democratization. Russia is not unique in this respect—in fact, from Belarus to Kazakhstan, non-democratic regimes across the post-Soviet space practice various models of such modernization. A comparative study of the literature provides several complementary theoretical explanations as to why many authoritarian regimes have to promote economic modernization while trying to avoid liberal democracy. For instance, Samuel Huntington predicted that “non-Western civilizations will continue attempts to acquire the wealth, technology, skills, machines and weapons that are part of being modern” (Huntington 1993, 49). They will also attempt to “modernize but not to Westernize” their political systems and societies (*ibid.*, 41).

The major risk of economic modernization for authoritarian leaders is that modernization could change the balance of power in society and create demand for democracy. As Lipset (1959) has pointed out, democracy requires certain societal preconditions, and economic modernization helps to develop them. In particular, if economic growth leads to economic prosperity, it could then promote the demands of the middle class for the institutional protection of property rights and more opportunities for participation in public affairs. A popular version of this argument emphasizes the increasing role of taxation in economic development and stresses that taxation leads to demands for political representation. To summarize, economic growth and technological development are likely to provoke societal calls for political reforms toward democracy.

In *Why Nations Fail*, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that *strategic* authoritarian leaders are likely to accept only a limited choice of methods for promoting economic prosperity, excluding most alternatives as being unacceptably risky to their political status. Most importantly, authoritarian leaders have to maintain control over how that increased prosperity is distributed, and who has economic and political power. Otherwise, economic progress may redistribute income and power in such a way that an authoritarian leader and his political supporters might become worse off. Economic growth and technological change are accompanied by what Joseph Schumpeter called creative destruction. The process of economic growth creates losers as well as winners in the economic marketplace and the political arena. Fear of losing the status of political incumbency often lies at the root of the resistance to creating opportunities for economic development (*ibid.*, 84).

Furthermore, according to Acemoglu and Robinson (*ibid.*), economic and technological development in authoritarian regimes is possible as long as it does not challenge the power of incumbency. For example, growth is possible “when elites can directly allocate resources to high-productivity activities that they themselves control” (*ibid.*, 91). Therefore, political centralization becomes the key to promoting growth under authoritarian regimes. However, even though such regimes “can generate some growth, they will usually not generate sustained economic growth, and certainly not the type of growth that is accompanied by creative destruction” (*ibid.*, 94).

Schlumberger (2008) has defined the prevailing model of economic development in non-democratic countries (including Russia) as “patrimonial capitalism”—an economic order that is strongly shaped by the political order and informal power relations. “Non-democratic governance is a necessary condition for patrimonial capitalism to emerge and survive over time” (*ibid.*, 635). On the other hand, “the selective enforcement of closely interwoven formal and informal institutions enables rulers to maintain power” (*ibid.*, 638). Developing Schlumberger’s ideas, Robinson (2013) has provided detailed analysis of the operation of “patrimonial capitalism” in the post-Soviet space, focusing on Russia. He has argued that in the post-Soviet region, patrimonial capitalism developed as a means of coping with exogenous pressure to modernize the economy while preserving the political power of elite groups. Robinson (2012, 191–7) has predicted that “the political dysfunctions of Russian capitalism” will allow Moscow to avoid democratic reforms for the foreseeable future.

Studying the cases of China and Russia, Bueno de Mesquita and George Downs have concluded that significant economic development will not lead to democracy (De Mesquita and Downs 2005). These authoritarian regimes (as well as many other autocracies around the world) might have learned how to sustain economic development on the one hand and avoid political liberalization on the other. De Mesquita and Downs use the concept of “strategic coordination” to explain how authoritarianism can avoid democratization. Strategic coordination refers to

the set of activities that people must engage in to win political power in a given situation. Such activities include disseminating information, recruiting and organizing opposition members, choosing leaders, and developing a viable strategy to increase the group’s power and to influence policy.

(*Ibid.*, 80)

If autocrats can weaken the strategic coordination of their political challengers, they can also avoid the emergence of democratization. The fundamental problem is how to “raise the costs of political coordination among the opposition without also raising the costs of economic coordination too dramatically” (*ibid.*).

In the Russian case, the ideology of conservatism (especially when mixed with “patriotism”) serves as an effective instrument for weakening opportunities for “strategic coordination” among those who could potentially demand democratization. According to Stanovaya (2015), the return of Crimea proved to be a particularly powerful and successful instrument to split the pro-democratic opposition. Conservatism serves as a part of Putin’s Code<sup>4</sup> (Taylor 2015) or a marker of loyalty that helps to identify and punish potential critics and political opponents. Interestingly, the presence of conservative ideology is most significant in social media and online sources. Overall, the promotion of “conservatism” is aimed at presenting the political status quo of the Putin regime as the best possible choice for the country, and to delegitimize the liberal opposition and Western influences.



Second, the rise of conservatism in Russia scares many potential supporters of democracy more than the shortcomings of Putin's regime. To them, Putin is less of a threat than the conservative masses, in particular those outside the major cities. Indeed, if, as Lesley Chamberlain (2015) argues, the vast majority of Russians "are intensely conservative," there is little hope to benefit from democratization. Perhaps such critics should recognize that the Russian people

are not prepared to accept a fully-fledged democracy in the true sense of the word. They are not ready to fully experience democracy and gain a sense of involvement in and responsibility for the political processes.

(Medvedev 2010)

Finally, the ideology of conservatism also serves as an instrument uniting potential supporters of the incumbent regime, while liberal democracy is associated with those to whom Russia and its people are deeply alien. The Western liberal democracies are blamed for their apparent attempts to promote liberal democracy, and by doing so to weaken Russia domestically and internationally.

Russia's dominant conservatism seeks to strengthen itself by appealing to the tradition of a strong, essentially unitary state led by a strong leader, where all nominal branches of power are in fact departments of the supreme authority.

(Trenin 2010)

### **The political conservatism of the Russian government has limited the choice of economic policies**

As stated above, the specifics of economic development in authoritarian political systems limit the choice of economic policies. Chris Miller labeled the choice of specific economic policies aimed at preserving Putin's political power as Putinomics and summarized Putinomics as: "growth is good, but retaining power is better" (Miller 2018).

In Putin's Russia, political constraints dictated the choice in favor of public policies with significant economic inefficiencies. First, economic policies aimed to increase political support for the incumbent president. There was increasing dependence of citizens upon the state, most importantly in terms of employment opportunities. Wages, pensions, and other sources of personal income of politically important groups of citizens were growing faster than the economy. Second, it was crucial for the Kremlin to limit the opportunities for successful businesses to influence politics and support potential opposition. Third, the economic prosperity of regions continued to depend upon the Kremlin. At the macro-level those and other economic inefficiencies were compensated by high energy prices. In fact, the economy and the federal budget depended more and more on the high level of energy prices.

### A social contract to keep Putin in power

Since Vladimir Putin came to power in the Kremlin in fall 1999, the government followed an implicit social contract based on a trade-off between economic prosperity and political liberties: the government provides steady improvements in living standards and, in turn, citizens refrain from political demands. As Cook and Dimitrov (2017, 10) explain:

the terms of the contract were dictated by the state, not bargained with society; [...] these terms nevertheless imposed constraints on both parties: the regime acted as if it had to deliver these policy goods and allocational outcomes in order to maintain political and social stability; the population had to receive them in order to remain quiescent and conformist.

In terms of macroeconomic policies, such a contract was based on a substantially higher growth in per capita consumption than the rate of growth in per capita GDP (see Figure 8.1). In other words, the living standards of Russian citizens were improving faster than the economy. The accelerated growth in consumption became possible thanks to steadily increasing energy prices. Yet, because in most sectors of the Russian economy labor productivity failed to follow the growth in wages, the Russian economy suffered from a significant increase in labor costs.

Cook and Dimitrov (*ibid.*, 18) have argued that the Putin-era social contract has been maintained through the 2008–09 recession and the first three years of the current economic downturn, but “at great costs in both budget expenditures and market inefficiencies.” Thus, the government has continued to maintain pension income stability, industrial employment protections, and health care

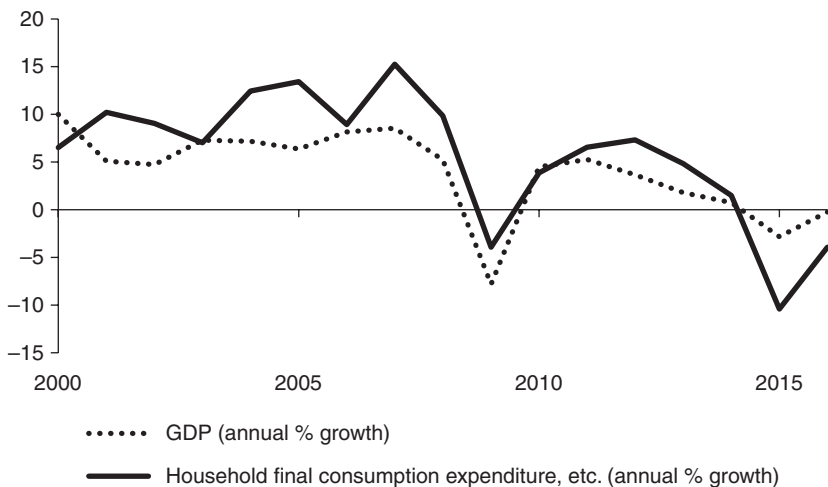


Figure 8.1 Growth rates of GDP and household consumption.

guarantees, and Putin's government justified these policies with the rhetoric of state responsibility for society's well-being and the maintenance of social stability. Before the elections in 2012, Putin, forgetting about the modernization agenda, made extensive spending promises, including raising pensions and public sector salaries and massive new investment in the military-industrial complex. As Johnson (2012) has shown, Putin himself estimated that the social spending commitments would cost 3 percent of GDP per year, while in other estimates this was as high as 8 percent.

As Treisman (2014) has demonstrated, until 2014 Putin's approval ratings closely correlated with economic performance. After the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the nature of Putin's popularity has fundamentally changed: his social contract with the population was no longer about economics but rather Russia's geopolitical status (Guriev 2016). Despite the economic recession, Putin's popularity has remained at a level above 80 percent.

### **State–business relations limit business opportunities to influence politics**

As the economic situation in Russia has started to gradually improve since Putin came to power, so has his public approval rating. While citizens demonstrated an increasing willingness to support Putin's regime, a growing economy meant increasing economic power for private businesses. This power of businesses could present a threat to political incumbency.

In mid-2003 Putin began redefining business–state relations. However, as William Tompson (2005) has pointed out, a frontal assault on the owners of the largest businesses as a group “would have led to falling tax revenues and rising capital flight, putting at risk both the economic recovery that was getting under way and Putin's own consolidation of power.” Instead Putin targeted selected “oligarchs,” most notably, the owners of Yukos, which at the time was the largest oil company in Russia. In the Kremlin-controlled media, Yukos was blamed for the provision of financial support to several opposition parties, including *Yabloko*, the Union of Right Forces and the Communists. Moreover, apparently, the largest shareholder of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, had publicly announced his political ambitions and perhaps even wished to succeed Putin. Khodorkovsky was arrested in 2003 and after a show trial was sentenced to a long prison term. The Yukos case became the most important turning point in the development of business–state relations in Russia, as the case sent a clear signal to the “oligarchs” about the “red line” that they should never cross in dealing with the state if they valued their businesses and freedom. In fact, two options were left for Russian big business: accepting the new reality or urgently leaving the country.

The combination of measures reducing the opportunities for businesses to influence politics had significant negative consequences for economic development in Russia. Most disturbingly, it created a problem for the Russian government's reputation and scared potential foreign and domestic investors.

It demonstrated that the Kremlin cannot credibly commit to respecting and sustaining the rules of the game which it itself promises to investors (*ibid.*), so Russia has been losing the competition for foreign direct investment in modern sectors of the economy. Russian businesses also became reluctant to invest in new technologies domestically, preferring to invest elsewhere. As Aven (2010) has explained: “there are so many emerging economies where people believe there is huge potential for growth, and the problem is Russia is not regarded as one of them by investors.”

According to a survey by the Higher School of Economics, a leading Russian University, in 2010 natural resource extraction was the most active area of investment. The survey revealed the tendency to invest not in new technologies, but rather in repair and maintenance of old, obsolete equipment. The equipment in use had become so old that it was now necessary to divert much of available investments just to keep it running. Almost 60 percent of all businesses reported that their key technological equipment was more than 10 years old, while almost 20 percent reported that it was more than 20 years old.<sup>5</sup>

### **Economic centralization has limited the influence of regions**

From the very beginning of his rule Putin had the clear intention to neutralize alternative sources of political power in the country, in particular, the power of regional executives. Prior to the elections of March 2000, Putin stated in an interview that “from the very beginning, Russia was created as a super-centralized state. That’s practically laid down in its genetic code, its traditions, and the mentality of its people” (quoted in Brown 2001, 51). The president solved the problem of the political autonomy of the regional executives, and their disproportionate influence on the national decision-making process, by introducing several reforms. In the summer of 2000, seven new federal districts ruled by Putin’s representatives were created. After that the governors lost the opportunity of direct contact with the president, as a new administrative layer was formed between the Kremlin and the regions. Governors were also deprived of their right to serve as deputies in the upper chamber of the parliament—the Federation Council. As Kryshtanovskaya concludes, “with these reforms, the governors were transformed from independent politicians with their own power bases into executives who were fully dependent on Moscow’s favor” (Kryshtanovskaya 2009, 28).

In 2004 the institution of the election of regional governors had been replaced by their nomination. This turn has massively suppressed political competition and made regional executives the agents of the federal executive. Indeed, in the new system the governors were subordinated to federal authorities and acted on their behalf, while the latter had at their disposal the instruments to punish or reward the governors. In 2012 the procedure of the election of governors was restored in Russia; however, this did not bring fundamental changes to the nature of center–region relations. The candidates for election must undergo a process of municipal scrutiny (the so-called municipal filter), and this condition makes it

possible to get rid of candidates that are objectionable to the federal center in advance.

From the beginning of Putin's rule, political centralization has been accompanied by economic centralization: from 2000 to 2003, the share of consolidated regional budgets in the consolidated budget of Russia decreased from 45.2 percent to 40.5 percent (Klimanov and Lavrov 2004, 113). Moreover, as Goncharov and Shirikov have shown,

the current highly centralized taxation system does not allow most of Russia's regions and municipalities to balance their budgets without external assistance. They are dependent on transfers from federal budget or regional budgets, respectively, and in many cases these transfers are the main sources of funding. These transfers reached 35% of federal budget expenses in 2008, 36% in 2009, and 38% in 2010.

(Goncharov and Shirikov 2013, 34)

To the end of 2017, more than 40 of Russia's regions had a growing budget deficit.<sup>6</sup> There is every reason to assert that economic centralization is inefficient from the point of view of economic growth, since it substantially constrains it. In Russia's system only a few regions have sufficiently strong local competitive advantages and are able to cope with globalization pressures—these were the capital cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, regions with abundant natural resources, as well as some border regions. Almost all other regions are not competitive enough, and do not provide economic growth.

### **Alternative economic models of conservative modernization**

For centuries, Russian rulers have attempted to implement reforms to reach a similar level of economic, technological, and military development as Russia's European counterparts (Gerschenkron 1962). In modern Russian debates, the term economic "modernization" most often stands for a "catching-up" plan, that is, an economic program "aimed at bridging the gap between Russia and the most developed countries" (Urnov 2012, 38). On 30 December 1999, then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated,

it will take us about 15 years and an annual growth of our gross domestic product by 8% a year to reach the per capita GDP level of present-day Portugal or Spain, which are not among the world's industrial leaders.

(Putin 1999)

Since 1999 the Russian economy grew about 7 percent annually and by 2007 restored the GDP level of 1990. According to IMF data, in 2011 Russia overtook Portugal's 2000 per capita GDP in US-dollar terms.<sup>7</sup> However, in 2016, Russia's per capita GDP was still below 50 percent of Portugal's (just below 9,000 dollars in Russia and 19,800 in Portugal).<sup>8</sup> The gaps between Russia and the US both in

terms of total size of the economy and per capita have been increasing since 1990 (see Figure 8.2).

Various groups of Russian economists blame government policies for the failure to promote necessary rates of economic growth, for the accumulation of economic imbalances (e.g. the growing gap between wages and labor productivity), and for the high level of economic inequality. They often emphasize that the current rate of economic development is not sufficient for Russia to sustain the status of a great power. For example, in January 2018 a group of experts working for Aleksey Kudrin stated that:

Russia is one of the most prominent powers in the world today. [...] At the same time, Russia is lagging behind in a number of critical areas. [...] The underdevelopment of the Russian economy and its governance institutions poses a much more significant threat to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity than realistic military threats that Russia is already well protected from.

(Kortunov et al. 2017)

For critics it would be natural to emphasize the connection between the failures of economic policies and the shortcomings of the non-democratic political regime in Russia. However, below we only focus on the views of the “conservative” critics—those who argued that it would be possible to achieve greater economic success without changes to the political system. There is no consensus among them on what could be a more appropriate economic strategy for Russia without political modernization; conservative agendas are conflicting. Thus, the most important dividing line is between “liberal” and “statist” alternatives. The “liberal” camp among Russian conservatives sees the main shortcoming of the current economic model in excessive government involvement in the

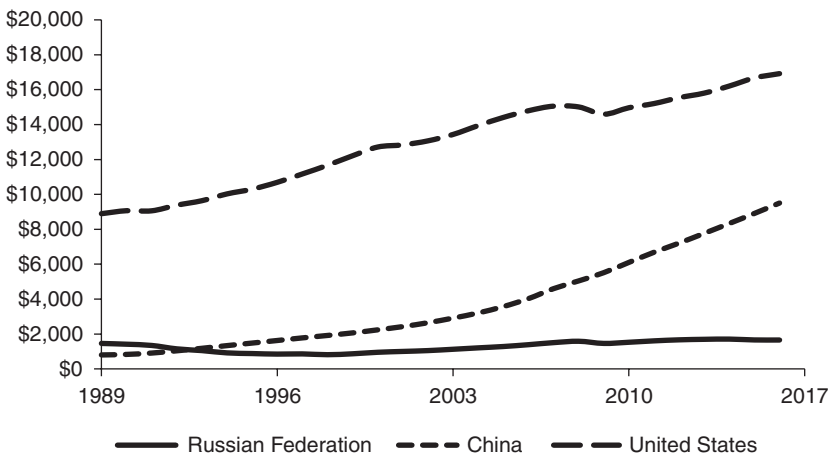


Figure 8.2 Russia's economic power is shrinking (GDP constant 2010 US\$).

economy. The “statist” conservatives, in contrast, argue for a greater role for the state. However, none of them propose to restrict the state by the means of democratic political competition and accountability. Generally speaking, all Russian conservatives are looking for a way to improve the economy without taking the risk of democratic transition.

### **“Liberal” economics and conservative politics**

In modern Russia, among the most influential critics of the economic policies of Putin’s government are economists who support conservative ideas in political, social, and cultural areas but who also advocate “liberal” economic policies. Many of them share the economic views of their conservative counterparts in Europe and the US. Almost all of them have worked in the government at some point in their professional careers and were a part of what is known as the group of “liberal reformers.” The two most important premises of Russian liberal economic thought are: opposition to state involvement in the market and opposition to income redistribution.

In fact, the liberal reformers were among the first to use conservative ideas in mainstream Russian politics. Since the late 1990s, they sought to use claims about the uniqueness of the “Russian path” and destiny as an instrument to gain political legitimacy for liberal market reforms. Because of the lack of financial resources and because of domestic political competitiveness, the Russian reformers had to balance the divergent objectives of multiple players—from the military, to the regional bosses in the Council of Federation, and to the communist and nationalist Duma majority. Particularly binding were the constraints set by the need to appease the military and to limit the popular appeal of the communists and the nationalists. When the government was at its “weakest,” as for example during electoral seasons, these influences pushed it to resort to its own populist rhetoric on the issue of Russia’s immediate (and not so immediate) neighbors. Recall Primakov’s famous “plane U-turn” when on his way to the United States in March 1999, in response to the commencement of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

In summer 1999, Aleksey Ulyukaev,<sup>9</sup> a long-term friend and, at that moment, the first deputy of Egor Gaidar presented a book, *Right Turn (Pravyy povorot)*. It was first published before Putin came to power and even before the start of the second Chechen campaign.<sup>10</sup> At the time of the first printing, the ideas expressed in the book seemed controversial and risky, as it called on democratic and liberal activists to adopt the nationalist rhetoric of rebuilding the Russian Empire when campaigning for the December 1999 Duma elections: “[t]radition must be our backbone, while our actions focus on renewal” (Ulyukaev 1999). Later, the infamous Russian nationalist and open xenophobe Egor Kholmogorov claimed that he was the ghost-writer of Ulyukaev’s book.

In 2003, another leading spokesman of Russian “liberals,” Anatoly Chubais (who had brought to life Russia’s privatization program), published an essay on foreign policy offering a new vision of Russia’s role in the post-Soviet space.

He argued in particular that Russia's mission was to integrate the former Soviet republics into a "liberal empire," while the key role in building this new empire was given to the conditional supply of energy to the post-Soviet countries (Papava 2007). Chubais wrote that Russia was a "natural and unique leader" and that Russia's "mission" should be to promote Russian culture and protect Russian populations in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Only through "liberal empire," by combining market liberalism and imperial principles, Chubais argued, "can Russia occupy its natural place alongside the United States, the European Union and Japan, the place designated for it by history" (as cited in Wenger et al. 2006, 219).

According to Trenin (2011, 148), Chubais was neither nationalist nor imperialist; rather, he attempted to gain more public legitimacy for economic reforms and, thus, "sought to marry liberal capitalism and imperial tradition in Russia." As a result, however, the ideas of Chubais's "liberal empire" proved to be strikingly similar to the ideas of "sovereign democracy" proposed by the Kremlin's chief political manager Vladislav Surkov in 2005. As Skidelsky (2007) has observed:

Surkov's world view points to the same conclusion as Chubais's. Russia is one of the world's natural "great powers." Greatness is defined by sovereignty. Sovereignty is conferred by history, geography, and the will to power. Some countries are destined to be sovereign, others to be subjects.

Though Chubais publicly criticized the idea of "sovereign democracy," as Artemy Magun (2010) pointed out, the thesis of "liberal empire" also meant the combination of liberal economic institutions with isolationism in politics. As Maler (2007) concludes, overall the position of Russian liberal reformers could be described as "liberal conservatism."

### **Liberals after the Crimea annexation**

The Crimea has split liberal critics of Putin. Most of those who earlier advocated the movement of the country toward the development of liberal democracy supported the annexation of Crimea. For instance, in December 2017 a group of experts working for Aleksey Kudrin explained the annexation of Crimea thus: "in the course of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia reunited with Crimea, solved the Black Sea Fleet problem, and put a long-term block on Ukraine's membership in NATO" (Kortunov et al. 2017). After the annexation of Crimea it became hardly possible in Russia to maintain one's status as a mainstream public figure while at the same time advocating liberal democracy for Russia. As for Kudrin, his disagreement with the Kremlin's position regarding Crimea would mean automatically losing any chance of ever entering any government under Putin. As Stanovaya (2017) has stated, although there is no official state ideology in Russia,



there is a reality in which professors are fired for taking an unpatriotic stance and victimized for “wrong” interpretations of historical events. A politically incorrect tweet or blog post can result in search and seizure.<sup>11</sup>

Facing the reality of the political climate in Russia, “liberal” economists now argue that, though in theory liberal democracy could provide the best conditions for economic development, Russia is not yet ready for democratic transition. Today, the practical alternative is the “second-best solution”—economic liberalism but without democracy. In 2017, as the leading liberal economists were preparing proposals for a new economic program for Putin, “Strategy 2035” (Jacobs 2014), one of them, Aleksandr Auzan, wrote in the Russian edition of *Forbes*:

Before trying to build a democracy from which a modern, innovative economy should emerge, one must understand that certain cultural conditions are needed for this [...]. In Russia in the 1990s, democratization brought controversial economic results, the same thing happened in Ukraine.

(Auzan 2017)

In practical terms the most recent idea—the “second best solution”—of “liberal conservatives” relates to non-political institutions like social networks, big data, digital platforms for crowdsourcing, and improving government services via the Internet. Apolitical technocratism, managerial effectiveness—“all this could become a basis for the formation of new institutions that can compensate for the weaknesses of traditional democracies” and contribute to “communicational democracy” (Stanovaya 2017). In essence, this is a technocratic approach that opposes itself to the political one and is not based on the protection of the interests of certain socio-political strata, but rather on addressing specific managerial tasks.

### **“More state control” alternatives**

For the supporters of the “more state control” option, the main problem lies in the wrong priorities of economic development set by the liberal economists. For them, the economy is an instrument of the state, and economic policies should focus not on economic stability, low inflation, or a balanced budget, but on national priorities. Most argue that “political will” has to prevail and to move economic reality in the desirable direction. For example, the status of great military power could be sustained with a relatively modest level of economic development, but requires keeping up with advances in military technology. Thus, the focus of economic development has to be on an acceleration of Russian technological and military capacities, even if such an approach would limit resources available to other sectors of the economy.

Broadly speaking, there are two sets of policy proposals connected to the conservative ideas that advocate a greater role of the state in economic development. One group is based on more or less rational principles and assumptions:

for instance, there are specific proposals aimed at protecting national industries from global competition or allocating parts of the federal budget to the development of technological innovation centers across Russia. Among these, one can distinguish two extremes: right-wing and left-wing conservatisms. Right-wing conservatism supports a free domestic market with state regulation of foreign economic activity in the interests of domestic entrepreneurship. The economic view of left-wing conservatives conforms to the “third way” model of economics, that is, to a set of economic theories which combine the market approach with the concept of a regulated economy on the basis of supra-economic criteria and priorities. Thus, the free market approach has to be combined with control over the strategic sectors of the economy while the redistribution of profits needs to be controlled according to the national and social needs of society as a whole. At minimum it requires nationalizing companies engaged in the export of natural resources, while the state controls domestic energy production, transport, and communications.

The second set of economic policy proposals by Russian conservatives is based mostly on wishful thinking—on the hope of finding a magic shortcut, a “unique path” that would have an “explosive effect” and give sudden and significant economic advantage to Russia. For example, Dugin (2014, 65–7) proposes subordinating the economy to “higher civilizational spiritual values”; spiritual development has to become “the main priority of life, which cannot be replaced by any economic or social benefits.” Another illustration here would be the proposal by Dmitry Rogozin (2012), who has suggested defining the “points of development of the scientific technical progress,” without losing time to develop those technologies that will be required in 30–50 years. It is theoretically possible that there are people who truly believe in such ideas, though most likely these proposals are aimed at helping various specific interests to lobby the Kremlin.

Indeed, various groups in Russia lobby on behalf of the interests of certain segments of the economy. For example, Russian business ombudsman Boris Titov is running for president in the 2018 election. His team has presented the “Growth Strategy” program developed by the Stolypin Club (Dumes 2017).<sup>12</sup> It proposes increasing state lending to the real sector of the economy—that is, primarily large state-owned enterprises with low or non-existent profitability; this would supposedly yield economic growth of 5–7 percent per year (Titov 2017). The competing team of Konstantin Babkin, leader of the Party of Business, has developed its “Strategy for the Economic Development of Russia until 2030” (Babkin 2017). According to this document, the policy of economic nationalism should replace the liberal model. At the same time, as a practical measure of Strategy 2030, Babkin proposes starting a policy of increasing the competitiveness of the agro-industrial complex by changing the principles of taxation and regulating foreign economic activity.

The most serious person to influence the Kremlin’s choices, however, is Sergey Glazyev. In 2017 in the newspaper *Zavtra*, he published an article with the title: “What ideology will raise Russia” (*Kakaya ideologia podnimet Rossiyu*)

(Glazyev 2018). Glazyev proposes combining “good elements of the capitalist and socialist systems, and abandoning the bad.” Such synthesis, in his opinion, was carried out by the Chinese, “having built a socialist market economy.” Its essence is in the synthesis of centralized planning and market competition, state ownership in the basic sectors of the economy with private entrepreneurship in the rest. In the capitalist system, explained Glazyev, the main criterion of economic activity is profit. In the Soviet system it was the growth of production, which raises the standard of living of the population. All in all, as this brief review shows, conservative politicians have very little to offer Putin in terms of alternative (and at the same time reasonable) economic policies.

## **Conclusion**

In modern Russia economic policies are highly centralized and defined by the presidential administration, and this means that any publicly relevant economic program has to obtain the approval of the presidential administration. But there are several contradictory constraints on obtaining this approval. First, President Putin is reluctant to implement unpopular policies, and this means that it is necessary to frame economic changes in a form acceptable to the majority of voters. Second, Russia’s foreign policy priorities are not subject to alteration. For example, no alternative program could venture to propose an elimination of state expenses in Syria, or whatever foreign military campaign Putin chooses to be involved in. Another “red line” is unconditional support for the annexation of Crimea, with all financial burdens that this has caused. Thus, according to some estimates, in 2017 Crimea received up to 20 percent of total financial assistance allocated to all Russian regions from federal budget. But no conservative would dare to challenge significant state expenses for developing Crimea, or North Ossetia and Abkhazia. Third, alternative programs cannot discuss cuts to federal budget expenditures on military buildup, security forces, and the secret services. As a result of such multiple constraints, alternative economic policies publicly advocated by conservatives are necessarily eclectic, combining various populist appeals and contradictory policy recommendations.

In general, it is to be expected that “conservatives in power” (that is, in the government) will continue to use conservative ideas for politics, while at the same time promoting liberal economic policies. The perspective of more radical conservatives for influencing current economic policies in Russia is limited, no matter how much they wish otherwise, by the need to obtain and sustain broad electoral support. In modern Russia it is practically impossible to build a coalition in favor of any economic reforms, conservative or liberal, so that the relatively liberal status quo is likely to prevail in economics. As clearly follows from Putin’s message to the Federal Assembly on 1 March 2018, increasing budgetary expenditures on defense and security forces with the ambition of Russian military domination in the world (Zhelezнова et al. 2018) will be the only—although very significant—exception.

**Notes**

- 1 More precisely, some conservatives dared to challenge Putin, but they were quickly charged and convicted as “extremists” in criminal court.
- 2 [www.4pt.su/en/content/economic-personality](http://www.4pt.su/en/content/economic-personality).
- 3 Aleksandr Dugin with his idea of rural life as an ideal for Russia is the exception.
- 4 Taylor has argued that political loyalty to Putin is based on Putin’s Code, which is “both more and less than an ideology; more, because it involves not just ideas but other stimuli for action, and less, because it is not a coherent and encompassing system of thought.”
- 5 [www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/251692/ne\\_do\\_investicij](http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/251692/ne_do_investicij).
- 6 [www.rbc.ru/opinions/politics/27/12/2017/5a438d209a79474d024dd2a8](http://www.rbc.ru/opinions/politics/27/12/2017/5a438d209a79474d024dd2a8).
- 7 <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/russia-overtakes-portugal-and-spain-is-next-18420>.
- 8 <https://countryeconomy.com/countries/compare/russia/portugal?sc=XE15>.
- 9 Aleksey Ulyukaev served as First Deputy Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation in 2000–04, First Deputy Chairman of the Bank of Russia in 2004–13 and held the office of Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation between 2013 and 2016. On 15 December 2017, Ulyukaev was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in a strict-regime labor colony and fined 130 million rubles (2 million US dollars).
- 10 An abridged version was also published in the daily *Izvestia* shortly before the December parliamentary elections—at that time Putin was prime minister (*Izvestia*, 6 December 1999).
- 11 Translated by Eugene Bai (2015), see [www.russia-direct.org/analysis/real-reason-why-resurgence-conservatism-russia-dangerous#](http://www.russia-direct.org/analysis/real-reason-why-resurgence-conservatism-russia-dangerous#).
- 12 Besides Titov, the Stolypin Club includes many of Russia’s well-known public figures, such as presidential adviser Sergey Glazyev, Deputy Chairman of Vnesheconombank Andrey Klepach, and the deputy chairman of the Duma committee on economic policy Victor Zvagelski.

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## 9 The “Budapest–Warsaw Express”

### Conservatism and the diffusion of economic policies in Poland and Hungary

*Ewa Dąbrowska, Aron Buzogány, and Mihai Varga*

#### Introduction

This chapter is about how conservative governments learn from each other in Eastern Europe with a focus on Hungary and Poland, widely regarded as the leading torchbearers of illiberalism in the EU. For a long time both Hungary and Poland were often considered to be the East Central European (ECE) avant-garde in terms of embracing liberal democratic values and economic liberalism. Analysts and policymakers have often noted the pendular historical swings between the two countries and referred to the “Budapest Express” and the “Warsaw Express” to describe these convergences (Lipovecz 2007). Two-and-a-half decades after the fall of communism there are, again, striking similarities in the policies they follow, a process that can be described as “policy learning.” A few years after Fidesz (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, “Alliance of Young Democrats”) secured its grip on power in Hungary, PiS (Law and Justice) won the 2015 elections with a similar agenda. Not only political goals, but Polish economic policies resemble in many ways the policies of the Hungarian blueprint. The “Budapest Express” has evidently arrived again in Warsaw.

There is a wide literature on how policies diffuse themselves across national and other administrative borders and how this process relates to policy change. The literature on policy diffusion and policy learning in East Central European (ECE) countries has largely focused on the diffusion of “liberal” ideas (Simmons and Elkins 2004): the ECE countries were considered to be at the receiving end of the diffusion process while the policies were designed in Western Europe or North America. Detailed studies have analyzed the diffusion of economic policy reforms in the ECE countries in complex fields ranging from pensions (Orenstein 2008) and taxation (Appel 2011; Evans and Alicicã 2008) to central banking (Epstein 2008; Johnson 2016; Ban 2016). International financial institutions (IFIs) and the European Union (EU) have strengthened these diffusion waves, with particularly EU enlargement regarded as a “transformative power” in the region (Jacoby 2006).

This chapter takes a different perspective. We explore the diffusion of ideas and policies horizontally—between countries which are largely seen in the literature as being located at the receiving end of diffusion processes. Our focus is



on the diffusion of conservative ideas in economic policymaking in Poland and Hungary. We examine how the coming to power of Viktor Orbán in 2010 and his use of heterodox financial and pension policies inspired the Polish conservative-populist party Law and Justice to rethink its economic program. We argue in line with the existing literature that Orbán’s policies represent a policy mix that is hardly attributable to conservative ideas only, and still allows a certain dose of economic liberalism. However, what has changed is that the government is now definitely in a situation of power to decide in which sectors and to what extent it allows liberalism. This “selective liberalization” can be traced back to policy- and state organization-related ideas that key Orbán advisors advocated early on, such as a “Neo-Weberian” state that not only pursues but also defines national interests, including economic ones. Economic policy was up to that time largely permeated by liberal economic ideas. Examining contacts between Polish and Hungarian politicians and the reception of Hungarian ideas and policies by Polish experts associated with Law and Justice and by party members themselves, we conclude that the Polish political and economic discourse in the 2010s was heavily influenced by Orbán’s policy experiments. We argue that the Hungarian policy after the coming to power of Fidesz in 2010 provided an inspiration for PiS politicians in their search for a new template for economic policy. The reason for this is that Hungary was the only country in East Central Europe that explicitly turned to unorthodox economic policy after the crisis. Hungary thus functioned as a critical test-case proving the potential and limitations of such unorthodox policies.

Our chapter conceptually builds on theories of “policy diffusion” and “policy learning” (Benson and Jordan 2011). In most diffusion studies, the emphasis is on the mechanisms of diffusion: coercion, competition, learning, and emulation are usually identified as the central mechanisms that underpin diffusion (Simmons and Elkins 2004). It is helpful to differentiate these mechanisms further as to whether they provide direct or indirect channels of influence. While direct influence is promoted actively by an actor (“the sender”) either through coercion, by providing incentives, or through socialization, indirect leverage emphasizes the attractiveness of the model used, as seen by a “receiving” actor. Applying foreign models to domestic policy problems can be tempting, simply by using the positive experiences from elsewhere. Indirect diffusion can be based either on rational interest calculations (lesson-drawing) or on ideational grounds (imitation), when actors appropriate institutional models out of a sense of belonging to a certain community or sharing similar values or worldviews. Whether diffusion between sender and receiver states is based on interest-oriented or ideational appeal can make a difference in the outcome of the diffusion process. Perceiving sender states as motivated by interests or ideologies might have an influence on the reactions of receiver governments. At the same time, the decisions of receiving governments are also influenced by their motivations.

More recently, traditional approaches to policy diffusion have been subject to criticism (Peck 2011). Some of the main shortcomings that are pointed out

concern the focus on vertical diffusion, and that they do not pay necessary attention to unsuccessful cases of “non-diffusion” (Löblová 2018). For Eastern Europe, scholars have recently noted “counter-waves” taking place in the region, indicating policy flows in the opposite direction to the liberal norms that have been analyzed previously (Sokhey 2017). Some of these counter-waves have overlapped with what the literature has described as “authoritarian diffusion” (Bank 2017; Hall and Ambrosio 2017). This chapter addresses these concerns by providing a case study of “horizontal” policy diffusion and learning taking place between Hungary and Poland as a mixture of interest-based and ideology-driven processes. Horizontal diffusion has rarely been addressed in the region and neighborhood effects have mainly been regarded as “filters” of larger, vertical emulations (Adascalitei and Domonkos 2018; Korkut and Buzogány 2015).

Our analysis of policy learning is based on constructivist assumptions in that it underscores the role of ideas and knowledge production regimes (Campbell and Pedersen 2014) in the spread of policies. We build on the argument that policy learning often takes place among similar countries in terms of history, language, or legal tradition. Similarities between Poland and Hungary can be found on three levels. First, there is a *longue durée* perception of a historical Polish–Hungarian friendship reaching back to the Middle Ages. Second, and regarding the post-communist decades, numerous studies treat the transition path followed by Poland and Hungary as broadly similar, either by grouping them together under the heading “Visegrad countries” with the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Bohle and Greskovits 2012), or by contrasting the market economies of Poland and Hungary with the Czech Republic (Vanhuysse 2006; Orenstein 2001). And third, there is also the similarity between Fidesz and PiS party ideologies, often championed by the leaders of the two parties through repeated public statements (such as Jarosław Kaczyński’s 2011 statement of soon having “Budapest in Warsaw”), mutual visits, and declarations of solidarity.

This chapter pays particular attention to knowledge networks—the expert groups that theorize new developments and distill them into succinct, easy-to-follow “models” for politicians to keep in mind, orienting them in their decision-making. To paraphrase Mark Blyth, the political and economic objectives of politicians “do not come with instruction sheets” (Blyth 2003). We focus on those actors that pull together the disparate facts into “instruction sheets”: the economists, policy experts, and economic think tanks that—to the extent they gain access to or influence over public institutions—have received increasing recognition as important shapers of economic policies, together with political parties and production regimes (Christensen 2017; Ban 2016; Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002).

The chapter is organized as follows. The next part introduces some of the most important elements of the economic approach pursued by Fidesz. It also presents the key experts involved in drawing up that economic policy, their background, as well as their most important ideas. The chapter then proceeds to detailing how Polish economic experts of conservative leanings adopt and adapt the elements of Hungarian economic policy that they favor, in order to enable or

prepare the change[s] in economic policy introduced by PiS since its return to power in 2015. The chapter concludes by treating the Polish reception of Hungary’s economic policy as a case of ideational imitation—facilitated by the similar views of Polish and Hungarian conservative experts and politicians—but filtered through the need to adapt the lessons from Hungary to a better performing Polish economy.

### **Hungary as the avant-garde of heterodox economic policies in ECE**

Like Poland, Hungary embarked on a foreign direct investment-led pathway to economic growth, accumulating large private and public debts in the course of the 1990s and early 2000s (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). The model collapsed with the global financial crisis, and the anti-austerity protests helped Fidesz secure an absolute majority and return to government in 2010, when it was determined to promote “national interests” by reducing the dominance of foreign capital and strengthening domestic actors. Although the nationalist turn in Hungary has attracted attention, scholars have attributed it mainly to the far-right Jobbik party (Pirro 2017; Varga 2014). Others have noted a turn toward economic nationalism (Johnson and Barnes 2015). However, the policy change from neoliberal to heterodox or unorthodox economics was propagated by Fidesz already during the 2000s and began to get increased attention in its own intellectual backyard.

The new economic model that was installed is characterized by “selective economic nationalism” (Tóth 2016) and combines the protection and promotion of domestic companies and the establishment of a “workfare regime”—the increased conditionality attached to the social safety net (Szikra 2014). At the same time, important foreign direct investments in productive sectors are nurtured, while the government has helped highly indebted middle classes settle their massive debts with foreign banks. In a highly popular move, over 1 million debtors were saved from the mortgage crisis by introducing an exchange rate cap on Swiss francs, in which the majority of the mortgages were taken (Palonen 2012; Bohle 2014). The government introduced high taxes on foreign banks operating in Hungary and forced them to convert forex loans to Hungarian currency at government-set rates. Adding to this, the Fidesz government has followed a determined anti-privatization policy directed against the excesses during the heydays of neoliberalism in the 1990s. Thus pension privatization, in which Hungary was a forerunner, was reversed (Naczyk and Domonkos 2016) and the privatization of public utilities was continuously pushed back (Voszka 2016). Since the Fidesz victory in the 2010 elections, the government has used various methods to bring public utilities back under state control. To buy back assets, the government forced regulators to push down prices by using various policy measures, price caps and special taxes (Keller-Alánt 2016; Szabó and Quesada 2017; Horváth 2016). During the electoral campaign of 2013 the main Fidesz electoral promise was to reduce household utility prices (*rezsicsökkentés*). As part of this

policy, household water prices were reduced by 10 percent, which diminished the profits of the water providers (Index.hu 2013). This has not only forced most of the profit-oriented foreign investors to leave the Hungarian market, but has also increased the centralization of public utilities, limiting the possibilities of smaller companies to operate. A similar centralization and renationalization has taken place in the waste management sector.

The self-termed “unorthodox” economic policy of the government has often evoked the term “freedom fight” (*szabadságharc*) when it aimed at reducing foreign involvement and strengthening the domestic middle class. This went together with a strong orientation toward economic nationalism, with Viktor Orbán declaring his intention to “build a country in which foreign banks and bureaucrats are not telling us what to do” (MTI EcoNews 2013). The Hungarian government re-acquired shares lost during the privatization rounds of the 1990s in the sensitive banking, telecommunication, public utilities, and energy sectors, and introduced “crisis taxes” for the mostly foreign-owned major retailers and financial services (Johnson and Barnes 2015). In the banking sector large foreign-owned banks which became unprofitable because of the bank taxes, like GE Capital’s Budapest Bank and *Bayerische Landesbank*’s MKB Bank, were sold to the government (Dönmez and Zemandl 2018; Méró and Piroska 2016).

### *Epistemic community*

The change in economic policymaking was based on alterations of the epistemic communities involved in designing these policies. While during the 1990s and 2000s neoliberals of different leanings maintained the upper hand, the Fidesz government offered privileged access to policymaking to self-termed heterodox economists.

Interestingly, both neoliberal and heterodox groups have their historical roots in the reform economist movement centered around the Financial Research Institute (FRI), a ministry-sponsored think tank. While most FRI economists supported the neoliberal consensus in 1989 (Fábry 2017; Sebők 2016, 2017; Gagyí 2015, 2016; Szelényi et al. 1995), some reform economists abandoned the neoliberal path during the transition years. Most important here is György Matolcsy, one of the key architects of the post-2010 Hungarian economic model. Before 1990 he worked for the Ministry of Finance and the FRI (Sebők 2017). He became state secretary for privatization in the first democratically elected cabinet under the first conservative Prime Minister József Antall in 1990, but switched six months later to become Hungary’s representative at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London. After his stint in London, Matolcsy led different economic research institutes during the 1990s and authored the Fidesz economic program in the late 1990s. He became the Fidesz Minister of Economics in 2000. In 2006 he was elected to parliament as Fidesz MP, authored the party’s second influential (economic) policy blueprint (Matolcsy and Cséfalvy 2008), and in 2010 became Minister of National Economy again when Fidesz came back into power. He stepped down in 2013 to assume

the position of Governor of the Hungarian National Bank, playing an important role in repoliticizing the once-independent central bank.

Matolcsy is said to have inherited his unorthodox/heterodox views from his academic mentor at the FRI, Sándor Kopátsy. Kopátsy’s approach is characterized by an encompassing historical and culturalist perspective—and the rejection of modern economics as an exact science. Similarly, Matolcsy’s academic interests combined an early interest in Keynesianism with speculative historical work. In a 2004 monograph on the “American Empire,” he analyses the historical development of US power. One of the important conclusions is that a strong economy cannot function without a unified nation having a stable national identity. He also cherishes the top–down creation of a middle class and regards the conservatism of the US (in terms of traditional values, religion, and so on) as an important explanation for its success. This resonated with an outmoded tradition in Hungarian economic thinking reaching back to the mid-nineteenth century and the iconic national liberal István Széchenyi, who was critical of foreign capital, supported domestic production, and later embraced agrarian nationalism (Maxwell and Campbell 2014; Dénes 2009).

The new heterodox epistemic community includes academics at the main think tank Századvég, such as László György, who was interviewed extensively by Marcin Piasecki, the future PiS-appointed vice-president of Poland’s National Development Fund (Piasecki 2015a); and university-based academics such as Csaba Lentner, professor of economics at the National Civil Service University. Lentner has worked as an economic adviser to the Smallholder Party and the far-right Justice and Life Party, served as an MP for the latter (1998–2002) and as Fidesz economic advisor since 2004 (Lentner 2015). The essence of conservative heterodox economic policy can be summarized as based on several characteristics of the “Hungarian model” (György and Veress 2016). Its main overarching idea is that of a “new equilibrium” that increases employment while reducing the unduly high influence of foreign capital on the Hungarian economy (György 2017).

### ***Policy mixes***

Several policy aspects can be identified at the core of the Hungarian model. First, there is the conservatives’ conviction of the failure of neoliberal solutions in economics. Many of them believe that this calls for experimentalism and creativity in a way that often transcends traditional left–right cleavages. Thus, the Fidesz government introduced wide-ranging family-support policies, and it limited, via direct intervention, price rises for households. These interventionist policies have been flanked by the introduction of clearly neoliberal policies such as the flat income tax, which replaced progressive taxation reaching up to 32 percent with a 16 percent flat tax from 2012 onward. At the same time, this policy mix was combined with a workfare regime (Szikra 2014), which aims to increase the active workforce. In general, heterodox economists are also critical of GDP-focused economic growth—noting that while between 1980 and 2010 Hungarian GDP

doubled, wages increased only by 7 percent (György 2017). They advocate instead pragmatic solutions, and not “market fundamentalisms.” Another of the important criticisms of neoliberal economic policies was the neglect of job creation during the heyday of privatization. Economists such as György and Matolcsy have emphasized the need for job creation policies, even if they are of low efficacy.

Hungarian heterodox economics is based on the recognition that Western templates do not apply to countries on the semi-periphery of the global economy. While many of the above policies—family support, flat tax, support for Hungarian businesses—were discussed already in the 2000s, a new element that came after 2010 was the orientation toward countries to the East of the European Union. Conservative economists embraced the argument about the decline of the West and the rise of countries like China, Singapore, or India. This rhetorical reorientation has led to the initiation of the “Eastern Opening”—a new, eastwards-oriented economic foreign policy (Buzogány 2017).

Finally, a direct implication of the above is the redefinition of the role of the state. The emphasis on a strong state has been a recurring idea of conservatism in Hungary. Fidesz embraced the ideal of a “neo-Weberian” state which was thought should replace the “sell-out” of public assets (privatization) and the excessive embracement of “new public management” (NPM) ideas by previous socialist governments. Instead of a market-oriented, “lean” government, which was seen by Fidesz to have served foreign interests to the detriment of the public good, a new, centralized core executive was installed, following the ideal of an effective “hard government.” One of the most influential theorists of state activity, a former professor of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz founding member, István Stumpf, calls the conception of the state he favors “neo-Weberian” (see Buzogány and Varga, this volume). For such a state, the concern with “normativity” is crucial, and is to be contrasted with NPM, which was strongly supported by the left-liberal Gyurcsány government. In practice, state reform after 2010 consisted mainly of recentralization. Decentralization efforts carried out during the last decade to accommodate EU regional policy demands were also largely taken back (Korkut and Buzogány 2015). The new governments halved the number of ministerial departments, replaced ministerial staff with staff loyal to Fidesz, and decidedly strengthened the prime minister’s office.

Liberal critics of Fidesz summarized one problematic aspect of Orbán’s reforms under the heading “mafia state” (Magyar 2016). The Hungarian state “is a mafia state by the nature of its organization, built on the network of contacts grounded in family, or sealed up by businesses with interests in common” (Grzymala-Busse 2017). They charge Orbán and Fidesz not just with corruption, but, with engendering, through state capture, a return to authoritarianism. Empirical research on corruption has partly confirmed these claims: since 2010 public procurement has become more centralized, less transparent, and more corrupt, to such an extent that researchers refer to the Hungarian economy as “crony capitalism” (Fazekas and Tóth 2016; Tóth and Hajdu 2016).

The heterodox economic policy has had ambivalent results, but some successes need to be mentioned as these are relevant for the potential diffusion of

the model. First, Hungary’s example showed that relatively radical moves against foreign capital could be carried out in the EU. While the neo-Keynesian turn with fiscal stimuli was countered by reference to the EU’s deficit spending rules, the Fidesz government has embarked on experimentation, such as by taxing foreign banks or reversing pension privatization. Some of these economic policies proved successful. Economic growth seemed to recover slowly after the crisis—which is rather a regional phenomenon than a Hungarian specificity. In case of the flat tax, Hungary also seems to have been relatively successful (Mostafa 2017). Second, foreign capital did not leave Hungary (Rugraff and Sass 2016), as expected by the critics.

In contrast to Fidesz’ concrete plans for shaping the economy, economic policy has long constituted a weakness of the PiS political program. In 2005, after PiS won the parliamentary election by promising a “solidary Poland” (*Polska solidarna*), it turned to neoliberal reforms (Zaremba 2010; Woś 2017). It supported, among other things, foreign-currency loans that later brought systemic risk to Central European economies. Back then, economics was the domain of neoliberal economic experts. Even a party promising the establishment of a new republic would continue the status quo economic policy, as there was no alternative to it. The situation changed after the global financial crisis of 2008–09, after which PiS started to question extensively the dominant economic thinking (Gromada 2017).

We argue that the Hungarian policy after Fidesz took power in 2010 provided inspiration for PiS politicians in their search for a new template of economic policy. The reason for this is that Hungary was the only country in East Central Europe that explicitly turned to unorthodox economic policy after the crisis. Hungary was thus a test whether this policy could work. For PiS representatives, the example of Hungary was important for a few reasons. First, Hungarian and Polish economies share many similarities: both are middle-income, post-socialist economies. Second, both economies were regarded as successful ones, into which foreign investors eagerly put their money. The third reason why Hungary inspired PiS is that PiS and Fidesz share many ideological tenets and perceive themselves as agents of a new conservatism. Thus, if ever PiS wanted to realize comprehensively its conservative program, it needed only take inspiration from the Hungarian case. Hungary constituted a conservative avant-garde, and Poland under PiS intended to emulate many political and economic solutions implemented by Orbán. As Orbán himself commented, PiS was moving much quicker after its victory in 2015 than Fidesz after 2010. Below we analyze what PiS politicians and experts made of the Hungarian experience in the domain of economic policy.

### **The 2015 turn in Polish politics and the search for a new policy model**

Before they turned to Orbán’s economic policy, Polish conservative intellectuals, experts, and journalists familiarized themselves with Fidesz’ political

ideology and strategy. One important actor to do this was Igor Janke, a journalist at the major conservative newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*. In a 2007 article, Janke wrote about how Polish conservatives sought in the mid-1990s to educate the children of the winners of the capitalist transformation in order to engender a change in the dominant political ideology in the future. In 2012, Janke wrote a book about Viktor Orbán called “The Attacker” (*Napastnik*) (Janke 2007, 2012). In it, Janke described Orbán’s political ideology, centered on the notion of the citizen (*polgár*). Furthermore, Janke showed how Orbán cooperated with conservative intellectuals to develop a convincing political message and strategy. Polish conservatives, including Janke himself, had a similar vision of an alliance between intellectuals and experts on the one hand, and politicians on the other. In the Polish context, this alliance served not least to assess the Hungarian experience in order to learn how a “conservative revolution,” Polish style, could unfold. The Jagiellonski Club in Cracow devoted several articles and studies to understanding the *polgár* ideology and its implementation, as well as to distilling from it lessons for Polish conservatives (Bieliszczuk 2015; Grosse 2013; Kołtuniak 2016; Wójcik 2015).

### ***Hungarian economic policy in the Polish conservative perspective***

The next step in evaluating the Hungarian experience was for Polish conservatives to turn to concrete policy steps undertaken by Orbán, especially in the economic domain (Bieliszczuk 2015; Wójcik 2015). Polish conservative think tanks examined Hungarian economic policy under Fidesz quite thoroughly in order to assess that policy’s effectiveness in fostering investment and growth. They also wanted to test that policy’s consistency with conservative ideology. Ideological consistency would have been one criterion for assessing this policy positively from the Polish perspective, but its actual effectiveness would have much improved its chances of being transferred to Poland. The Jagiellonski Club focused on understanding the rationale behind Orbán’s approach to economics, whereas think tanks with more economic expertise—the Freedom Institute and the Sobieski Institute—conducted empirical analyses of specific policies undertaken by Orbán and his team.

An expert of the Freedom Institute, Marcin A. Piasecki, the Polish Development Fund vice-president responsible for investments from 2016, conducted a comprehensive study of Hungarian economic policy in 2014–15 (Piasecki 2015a, 2015b). The Institute itself was set up by a few important figures in the conservative milieu—Dariusz Gawin, a deputy director of the Warsaw Uprising Museum and an intellectual related to the journal *Teologia Polityczna* (“Political Theology”), Jan Ołdakowski, the director of the Museum, and Igor Janke, the *Rzeczpospolita* journalist and author of Orbán’s above-mentioned Polish biography. In the preface to his study, Piasecki mentions that Janke introduced him to Hungarian experts able to gather data and opinions for the study. Among the experts he met in August and November 2014 were representatives of the Hungarian government, experts from the Századvég Foundation that he



acknowledges is related to Fidesz, and economists from the University of Technology and Economics in Budapest (among which was the aforementioned László György). Piasecki also took into account views of experts from Hungary and abroad critical of Orbán’s economic policy.

Piasecki’s general assessment of Hungarian economic policy is that it proved effective in leading the country out of the economic slump of the mid-2000s. Even if the investment level was still below 25 percent in 2014, it had been growing successively from 2010. Growth showed remarkable dynamics as well, reaching 3.6 percent in 2014. Piasecki saw in these figures evidence of effectiveness of this policy, especially in light of Hungary’s poor finances during the crisis and even before. He pointed to differences between Poland and Hungary in this regard, as Poland’s budget deficit and public debt were far lower than Hungary’s. The general economic and financial situation of Hungary before the advent of Fidesz was far worse than Poland’s during the same time. Therefore Poland did not need quite the same solutions to cure public finances and to spur growth.

In general, Piasecki did not directly formulate recommendations for Poland, but his analysis contained an implicit comparison between the two economies. For instance, Piasecki debunked the “myth” shared, according to him, with Hungarian economists, that early-1990s privatizations were more painful in Hungary than in other post-communist countries. Nevertheless, citing heterodox economists Eric Reiner and Ha-Joon Chang, Piasecki made clear which school of economic thought he approves of. Thus he also assessed favorably Orbán’s heterodox policies, such as the return of state ownership of the economy, and disregarded potentially negative consequences for it. Yet, as other studies and critical newspaper articles reveal, corruption in the Hungarian economy is growing and the structure of ownership resembles increasingly that of an oligarchy (Góralczyk 2015).

The Sobieski Institute also devoted a study to Hungarian economic policy in 2014, posing more explicitly the question of what Poland can learn from Hungary. The study was financed by the Institute’s director, Paweł Szałamacha, who wrote in 2009 a book on the Fourth Republic and entered the PiS government in 2015 as Minister of Finance, only to be dismissed in 2016. Cezary Mech, an economist associated with PiS, and Paweł Pelc, a jurist, analyzed Hungarian financial and industrial policy and asked to what extent this policy provides a template that could be copied in Poland. They favored in particular the tax on hypermarkets, as according to them foreign hypermarkets in Poland tend to avoid paying taxes (Mech and Pelc 2014, 64). However, they criticized the tax on the banking sector, saying it incentivizes banks to limit lending and makes bank clients pay more for loans. According to Mech and Pelc, the Polish government should turn state banks and investment funds into instruments of its investment policy, and avoid influencing the lending behavior of private banks (*ibid.*).

Both experts favored the general direction of economic policy in Hungary that eliminated the negative tendencies of the first two decades of post-communism. Deregulation and an ideology of a “lean state” should be replaced

by a smart industrial policy supporting companies that engage in research and development, accompanied by infrastructural policy. Unlike Hungary, however, Poland should not focus on developing the automobile sector, but instead on the energy sector. They do not specify what energy sector they mean, but hint at removing limits on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which makes them likely supporters of coal-mining. Finally, Mech and Pelc favor treating certain kinds of social expenditures as investments, and call for the state to engage more in alleviating demographic problems, and improving the situation of the healthcare and education sectors (*ibid.*).

### ***Conservative experts in Polish policymaking under PiS***

Since its establishment in 2001, PiS has been a party that relies heavily on support from intellectuals and experts. On the one hand, a political party preaching moral renewal and rejection of post-communism needs intellectuals and experts to legitimate its political ideology. On the other hand, PiS needs policy advisors, as its ideology is vague on many issues. Economic policy is one of them. As initially it still included many members with liberal views on the economy, PiS was not ready to completely abandon the neoliberal economic thinking that dominated Polish politics in the first half of the 2000s. However, PiS also intended to rehabilitate the state, strengthen state structures, and make the economy serve society. Finding a set of economic policies that serve those purposes poses a challenge that should be better taken up with the help of experts.

### ***The role of conservative experts forming economic policy***

The economic ideas of PiS have been evolving since the party's formation in 2001 and more intensely since the election campaign of 2004–05, during which PiS opposed the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska, or PO*). Committed initially to a certain degree to liberal values on the one hand, and to social justice and solidarity on the other, PiS was looking for a set of economic policy solutions that would best express its political and economic ideology. Collaboration with conservative think tanks was helpful in this process. In the mid-2000s the Sobieski Institute obtained a reputation for acting as the PiS economic think tank. Through the personal relation between the Institute's founder Szałamacha and the prime minister in the PiS-led government, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (with both coming from the town of Gorzów Wielkopolski), the Sobieski Institute was increasingly integrated into the PiS political circle (Szałamacha 2015; Węglewski and Ćwiklak 2016). This connection between the Institute and the government became even stronger when Szałamacha assumed the position of state secretary in the Ministry of Finance (2005–07). Szałamacha himself was in the past associated with the Adam Smith Center, but his economic views changed gradually from neoliberal to liberal-conservative ones (Szałamacha 2015; Miączyński and Popiołek 2016; Węglewski and Ćwiklak 2016). An

important concern throughout his career was family policy, but he paid equal attention to redesigning financial and pension policies.

The Sobieski Institute became particularly active in the runup to the 2015 election. Szalamacha had been anticipating the PiS victory already for a few years and was busy working out the party’s economic program, inspired to a large extent by Hungarian experiments. It was especially the new taxes on banks and hypermarkets that Sobieski Institute experts observed with great interest. The tax on banks was an expression of an underlying economic ideology according to which banks should primarily give loans to the real economy and engage less in financial speculation. But the Polish conservatives anticipated its potential consequence—that the banks would transfer the costs of the new tax to clients. As for the tax on hypermarkets, the idea behind it was to indirectly support domestic trading companies, given that foreign-owned hypermarkets frequently evaded taxes, which domestic traders could not do as easily as did subsidiaries of international holdings. For both the Hungarian government and for PiS, domestic small and middle-sized business was more valuable than foreign investors, especially of the kind prone to avoiding domestic taxes.

Beside the Sobieski Institute, the Freedom Institute emerged as a further conservative think tank focusing on socio-economic policy and state reform. It equally served the PiS government as a source of expert knowledge after 2015. Furthermore, it transferred its experts to institutions of the newly emerging economic governance under PiS. An example of this tendency is the above-mentioned economist Piasecki. As vice-president of the Polish Development Fund (*Polski Fundusz Rozwoju*), Piasecki is responsible for investment policy, in itself a new instrument of government industrial policy. Having an extensive background in project finance and a good knowledge of heterodox economics including Hungarian practices, Piasecki clearly intends to pursue a full-fledged industrial policy. Invited to the conservative television station *Republika* (established in 2012 by conservative public figures such as Bronisław Wildstein, Cezary Gmyz, and Rafał Ziemkiewicz), Piasecki expressed a wish to support especially middle-size companies by helping them to finance or insure their exports (Republika 2016).

### ***A change of economic policy under PiS: an unorthodox turn?***

Economic policy under PiS has been the object of many analyses and commentaries in the Polish press since the beginning of this party’s rule. PiS dared to question the neoliberal economic thinking that had shaped the Polish transformation from communism to liberal democracy, provoking much criticism from economists who had participated in this transformation (Gadomski 2016; Wielowieyska 2017). Especially the first reform enacted by the PiS government—the introduction of a family allowance for families with two or more children—was expected to quickly bring the government into financial difficulties and to diminish the population’s incentive to work (Morawski 2016). Other reforms that were arguably inspired by the Hungarian case, such as the tax

on the banking sector, the tax on hypermarkets, or rejection of the neoliberal pension reform, were widely regarded as equally irresponsible or unrealistic, given the likely opposition of the European Commission, and the Polish demographic situation (Wójcik 2015). A favorite assessment of PiS economic reforms by adherents to the neoliberal economic school, such as the architect of Polish reforms in the early 1990s Leszek Balcerowicz, was that PiS only copies Viktor Orbán's bad ideas (Gadomski 2016; Niedziński 2016; Wielowieyska 2017). Some conservatives share this opinion, too. In the following we analyze the changes PiS introduced into government economic policy, and which of them likely resulted from Polish conservatives' perception of the Hungarian experience.

The budget situation in Poland at the moment of the Law and Justice accession to power differed from that obtaining in Hungary in 2010. Poland had no history of excessive budget deficits; on the contrary, budgetary discipline was good under the Civic Platform. Yet, financial policy under PiS changed in comparison with that of the years of the PO government in two aspects that suggest an affinity between the budget approach of PiS and that of Fidesz.

First, PiS is concerned with budgetary loopholes and improving budget revenues by the same token, for instance by improving regulations concerning collection of the value-added tax (Kuzińska 2017; Sasiada 2018). PO tolerated the loopholes and VAT avoidance. This policy step was consistent with the conservative party's ideology of a strong state and a strong budget. Equally, Fidesz attempted to make the budget an effective instrument of state economic policy. Budgetary discipline thus has a different meaning for liberals and for conservatives. The former have a preference for a lean state and a balanced minimal budget fostering stable expectations for inflation and growth. For conservatives, a balanced budget means a more effective instrument of state policy.

The second difference between the liberal and conservative approaches to budget policy concerns their attitude to social spending. While liberals are suspicious of any kind of social policy, East European conservatives tend to regard elements of this policy as an investment. This concerns in particular family policy (see Bluhm and Brand in this volume). Fidesz was the first East Central European party to make family policy its priority by introducing substantial tax exemptions for families with children, especially those with three children; given that it operated through tax breaks rather than direct financial transfers, in Hungary this policy was specifically targeted to the middle class and not the poorest strata (Szikra 2014). Since Poland has demographic issues as well, PiS politicians and experts were likely to observe the Hungarian experiment quite closely. Hungary's stress on family policy gave PiS politicians an additional impetus for pursuing the "Family 500+" program, even though they opted for financial transfers rather than tax cuts, by giving 500 PLN (*Złoty*) monthly for every second (and further) child. Despite this difference, the essence of the reform [in both countries] is nevertheless similar (Kołtuniak 2016; Kuzińska 2017).

As concerns pensions, which may count as an aspect of social policy, the approach of the Hungarian government here again inspired PiS. The actual

policy steps differed, as the Hungarian government increased the pension age from 60 to 62, whereas the Polish government lowered it from 67 to 65 for men and to 60 for women. Nevertheless, the tendency to act against the “neoliberal” imperative of raising the pension age, and of privatizing at least a part of the pension system, was visible in both cases. The government of Fidesz even nationalized private pension funds, a fairly radical step going against neoliberal tenets. The government of PiS did not go quite as far, but it clearly favors state pensions more than private savings pension schemes. It has not found ways to make the state pension system more sustainable—given the structural asymmetry in the Polish demography—but it has turned more attention to this system in comparison with the private pension funds that notoriously underachieved in the Polish context. At the same time, PiS intends to keep pension funds in place as a part of the plan to further develop the domestic financial market (Oręziak 2017). This shows that economic policy of East European conservatives is not per se anti-liberal, but constitutes a synthesis of liberal and statist solutions to be able to pursue “national interests” more effectively.

### ***The return of industrial policy?***

In Hungary, financial policy is not least a means of fostering investment, that is, an instance of industrial policy. Accordingly, companies that invest have to pay much lower taxes than non-investing ones. Furthermore, producing companies have an advantage tax-wise over companies from the service sector. Banking, trade, energy, and telecommunication sectors are even exposed to new taxes. The idea to give companies tax incentives to invest was practiced within the neoliberal paradigm as well, but less radically. Foreign companies were often given tax privileges when investing in special economic zones; however, they rarely had to pay taxes as high as those imposed by Fidesz (reaching 50 percent) when functioning outside those zones. In fact, Fidesz forces companies to invest and punishes them for not investing. Polish conservatives have observed those efforts with great attention, but they have not yet dared to copy them. The Polish banking tax is an element of the policy of subordinating this sector to the will of the government, but not yet a part of a comprehensive strategy to make the tax system more just and promotive of investment. PiS is promoting nationalization of the banking sector and its general ideology includes implicit aversion vis-à-vis speculative capital, but the actual policy is not nearly as comprehensive as the Hungarian one (Konopczyński 2017; Morawski 2017; Sutowski 2017).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we argue that the transfer of economic ideas from Hungary to Poland is a case of ideational imitation, but that the copying of specific economic policy solutions has only followed a rational analysis of the Hungarian experience by Polish experts. Hungary was the first country in East Central Europe that

experimented massively with so-called unorthodox economic policy. This policy largely followed Fidesz' ideological break with liberalism. Having considerable ideological commonalities with Fidesz, the Polish political party Law and Justice was naturally interested in the performance of the Hungarian state and economy under the rule of Viktor Orbán. In this respect, experts in think tanks and universities played a fundamental role. In both countries, these experts worked on producing and organizing the knowledge—the arguments and the evidence—supporting the rediscovery by Fidesz and PiS of the state's importance to the economy. The knowledge produced by conservative experts was crucial for these political parties' break with the legacy of liberal economic reformers (such as Leszek Balcerowicz in Poland or Lajos Bokros in Hungary). Both Fidesz and PiS counted on the efforts and advice of experts to challenge neoliberal policies, and actively recruited such experts into governmental positions or government-inclined think tanks. Prominent examples in Poland include Paweł Szalამacha, and the Deputy Minister of Finance, Minister of Finance and Development (2015–17) and (from December 2017) Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. In Hungary, the rapprochement between the conservative political party and experts began already in the 1990s when economist György Matolcsy joined Fidesz. Matolcsy already then held views that prioritized national over private interests (Sebök 2018), and he would go on to directly shape or influence all major economic policies of Fidesz, either as minister or as author of economic programs.

Many conservative experts in Poland turned to the economic policies devised by Matolcsy under Orbán both for inspiration and to evaluate them critically. In advising PiS, conservative experts did not intend to copy all Hungarian policies for several different reasons. First, the state of the Hungarian economy in 2010 differed from that of the Polish economy in 2015. The Hungarian crisis was much deeper. Second, Orbán's economic reforms are not uncontroversial. The main criticism in the eyes of Polish observers is that Orbán's reforms have contributed to the establishment of a Hungarian oligarchy or a "mafia state" (Góralczyk 2015). Furthermore, reforms are seen as having worsened the investment climate in Hungary and led generally to the politicization of the economy (Gadomski 2016; Wojciechowski 2016). Since the conservative experts associated with PiS have economic expertise, they could not automatically adopt an uncritical approach to Hungarian economic experiments. Rather, they recommended following selected, though crucial, policies that were both consistent with the overall conservative ideology of both Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński, and promised to improve the situation of public finance, of small and middle-sized business, and of the society as a whole. In the domains of financial, social, and industrial policy, the Hungarian experience has helped the Polish government to specify its policy approach.

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# 10 Gender in the resurgent Polish conservatism

*Agnieszka Wiercholska*

## Introduction

Ever since the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) came to power in Poland, women's rights and reproductive rights in particular have caused heated debates, protest movements and have in effect polarized society. The "Black Protest" in October 2016 mobilized over 100,000 people in marches all over Poland against the new conservative government's project to restrict the existing abortion laws. "PiS hates women," said an MP from the opposition party.<sup>1</sup> "This government will be overthrown by women," read one of the slogans in the protest.<sup>2</sup> Polish society has been polarized and mobilized on the grounds of gender issues from the moment the Law and Justice party came to power in November 2015. Yet, women's and reproductive rights caused sharp controversies even before PiS won the parliamentary election. Different protagonists such as the Catholic Church, various parties and lobby groups had for years been shaping a conservative agenda and public opinion. The conservative outlook on gender has thus a longer tradition in Poland.

This chapter gives an overview of recent discussions on women's rights and roles. It asks what constitutes the conservative agenda on gender issues. How does it translate into laws and decision-making? Who are the actors advocating it? It also sketches how feminists and women's rights activists react to the endeavor to implement the conservative ideology in law and in public opinion. How do they interpret the current situation in Poland against a broader background? In a first step, this chapter summarizes recent developments since the Law and Justice party has been in power. It will discuss reproductive health issues under the PiS government and the ideological foundations of political decisions. Domestic violence and family policies are also discussed in a first step. Recent initiatives under the Law and Justice party have to be contextualized though in a broader perspective, in order to observe long-term continuities. In a second step, I focus on three major issues and the debates that have surrounded them. The discussion over abortion laws (1) and the anti-"gender ideology" campaign (2) both give us insights into the argumentation, lobby groups, and actors that effectively shape public opinion. They also display the frame in Polish society within which these debates take place. I also outline traditional

and national patterns of gender roles in Poland (3) that have shaped a canon of values—a gender norm—for generations. This chapter does not pretend to be an in-depth analysis of the current situation, nor does it claim to discuss the topic in its totality. Rather, it endeavors to outline tendencies in current politics and the long-term legacies that have shaped gender relations in Poland and sketch some of the ways feminists, scholars, and women’s rights activists have challenged these.

### **Women’s rights and reproductive health under the PiS government since 2015**

In November 2015, Jarosław Kaczyński’s Law and Justice party gained the absolute majority of seats in the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament. In May of the same year, Andrzej Duda of PiS won the presidential elections. Thus, since the end of 2015 nothing seemed to stand in the way of the “good change”—as PiS politicians like to call their political agenda. This “good change” is a narrative code for reshaping the state and society according to PiS beliefs. Observers have criticized how the Constitutional Tribunal was de facto blocked, the state media taken over by PiS adherents, and the judicial system put under control of the ruling party (Osteuropa 2016; Pilawski and Politt 2016). Some Polish intellectuals have publicly called Poland’s regime an illiberal democracy, an authoritarian regime, or a return of Bolshevik-style governance. Because of the non-observance of rule of law by the PiS government, the European Union has initiated proceedings against Poland according to Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union—for the first time in the Union’s history.

Dismantling democracy is just one side of the “good change”; the other, closely interwoven, is a fundamental shift of values toward conservative norms within society. The roles of women and family are central in this consolidating of conservative societal norms. With the Law and Justice party in power, women’s rights and especially reproductive health issues have been called into question, which has caused heated debates and reactions. The scholar, feminist activist, and journalist Agnieszka Graff warns that gender issues should not be perceived solely as a “diversionary tactic” from “real” political problems, or treated just as a side matter. In fact, gender issues should be at the center of our attention: what is at stake, argues Graff, are issues of equality and core values of democracy (Graff 2014b, 434). Fundamentally, the conservative anti-gender turn undermines liberal democracy. The debates over gender equality also show the place of the Catholic Church within political decision-making in Poland. Graff emphasizes, “What is at stake is the (increasingly blurred) boundary between Church and State” (ibid.). We thus cannot view gender as a side effect of the “good change”: rather, gender issues are at the core of the contestation over the direction Poland is taking.

**Reproductive health**

Women's rights activists condemn the fact that in Poland the promise of rights "to access to sexual education, contraception, termination of pregnancy and in-vitro fertilization have been notoriously broken" (Nowicka 2016). This is the case not only since Law and Justice has come to power, but ever since reproductive and women's rights have been increasingly curtailed and political leaders have invoked arguments based not on scientific evidence but rather on ideological convictions. Propagating conservative ideological beliefs has a vast impact on women's political and reproductive rights—they shift accepted norms within society, affect political decision-making, legislative initiatives, and public discourse.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines reproductive health as follows,

Reproductive health, therefore, implies that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this area [is] the right of men and women to be informed of and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their choice, and the right of access to appropriate health care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.

(WHO 2010)

I discuss the topic of abortion rights in Poland in a longer perspective in the second part of the chapter, but in talking here about reproductive health it must already be cursorily mentioned. Since 1993 Poland has had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. It allows termination of pregnancy only in three cases: when the pregnancy occurs as a consequence of a criminal act (rape, incest), when the fetus is damaged, and when the health or life of the mother is endangered. In 2016, a legislative initiative to ban abortion totally in Poland triggered mass protest all over the country. There is also the aggravating circumstance that emergency contraceptives (the morning-after pill) are available only on prescription. The former government, formed by the coalition of the Civic Platform (*Platforma obywatelska*, PO) and the Polish Peasants' Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL), was in power from 2007 to 2015. This government released the pill from compulsory prescription only in 2015, after eight years in power and shortly before the next elections. For a short time, women could buy the pill in pharmacies without a doctor's prescription. However, the PiS government reintroduced the doctor's prescription for the morning-after pill, creating a critical situation for women in cases of need.

The lack of knowledge about this pill and wrong assumptions stigmatize emergency contraception additionally. Many believe the pill functions as an

abortive medicine leading to the termination of a pregnancy (Dłużewska 2017; Kacpura and Grzywacz 2016), which impedes women's access to emergency contraceptives. The PiS Minister of Health Konstanty Radziwiłł declared in a radio interview on 23 February 2017 that as a doctor he would not prescribe the morning-after pill even if a raped woman asked him for it. That is, he would use his right to invoke the conscience clause (Radio Zet 2017). Doctors have the right to do this when they choose not to terminate a pregnancy (even if legally in any of the three cases mentioned above) or to prescribe contraceptives. Until October 2015, doctors were obliged to redirect the patient to another physician who would agree, but they were disengaged from that duty with the decision of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal of 7 October 2015, that is, even before the PiS government came to power (Nowicka 2016, 52).

This means, effectively, that women are not always able to exercise their (already limited) rights because of this legal loophole. Increasingly also pharmacists invoke the conscience clause when they refuse to sell contraceptives (*ibid.*, 51). There are also whole regions in Poland where women who fulfill one of the criteria for legal termination of pregnancy have trouble finding a consenting doctor, where procedures in hospitals are delayed and complicated, thereby prolonging the crucial time factor for the women in need (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 53). On 13 May 2016, the Sejm MP Robert Winnicki (first of the "Kukiz'15" parliamentary fraction, later independent) and leader of the nationalist All-Polish Youth, bragged during a Sejm session that in the region of Podkarpackie, there is not a single remaining clinic where "children are being killed," that is, where legal abortions take place. All doctors there have purportedly signed the "conscience clause" (Sejm 2016).

PiS is not only concerned over abortion rights and contraception, but also other areas of reproductive health. In-vitro fertilization and conditions in maternity clinics were also on the agenda of this government's healthcare activities. As one of the first acts as Minister of Health, Konstanty Radziwiłł (PiS) cancelled government subsidies for in-vitro fertilization procedures (Nowicka 2016, 49). This method to remedy infertility is highly criticized by the Catholic Church and media close to the Church. Their stance affects the structure of the debate within society, since no public protagonist can ignore the moral and religious questions brought forth by Catholic voices in the discussion. Sociologist Magdalena Kozub-Karkut has analyzed the debate on in-vitro fertilization in Poland since 2007, often referred to as the "secondary abortion debate" (Kozub-Karkut 2017, 247). According to the Catholic Church, human life starts at the instant of fertilization and requires protection from that very moment. During the in-vitro fertilization, humans can choose which fertilized ova will be implanted into the mother's womb, and which will be frozen or destroyed. This process causes moral and ethical questions that need to be resolved. Many Western states have introduced laws regulating the procedure. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, the procedure is a "selection" of human life. Furthermore, already the intervention of the doctor—a third party—in creating human life is incompatible with the doctrines of the Church (*ibid.*, 247–9; Znak 2008). Kozub-Karkut

shows moreover how children procreated in the in-vitro process have been stigmatized in debates in the media, as well as by representatives of the Catholic Church (Kozub-Karkut 2017, 250). Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek compared in-vitro fertilization, in a statement in 2009, to the creation of Frankenstein (*ibid.*, 251). Kozub-Karkut depicts convincingly how the attitude of the Catholic Church implies that such children are challenged in their personal identity, since they have been selected at the expense of their siblings (*ibid.*, 254). In addition, some PiS representatives have repeated infamous verdicts about the psychological well-being of children conceived thanks to in-vitro fertilization.

Since the Church has a vast impact on public opinion and Polish society, in-vitro fertilization is a highly controversial issue. It was only in 2015 that the previous PO-PSL government regulated parameters of the process by law. A state-funded program in place in 2013–16 subsidized in-vitro fertilization for married couples. However, the treatment was never put on the list of guaranteed eligible medical benefits and thus it was easy for the new PiS government to shorten the subsidies. To treat infertility PiS health minister Radziwiłł prefers to promote “NaPro” technology based on “natural methods,” but scientists and leading world health organizations question its effectiveness in helping couples suffering from infertility (Nowicka 2016, 49).

After the reshaping of the PiS government in January 2018, the cardiologist Łukasz Szumowski became the new Minister of Health, but it is too early to assess his deeds in office. Yet, as we know from media coverage, he signed in 2014, along with 4,000 other Catholic physicians, the document “Declaration of faith of Catholic doctors and students of medicine on the sexuality and fertility of human beings.” Wanda Póltawska, herself a devout Catholic doctor, close friend of Pope John Paul II, and survivor of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, initiated this declaration. She herself suffered in pseudo-medical experiments in Ravensbrück. The declaration places divine law over human law. It condemns abortion, euthanasia, in-vitro fertilization, and contraception as transgressions against the Ten Commandments and the divine order.

Maternity clinics and the conditions on the wards have also been on the agenda of the PiS government. A few years ago in 2012, before the recent government came to power, the Ministry of Health introduced standards of birth assistance based on the recommendations of the 1996-initiated foundation Give Birth Humanely (*Rodzić po ludzku*). These instructions to medical personnel put the mother in labor at the center of attention and decision-making. They were to make sure she had all the information needed and provided her with generous rights to influence her conditions and the labor process. But now, women’s rights activists fear that these standards in maternity clinics may be curtailed at the expense of the laboring mothers, since PiS Health Minister Radziwiłł has summoned a committee of experts to reform birth-giving assistance. One of the experts is the highly controversial gynecologist Bogdan Chazan, a declared opponent of abortion (Pacewicz 2017; Szewczyk 2017) who was sued by a former patient and had to explicate his decisions in court (Świąchowicz 2017). His critics call him a Catholic fundamentalist and a “women’s hangman.”



Women's rights activists now fear that under the PiS government women will be reduced to simple objects of reproduction, hampered in their rights and belittled to mere "living incubators" (Barbara Nowacka). Thus, the debate over maternity clinics has triggered the broader issue of the dignity of women on labor wards in particular and the role of women in society as a whole.

Sex education and knowledge about sexuality are effective tools for reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies (WHO 2010). Nevertheless, conservative circles and the Catholic Church declare themselves against sex education in public schools. No Polish government has yet introduced sex education in schools. In the last legislation period, PO voted against a legislative initiative to introduce the course into the school curriculum (Nowicka 2016, 48). Now, students in the fourth grade or above can choose the optional subject "education for family life." With the PiS government in power, this course will be easily prone to be used to propagate conservative ideology on the subject. Education minister Anna Zalewska has asserted that she would not let "sex educators" into public schools, since (she says) what they do is sexualize children. Furthermore, it should be (in her view) the responsibility of parents to educate their children on sexuality (Nowicka 2016, 53; Kacpura and Grzywacz 2016, 31). In 2016 she summoned a team of advisors to revise the "education for family life" course. One of the "experts" is Urszula Dudziak, a theologian appearing on Priest Tadeusz Rydzyk's TV station Trwam. She opposes all forms of contraception and has made it into the wider media with statements about sperm's positive effects on women's health versus contraception's damaging effects (TVN24 2016; Żelazińska 2017; Chrzczonowicz 2017). Up to January 2018 the Ministry of Education had authorized only one book for the above-mentioned course. It reproduces gender stereotypes, teaches little on contraception, but rather offers arguments for why sex only after marriage seems to be the best solution. Another advisor in the matter of the book is the aforementioned, highly controversial Bogdan Chazan (Nowicka 2016, 53). Many fear that Catholic-conservative ideology will bias sex education with information on reproductive health and sexuality that lags far behind contemporary scientific standards on the subject.

As a reaction to these developments, Anja Rubik, a successful model, initiated the campaign "#sexedpl" in autumn 2017. Under the slogan "All of Poland is talking about sex" she gathered famous personalities from show business to help educate viewers on certain topics concerning sexuality in short clips on YouTube. For example, Małgorzata Szumowska, award-winning film director, introduces diverse forms of contraception. Popular actor Maciej Stuhr explains to his daughter that she has the right to "say no" at any given moment. Singer Mary Komasa persuades girls to visit the gynecologist regularly. Słupsk city mayor Robert Biedroń talks about his homosexuality. The clips were seen on the internet site of *Wysokie Obcasy* ("High Heels"), a women's magazine, and YouTube. Initiatives by civil society are taking a stand against the narrow vision of gender roles promoted by the ruling government party. On social media, grassroots projects are offering an alternative to the conservative narrative.

In conclusion, reproductive health issues are prone to be influenced rather by ideological convictions than by scientific data. Women's rights in this arena are limited and moreover easily ignored and made difficult to access (by the doctors' "conscience clause," which also pharmacists apply, and ostracism in society). As sexual education in schools will evidently not be introduced, the spread of knowledge on the topic is hampered even further. Convictions seem to be more important than knowledge. Grassroots initiatives offer an alternative to conservative worldviews and are extremely valuable, yet they cannot effectively counterbalance the policies propagated by the PiS government and the Church.

### ***Domestic violence***

Domestic violence remains a major challenge in Poland. In 2017 the police registered 950,000 cases of domestic violence, with 88 percent of the victims being women and children (Statystyka Policja 2017). The number of unreported cases is certainly much higher. The estimated number of fatalities is 150 to 400–500 victims per year (Chrzczonowicz 2016; Dominiczak 2013, 14). At the same time, the family is valued as a highly respected institution in this Catholic country. However, real problems within families such as domestic violence are obscured by the shining ideal. In 2015, the former PO-PSL government of Poland signed the "Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence" (Istanbul 2011), but the PiS government has threatened to withdraw from the Convention, because, they argue, it promotes unnatural gender roles. Since May 2016 the PiS government has cut funding to several organizations helping victims of domestic violence such as the Center for Women's Rights or the domestic violence emergency hotline Blue Line. This was a serious error, judged Małgorzata Fuszara in an interview on 18 May 2016 (Tok FM 2016). Fuszara is professor of sociology specializing in gender studies among others, and in 2014–15 was the government's advisor on gender equality. The new government's policy gives a signal, Fuszara says, that domestic abuse victims should remain with the perpetrators. The dictum of holding the family together, no matter what, is thereby elevated above other considerations and above the rights of the victims, Fuszara says (*ibid.*). In October 2017 police searched the rooms of several women's rights organizations, confiscating documents and computers. Commentators in the press judged this incident as planned intimidation. The operation took place just one day after the anniversary of the "Black Protest."

Magdalena Środa, professor of philosophy and ethics and leading Polish feminist, states that PiS ennobles collective entities as the organizing principle in the hierarchy of society (Środa 2016). Family, community, and nation have become the relevant entities in society. Individual rights must thus lose out in a conflict with the values of the collective. Women's rights are subordinated to family values. PiS representatives, argues Środa, strive after an idealized conception of a seemingly "golden age" in which families have strong bonds over generations, in which women take over all the care work, and in which the nation is proud (*ibid.*).

***The program “Family 500 Plus” (“500+”)***

During the 2015 election campaign, a major PiS promise was to introduce a child benefit amounting to 500 PLN monthly for the second and each following child. This benefit would be paid to all families independent of income. After the election, the program was quickly introduced and has been in effect since April 2016. The following short sketch of family policies in Poland since 1989 will show, on the one hand, that PiS engaged hereby in an arena of politics—family policy—that post-socialist Polish governments had neglected for years. On the other hand, the aims and limitations of the 500+ program are such that the program is based on a conservative model of the family in which mothers shoulder the major burden of care work.

After the transformation of 1989, Polish politics at large neglected investments in family and social welfare. Expenditures in social systems were curtailed; the budget spent on families was one of the lowest in Europe (in 2011, 1.76 percent of GNP) (Rumińska-Zimny and Przyborowska 2016), and childcare facilities were closed. Though Poland was economically growing and prospering and its GNP rising, many families, especially those with three children or more, as well as single parents, did not benefit from the changes as much as other segments of society. The authors of a report on women’s rights in Poland, published by the Women’s Congress, Ewa Rumińska-Zimny and Katarzyna Przyborowska, argue that, albeit the government was investing then in infrastructure, large parts of society faced (and still face) economic instability due to short-term contracts, poor conditions of employment, low benefits, or simply unemployment. These people felt excluded from participation in society (*ibid.*, 25). At the same time, the birth rate sank from 2.1 in 1989 to 1.3 in 2012 (*ibid.*, 26). The authors Rumińska-Zimny and Przyborowska propose a correlation between sinking birth rates and the troubles undergone by people during transformation. “The drop in birth rates that occurred in Poland and other countries of the region was in large part the answer of women to the difficult process of transformation and the lack of support from the state” (*ibid.*, 31).

The demographic change caused major problems such as the aging of society and a diminishing number of inhabitants, which social systems can solve only with increasing difficulty. From 2007 the PO-PSL government engaged in a family agenda, actively promoting family policies and gender equality. In its last years (2013–15) it intensified these endeavors since gender equality between parents in Poland lags severely behind. Nevertheless, the authors of the report on women’s rights point out that these family policies came too late, aimed too low, and were inconsistent (*ibid.*, 30). In its report on the reconciliation between work and family life, published in 2015 by the Commissioner for Human Rights in Poland, the authors conclude that women still shoulder the major load of childcare and household chores, whereas men only “help” occasionally (Błaszczak et al. 2015, 60). This state of affairs is due to the lack of childcare facilities, the gender pay gap, and the state of the role of mothers within society. According to Eurostat, only 5 percent of children under age three had a place in childcare

facilities in 2013, and still only 38 percent of children aged three to five had a childcare spot (*ibid.*, 69). In 2012, women in Poland earned on average 20 percent less than men did (*ibid.*, 63). Fathers are now also eligible to take parental leave, but in 2014 a mere 1.65 percent of those parents who actually did take leave were men (*ibid.*, 60). In 2012 surveys, 46.4 percent of Poland's population believes that it has a negative effect on children if mothers work (Rumińska-Zimny and Przyborowska 2016, 31). Rumińska-Zimny and Przyborowska argue that the best policies to slow the drop in the birthrate—as shown in international comparative studies—have two ingredients: increase government expenditures on the family and, simultaneously, promote gender equality. These are two things which can better enable women to have real choices in their concept of life, family, and work (*ibid.*, 26).

The PiS government's Family Ministry also aims to fight the country's sinking birthrates. Vice Minister Bartosz Marczuk has called the public's attention in the media to the fact that Poland is literally "becoming extinct" (*Naprawdę wymieramy*. In: *Rzeczpospolita* 29.1.2016) (*ibid.*, 25). The program 500+, in effect since 2016, is directed at altering the demographic change of the last decades. For many families neglected by policies for a long time, the extra amount paid into the family budget was significant. The Ministry assumes that the risk of poverty for families will be thereby lowered from 23 to 11 percent (*ibid.*, 35), but to date we cannot yet observe a substantial effect on the birthrate. The Ministry reports, however, that in 2016 the number of childbirths was higher by 13,000 over the preceding year (Ministerstwo Rodziny 2017).

Yet, the program has earned much critique. The objections go in two directions but complement one another. For one, there is the high cost of the program, yet simultaneously predictions of little effect on the birth rate. The other point focuses on the program's ideological premise. The authors of the report on women's rights argue that the program 500+ is founded on a conservative model of the family. It discourages a dual-parenting/-earner model where both parents have the same rights and burdens (Rumińska-Zimny and Przyborowska 2016, 36–9). The assumption is that mothers will shoulder the major portion of the family care work. Their freedom of choice will thereby be even more limited, causing more and more women to drop out of the labor market. Poverty among elderly women, as an effect, seems inevitable. However, women in Poland do wish to have more children, according to surveys (*ibid.*, 27), but poor employment conditions, the difficult reconciliation of family and working life, and poor childcare facilities are impeding factors. The conservative model, argue women's rights activists, will not much alter birth rates positively, although expenditures on family policies have increased enormously (*ibid.*, 36).

## **Gender issues in a longer perspective**

### ***Abortion in Poland—laws, debates, protagonists***

This part discusses what patterns of argumentation various pressure groups use to manifest their ideological convictions in debates over the right to terminate pregnancy in Poland: it asks about the framing of these debates, about accepted societal norms, the perceived transgressions, and the wording used in talking about the issue.

The law on abortion in effect until now (March 2018) dates back to the so-called compromise of 1993. During the Polish People's Republic, abortion on social grounds was legal and was de facto practiced whenever a patient wished to terminate her pregnancy. After transformation, conservative circles and especially the Catholic Church put pressure on politicians to prohibit abortion. In January 1993, the Sejm finally passed a law that was considered a compromise with the Church (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 53–4). The law allows terminating pregnancy in three cases: when the fetus is seriously damaged, the health of the mother is endangered, or when the pregnancy results from a crime. In 1996, the Sejm amended this law to allow abortion also on social grounds, but the Constitutional Tribunal canceled the amendment in 1997.

Many women's rights activists criticize the "compromise." This law and the decision-making process that preceded it show very clearly how strongly the Catholic Church has a say in lawmaking and the authority it has over the ruling parties (Federa 2018). To date, no liberal or leftist government has dared to challenge the "compromise" fundamentally. In consequence, an "abortion underground" has developed in the last 25 years (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 53–4). The Federation for Women's Rights and Family Planning declares on its website (and under the hashtag "#25latpieklakobiet") that over the intervening 25 years Poland has become a "women's hell" (Federa 2018). They are alluding thereby to the text "Women's Hell" written by the Polish poet and writer Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, who advocated for the right to abortion already in the 1930s by showing the damaging effects of the prohibition on women. The Federation as well as other NGOs estimate that Polish women are performing around 100,000 to 150,000 illegal abortions per year (ibid.). In 2013, the pollster CBOS conducted a survey on abortions. According to this survey around 4.1 to 5.8 million Polish women had had an abortion, which would amount to 25–33 percent of Polish women—in spite of the strict abortion law (Nowicka 2016, 52). There are underground clinics performing illegal abortions, and sometimes, as Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska shows, carried out by the same physicians who have signed a "conscience clause" in public hospitals (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 53). There are organizations selling abortion pills and a black market for these products. Outside Poland, some clinics focus on "abortion-tourism" from Poland (ibid.). Women who cannot afford to go abroad may resort to dangerous "home methods" (ibid.). Nevertheless, since the year 2000 there have been several legislative initiatives aiming at restricting even further the existing abortion law.

Every endeavor to change the law on abortion triggers strong reactions within society. Wanda Nowicka, former Sejm MP and co-founder of the Federation for Women's Rights, as well as long-time combatant for the liberalization of the abortion law, has drawn attention to how the discourse on abortion has shifted over time (Nowicka 2016, 48). From the beginning, the words and language accompanying the abortion debate have been problematic. Already in the 1990s, argues Nowicka, the Catholic Church and conservative circles used a highly ideological terminology and thus acquired an interpretive hegemony in the war of words over abortion (*ibid.*). The word "fetus" was substituted with the term "unborn child" or sometimes merely "child" (*ibid.*). The effect of this was that abortion was discursively equated with the "murder of the child." This incriminating terminology has gradually reshaped the way some parts of society perceive abortion.

This discursive battleground has been illustrated by visual statements in regularly appearing billboard campaigns by anti-abortion organizations. Most of these call themselves "pro-life" whereas their adversaries label them "anti-choice" (an example of the semantic contestation that takes place on various levels simultaneously). The foundation *Pro-prawo do życia* ("For the right to life") displays its "Choose Life" exhibition in public spaces regularly.<sup>3</sup> Their billboards show fully developed fetuses full of blood, sometimes dismembered, outside the womb. A billboard in 2010 featured Adolf Hitler next to a fetus, informing the viewer that Hitler legalized abortions for Polish women on 9 March 1943 (TVN24 2010). This juxtaposition, ahistorical and taken totally out of context as it is, would suggest that those who pronounce themselves for the right to abortion, are comparable to Adolf Hitler—mass murderer and foe of the Polish nation, responsible for decimating the Polish population. Abortion is thus put into a national and martyrological perspective. The phrase "holocaust of unborn children" also puts abortion into the context of genocide and civilizational breach (Wolna Polska 2017). In addition, state representatives and the media today widely use the wording "eugenic abortion" to refer to abortions of malformed fetuses, an expression highly suggestive of the National Socialists' eugenics program in the service of their ideology. "Eugenic abortion" thus demands a priori a negative moral judgment. Today, prominent PiS politicians including President Andrzej Duda and many journalists use the wording as if it were a self-evident. Those who advocate the liberalization of the abortion law are also sometimes labeled "abortionists" by their adversaries—as if they were propagating abortion instead of women's rights to choose. Language affects, as we know, the perception of reality, with a vast impact on what society perceives as the acceptable norm.

From the beginning of this century, civic organizations have submitted legislative initiatives to restrict the law on abortion, but the Sejm has always declined the drafts. In 2014, the majority of the PiS parliamentary faction, at that time still an opposition party, voted in favor of the restrictions (Kacpura and Grzywacz 2016, 31). After the parliamentary elections of 2015, majorities had shifted. Since then PiS has held an absolute majority in the Sejm, and the overall

political climate has changed. Those advocating further restrictions on abortion in the law now saw a suitable opportunity to push their agenda forward. In 2016 the group *Stop Aborcji* (“Stop Abortion”), primarily driven by the Catholic organization *Ordo Iuris*, introduced a citizens’ legislative initiative aiming at a total ban on abortion. The draft law proposed prison sentences of up to five years for all those who performed or contributed to an abortion—including the expectant woman.<sup>4</sup> Lawyers warned that the new law might result in attorneys—or the police—examining each miscarriage and incriminating the miscarrying women. Doctors would fear performing certain prenatal diagnostics when there is any chance causing miscarriage (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 54). Katarzyna Kacpura, head of the Federation for Women’s Rights and Family Planning, summed up the possible result:

Carrying the child to term and giving birth will be mandatory. Even if a woman is 11 years old. Even if the pregnancy results from a crime and the perpetrator is her own father. Women will be forced to give birth to severely ill children with fatal conditions, or the children will die in tremendous pain, over several hours, days or months after birth.

(Kacpura and Grzywacz 2016, 32)

At first, leading PiS politicians and the Catholic Church supported the initiative. The Catholic Episcopal Conference spoke out in favor of the total ban on abortion and stressed that the “compromise” in effect to date was insufficient. The Conference’s communiqué was read in parishes all over Poland during Sunday Mass on 3 April 2016 (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 54–5).

Quickly, hundreds of thousands of people, especially women, voiced their concern and protest against the draft law. In April 2016, the Facebook group *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* (“Girls for Girls”) was initiated and gained 100,000 followers within 48 hours (Korolczuk 2017, 96). Soon, women (and men) demonstrated their opposition in various forms and ways—such as by street protests and sending messages to the prime minister on social media.<sup>5</sup> The protest movement created its own new symbols and reinterpreted old ones. A simple wire coat hanger symbolized the dangerous DIY methods to which women could resort because of the lack of access to legal abortions. Women dressed in black—hence the name “Black Protest”—in order to express their state of mourning for women’s rights in Poland. In this way they also alluded to an older, patriotic tradition. During the times of the partitions of Poland in the nineteenth century, when the January Uprising of 1863 was repressed and demonstrators in Warsaw killed, women dressed in black in mourning for their killed husbands, fathers, and sons, and to show their solidarity with the national cause. Black dresses (also brides wore black) were an open expression of (female) protest against the repressive politics of the Russian Empire. Other national and patriotic symbols were turned into signs of female protest in 2016: the national anthem, *Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła* (“Poland is Not Yet Lost”) was transformed into *Jeszcze Polka nie zginęła* (“the Polish woman is not yet lost”). The anchor,

the sign of the Polish underground during Nazi occupation *Polska walcząca* (“Fighting Poland”), became *Polka walcząca* (“The fighting Polish woman”) with nipples added to the anchor.

In May 2016, Barbara Nowacka, representative of the leftist extra-parliamentary opposition, co-founded the committee *Ratujmy kobiety* (“Save Women”). It introduced its own draft law aimed at liberalizing the abortion law, and at providing broader access to contraception and sexual education (Bielińska-Kowalewska 2017, 55). In order to submit a civil legislative initiative to parliament, the organizations must collect at least 100,000 signatures. The project *Stop Aborcji* gathered around 450,000 signatures, whereas *Ratujmy kobiety* around 215,000 (ibid., 55). At first reading in September 2016, the Sejm accepted the motion of the *Stop Aborcji* initiative and the draft law was delegated to further debates in a parliamentary committee. The Sejm denied the motion of the liberalizing law project. With a PiS majority in parliament, the total ban on abortion, including prison terms, had realistic prospects of passing parliament at subsequent readings.

In reaction to the decisions of parliament, the protests against the restrictive abortion law draft culminated in October 2016. On 1 October a demonstration outside parliament took place, and a general women’s strike was scheduled for Monday, 3 October (modeled on the women’s strike in Iceland in 1975). On that day, women all over Poland did not go to work, and gathered in rallies in 143 cities. In Warsaw alone, tens of thousands of women (and men) gathered for the demonstration. The number of those who came together surprised even the organizers. It was a rainy day, and the streets leading to the main assembly point at the King’s Palace were flooded with umbrellas. Thereby the umbrella became a new symbol of the protest movement. An estimated number of around 100,000 people took part in demonstrations, but other forms of protest were significant as well, and made the “Black Monday” of 3 October 2016 a success. Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska describes how many women who feared losing their jobs by going on strike, went to work, but dressed in black. Others limited their duties at work, for example by refusing to answer the telephone. Administrations in town halls were paralyzed. Some companies with female staff in the majority had to shut down. Teachers at universities did not write absence notes (ibid.). The protest delivered success: PiS abandoned the initiative of the total ban on abortions; particularly, even the Catholic Church eventually also distanced itself from the project, criticizing the prospect of prison terms for the women.

Although the protest had a favorable outcome, the conservative agenda on reproductive health is still accepted by many, and the controversy over the “compromise” lingers on. By the end of 2017, the organization Life and Family proposed yet another new legislative initiative to restrict abortion. This time, the project did not aim at prohibiting abortion entirely, but rather, the abortion of malformed fetuses was to be prohibited. Again, the committee *Ratujmy kobiety* (“Save Women”) simultaneously initiated a draft for a new law aiming at liberalizing abortion. While the latter collected around 200,000 citizen signatures, the abortion adversaries mobilized around 800,000 people to endorse their project,



according to their website. In January 2018 the project of Life and Family was accepted at first reading, and again, parliamentary committees were to work on the draft bill.

PiS earlier had promised to allow more direct democracy and reassured citizens that it would accept all motions coming from citizens' legislative initiatives at first reading. In spite of that promise, PiS rejected in September 2016 the draft of the law submitted by *Ratujmy kobiety*, and the parliamentary opposition criticized the ruling party for not keeping its own promises. In January 2018, the situation was not to repeat itself: even some prominent PiS members such as Jarosław Kaczyński and Krystyna Pawłowicz voted in favor of the liberalizing project at first reading. The Sejm rejected the project of *Ratujmy kobiety* nevertheless. It failed mainly because of the voting behavior of the parliamentary opposition: 39 deputies from the opposition either voted against it or were absent during the ballot. If the project had acquired merely seven more votes, the project would have passed at first reading. Some journalists viewed this vote on the liberalization project—as it had no real chance to pass ultimately into law anyway—as a tactic of the extra-parliamentary opposition to drive a wedge between the opposition parties within the Sejm. In the end, the outcome of the vote discredited the opposition on the issue. However, these press commentaries show how reproductive health issues are often interpreted as a political tool for something else, a game of interests rather than a core issue. We await the further outcome on the abortion issue.

In the debates over abortion, different pressure groups are presenting their overall worldviews and visions of the society they want to live in. Thus it is important to analyze how different groups within society negotiate conflicting interests. One of the most important players in this debate in Poland are different factions within the Catholic Church who try to actively shape public opinion. As shown earlier, priests in Poland regularly do take a stance on ideological debates from the pulpit or in the media. The Church, as a well-respected authority, affects large segments of the population. Furthermore, the upper hierarchy of the church communicates with the faithful through communiqués of the Bishops' Conference or pastoral letters read out during Sunday Mass. Catholic moral concepts thus cannot be ignored in any public debate since they effectively shape majority opinions and accepted norms.

The Catholic Church as player and pressure group influences political decision-making. Magdalena Środa, professor of ethics and philosophy and engaged feminist, views also the liberal PO as being “kept on a leash by the church” (Kubica 2018). This is one of the main reasons why the “compromise” on abortion has not been altered for 25 years. It was only in 2015 that the PO-PSL government regulated in-vitro fertilization and allowed the sale of the “morning-after” pill without a doctor's prescription. However, in 2015 the PO-PSL government, having been in power for eight years, was already anticipating parliamentary elections. PO also voted against sexual education in public schools. Rightist political parties such as the *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (“League of Polish Families”) have repeatedly propagated a conservative canon of values in

politics and society, but none has been as successful as that of PiS. The latter is a natural ally of the Church on the political stage, and in return counts on Church support and mobilizing potential. Independent media reported in 2017 how the PiS government subsidized a Catholic foundation, headed by the priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, who holds ultraconservative and anti-Semitic views and is the founder of Catholic radio and TV stations (TVN24 2017; Gmiterek-Zabłocka 2017). We can observe synergy effects between the parliamentary majority of PiS and the mobilizing potential of the Church, resulting in the successful representation of its ideological agenda on the political scene. Środa thus comes to the following conclusion: “Any political revolution in this country must begin in the church. God is everywhere, but in the churches, we find only PiS. If people don’t start leaving the churches, nothing will change” (Kubica 2018).

The authority of the Church in society, and the synergy effects with a conservative party in power have provoked a major shift to the right in public opinion and in accepted societal norms. As a result, organizations on the right part of the political spectrum have gained momentum. Adversaries of abortion, gathered in anti-choice NGOs, are supported in part by Catholic organizations. The foundation Life and Family triumphed over the fact that the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) supported their draft law to curtail the right to abortion in 2017–18 (Łońska 2017). FAFCE is a Brussels-based NGO with participatory status in the Council of Europe.<sup>6</sup> It unites several Catholic organizations in different European countries. Transnational networks have become increasingly important for conservative organizations. In 2016 *Ordo Iuris* achieved some notoriety in Poland as the NGO that agitated for the total ban of abortion and drafted the legislation that was motioned in the Sejm. This ultraconservative foundation, of which most members are lawyers, analyzes prevailing legal norms and drafts new laws, aiming to turn its conservative worldview into reality.<sup>7</sup> It also organizes lectures at universities and supports PiS. In this way such ultraconservative pressure groups agitate on gender issues from the Right, and PiS has to react to them.

### ***Gender—the plague from Brussels, or on international networking***

Around the end of 2013 and in early 2014 the term “gender” in Poland gained notoriety in the public sphere, conquering the headlines of important newspapers and the attention of TV journalists and parliamentarians—much to the surprise of those engaged in gender studies. Until then, most Poles probably would have had difficulty in spelling the word, not to mention explaining what “gender” meant. But since 2013 the term has resounded throughout the land, with the political Right demonizing it as “gender-ideology”—a thing worse than Communism and Nazism put together, as Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek claimed in the summer of 2013 publicly (Graff 2014b, 432). At the same time, in autumn 2013, the Catholic Church in Poland faced severe accusations of pedophilic crimes within its ranks. In this context, Archbishop Michalik earned much critique for his extremely blunt “victim-blaming” strategy that he voiced in October 2013. His line of reasoning

was that the involved children would cling physically to the priests and simply draw the clergymen into cooperating with their perverse behavior. Pedophilia would be, thus explained, the result of the effect on the children of pornography, lack of love in broken families, and—of “gender-ideology” (ibid.). At first, commentators interpreted the emerging “war on gender” to be a cover-up strategy to divert from the accusations of pedophilia against the Church. Yet, more and more scholars have come to view the mobilization against gender in a broader context, concerning not only Poland, but in a transnational dimension (Graff and Korolczuk 2018). So, what does this contestation of gender consist of? And what purpose does it serve within Polish society and beyond it?

In December 2013 a pastoral letter broached the gender issue. The letter was read during Sunday Mass all around Poland. Gender, supposedly an ideology rooted in Marxism, feminism, and the sexual revolution, endangered the “natural order” of the sexes—so the line of argument in the letter. Thus, so-called “gender-ideology” was demonized as a threat to the family. In this Manichean vision of the world, family and traditional gender roles appear as a safe haven threatened by evil ideas coming from the decaying West, such as sexual freedom and feminism that would lead to the “sexualization” of children and a “moral chaos.” What followed after 2013–14, as Agnieszka Graff puts it, was a “brilliantly orchestrated mobilization on the right” (Graff 2014b, 432). In a very short time, anti-gender groups became active. For example, they threw smoke bombs at panel discussions with feminists. A parliamentary commission labeled “Stop gender ideology!” headed by Beata Kempa (PiS) was formed. The ultraconservative clergyman Dariusz Oko held a speech in the Sejm about the “damaging effects of gender-ideology” (ibid., 432–3). In 2015, during a large anti-sex education rally in Warsaw, one of the slogans compared gender to “Ebola from Brussels”: a dangerous disease and a threat spreading from the seat of EU institutions and imperiling Poland (Graff and Korolczuk 2018). Agnieszka Graff comments:

The word “gender” is being used strategically as a catch-all word which signifies the chaos supposedly caused by women’s rights, sexual freedom and gender equality policies, while the “child in danger” figure is used—with great success—to mobilize parents.

(Graff 2014b, 434)

Whereas the anti-gender campaign was first perceived by many as specific to Poland, many scholars can now depict its international dimension and the networks behind it (Graff and Korolczuk 2018). By comparing figures of speech, monitoring transnational organizations and publications, they discovered striking parallels and interconnectedness. The Polish debate relates well to other phenomena occurring elsewhere: Vladimir Putin’s anti-LGBT activist policy, the French movement “La Manif pour tous,” warnings from the Vatican about “gender-ideology.” As Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk reveal, ultraconservative coalitions have been organizing themselves worldwide, for example through the World Congress of Families, or the international website

“Citizen.Go” with over 4 million subscribers. Transnational networking and mobilization of grassroots activists are two sides of the same coin. The organizations described by Graff and Korolczuk use strikingly similar rhetoric and figures of thought, amplifying one another.

Some scholars analyzing “gender” posit that gender is a “symbolic glue” which unites diverse and loosely connected conservative, right-wing populist and nationalistic protagonists (*ibid.*). The common line of attack against gender promotes a cohesiveness of the diverse groups and enables international networks to flourish (Kováts and Põim 2015). Graff and Korolczuk stress the “anti-colonial frame” of the anti-gender movement: Western organizations such as the EU, UN, UNICEF, WHO, World Bank but also feminists, homosexuals, etc., are portrayed as colonizers (Graff and Korolczuk 2018) spreading a dangerous ideology against which the local, national, “primal” community must defend itself. The figure of speech “Ebola from Brussels” is emblematic: just as the conterminous disease, gender threatens to decimate the population. Graff and Korolczuk argue that the anti-genderism movement is a cohesive worldview, organized transnationally but also working in local communities. The movement sees itself as “a resistance to colonialism and neoliberal exploitation” (*ibid.*, 807). They also underscore the new forms of cultural conservative disenchantment with neoliberalism, that is, the “undervaluing of care, the dismantling of welfare provisions and the effects of these trends on women and families” (*ibid.*, 814).

The family appears here as the ultimate battleground in this ideological confrontation. Therefore the issues of family, sexuality, reproductive health, and sexual education are such important assets in this ideological warfare. To win this “war on gender,” conservative parties take on the above-mentioned issues actively and push their agenda. Graff and Korolczuk see the family as the fundamental battleground, a “nature/culture frontier.” In that sense, we have been witnessing in recent years how anti-gender activists are creating a universally coherent worldview, with followers highly mobilized, internationally organized and thus able to effectively promote an alternative civil society (Graff and Korolczuk 2018, 802–16). Graff and Korolczuk sum up: “Relying on an anticolonial frame, the Right has undermined the left-wing monopoly on voicing critiques of capitalism and has offered a new version of cultural universalism, an illiberal one.” (*ibid.*, 816). Feminists and activists argue that this interconnectedness and activation should not be ignored. There can be no going back to a “business-as-usual” stance. They are convinced that fundamental values of equality and diversity are at stake and that liberal democracies are being undermined by democratic means (*ibid.*). As Graff again sums up:

We are facing a powerful transnational effort of religious fundamentalists and right-wing radicals to discredit gender equality, and more broadly—to undermine liberal democracy. This growing social movement draws its power from collective anxieties produced by neoliberalism and globalization.

(Graff 2014b, 434)

***Matka Polka—the traditional values and real problems of Polish women***

Traditional female roles were shaped in the course of turbulent Polish history and are up to today strongly intertwined with Polish nationhood. The gender norm that was passed on through generations is the background to the recent developments and must be sketched in this overview, for it still has repercussions for today's perceptions of female and male roles. The process of modern nation-building by the Poles was deeply impacted by the partitions of the nineteenth century when Poland was divided among three empires and no sovereign Polish state existed. The struggle against foreign rule was a central element of the "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson) of the Poles as a nation. Another important pillar was the messianic, martyrological pattern, deeply rooted in Polish romanticism, ennobling sacrifices for the national cause. Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish poet, conceived the image of the Poles as the "Christ of the nations"—crucified in order to be resurrected (Mickiewicz [1832] 1956, 27–8). Romanticism and its martyrological current are important ingredients in the Polish national imagery, and still relevant today for constructing a national identity discourse.

In this notion of the subjugated nation that has to rise from oppression, women were delegated a specific role. Gertrud Pickhan, a professor of East European history, depicts Polish women on the one hand engaged in the common battle alongside the men against foreign rule, and on the other hand, bound by a societal contract based on gender difference (Pickhan 2006, 7–17). During the partitions, women—who traditionally took care of the children—became the "keepers of national family traditions, which were indispensable for the survival of the nation. Motherhood was thus politically loaded" (ibid., 8). Especially the sons were to be raised in a patriotic spirit, and this was in the hands of the mothers. Ultimately, the mothers had to be prepared to sacrifice their sons at "the altar of the nation" (ibid., 9). The most famous literary depiction of the proverbial *Matka Polka* stems from the aforementioned Adam Mickiewicz in his poem "To *Matka-Polka*," in which Pickhan discerns "the symbiosis of motherhood and nation" (ibid., 8). The readiness of women to make sacrifices for the national cause is strictly inscribed in this imagery.

At the same time, the engaged resistance against foreign rule was an important female activity, in the active fight for the nation, patriotic upbringing of children, and educational work. In the second half of the nineteenth century, educated women earned a living as (private) teachers—but also worked in the underground, offering alternative education that would hamper the Russification of the next generation. All of these realms of activity shaped the contours of what would become the notion of traditional female roles within Polish society. The historian Pietrow-Ennker writes:

The reconfiguration of the woman [during the partitions] conveyed strength in the national struggle on the one hand, but on the other it wove family and

nation together so strongly, that emancipation from the family ties seemed almost like a betrayal of the fatherland.

(Pietrow-Ennker 2000, 129)

In her groundbreaking book *Ladies, Knights and Feminists: The discourse on women's rights in Poland*, Sławomira Walczewska portrays the “story of protest,” as she calls it, against the prevalent attitude that women should find fulfillment in marriage and motherhood only. Walczewska thus writes about the other side of the story—the history of women’s rights activists and their emancipatory struggle. She assesses the myth of *Matka Polka* as follows:

*Matka Polka* is the formula for women to become part of the national Polish community. Polish women buy themselves into the community with motherhood. Ideally, motherhood will be brought to completion by bringing a son into the world and educating him in a patriotic spirit. The *Matka Polka* myth, by its anti-emancipatory character, represents a challenge for today’s women’s rights movements.

(Walczewska 2015, 49)

In partitioned Poland, family and church were, as Pickhan writes, the two “arenas in which a national-Polish consciousness under the condition of foreign rule” was shaped (Pickhan 2006, 11). These two strongholds of the nation have been effective until today. Feminists and women’s rights activists who struggle for gender equality, self-determination, and emancipation can easily be excluded from the national community by the conservative discourse. In effect, the aforementioned “war” on gender reveals how different groups have repelled the claim to gender equality and discredited it as an attack on the nation and the family. Agnieszka Graff states in an interview that women are no longer willing to postpone their demands in order to redeem Poland (Graff and Korolczuk 2017, 182–3). She alludes here to the romantic canon of gender roles. It functions as a code immediately understood by her (Polish) readers. In an unspoken societal contract, it is expected of women to make a sacrifice for Poland willingly and it is anticipated that they naturally put their own interests last. The wording “to redeem Poland” implies a sacred dimension of the sacrifice which is also inherent in the martyrological myth. Should women choose not to follow this predetermined pattern, they can be easily defamed as deserting the national community.

The myth of *Matka Polka* has been challenged repeatedly. Scholars and feminists criticize this romanticized ideal that veils the real problems of women and mothers in post-socialist Poland. In 2012, Elżbieta Korolczuk and Renata Hryciuk published a volume with the programmatic title: “A Farewell to *Matka Polka*?” (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012). The authors point out that cultural studies scholars and anthropologists concentrate on the representations of women, and the myths affecting female roles in society. Yet, analyses of the structural problems that mothers struggle with every day lag behind. In the book,

the authors analyze the role of the mother in Polish society, including aspects of intersectionality, ethnicity, and social status. According to Agnieszka Graff, the book reveals a rift within society between two canons of values existing simultaneously yet contradicting one another. On the one hand, the idealized role of mothers and motherhood still affects powerfully the perception of gender roles within society. Mothers are expected to willingly make sacrifices and put individual interests last, but in return, they possess an unquestioned position within the (national) community. On the other hand, the reality of life in neoliberal Poland after 1989 transformed motherhood and families deeply. Agnieszka Graff has devoted many articles to this topic, some of which have been published in her book (note the allusion in the title) *Matka Feministka* (Graff 2014a). She argues that the neoliberal state with its market-oriented principles views the woman as an autonomous entity, her motherhood as a conscious decision, a “project” that she is supposed to manage successfully (ibid., 59). Should she fail to combine care work and working life, she alone will be responsible, whereas the community and the state withdraw from their share of the responsibility—thus Graff’s argument (ibid.). Graff shows convincingly how in the 1990s child-care facilities were being shut down en masse. The scholar concludes that in the neoliberal world, sacrifices are still demanded of women, yet now the support of the community is no longer certain. Graff sees the major problems in the crisis of care work and its devaluation: they are the cause of such phenomena as the disappearance of women from the labor market, lack of opportunities for the advancement of women, and low birth rates (although women declare in surveys that they wish to have more children) (ibid., 67–74). Those diverse and simultaneous processes within society, and the long-term gender norms passed down through generations, are pointed out sharply in a short quotation from Agnieszka Graff:

[reproductive health] is a core issue for the dignity of women, for their treatment as agents in society, and simply for their security. This issue is closely connected with such major issues as the crisis of care work and the fact that the neoliberal state has deserted women. We are no longer willing to again postpone our demands, in order to redeem Poland. I’ll put it this way: either the Left and liberal Center will learn, as the Right did already in the 1990s, to take gender issues dead seriously and treat these questions with respect and use them in their struggle to rule the people—then, they will have a chance to win against PiS. Or they will not and will fail.

(Graff and Korolczuk 2017, 182–3)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sketches the role of gender in the resurgent Polish conservatism. It depicts recent developments since PiS came to power in 2015 and focuses on reproductive health issues, domestic violence, and family policies. In a second part, it draws on long-term developments that have affected societal norms such

as the debates on abortion, the “war” against gender, and the myth of the *Matka Polka*. It gives an overview of tendencies, political players, and reactions, as well as interpretations of scholars and feminists.

The Polish conservative agenda stresses the role of the woman as a mother. Motherhood is understood as the primary societal function of the woman, and to the benefit of the family, the community, and the nation. Reproductive health issues as well as family policies are oriented toward this understanding of women as mothers. Women are supposed to shoulder the major burden of family care work. The state in its conservative outlook under the PiS administration supports mothers in enlarging the family—but not in combining work and family life. Emancipation from the family and the fight for gender equality are attacked as damaging to the community. The ideal of the mother is elevated to a sacred dimension, strongly infused with the national myth of the *Matka Polka*. Often the real problems of mothers tend to be ignored. As the family is idealized, violence within families as a widespread societal problem is largely neglected. Organizations see their funding curtailed, their activities reduced or closed down, while the government threatens to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention against domestic violence, with the claim it propagates the wrong gender roles. In this idealized vision of Polish society—such as we can make out from the PiS party rhetoric, their decision-making and policies—the family, nation, and parish offer Poles a cohesive community valued above individual rights. Among the societal players that pursue this conservative agenda, the Catholic Church plays a key role. It is an authority within society and has the power to reach out to and mobilize many people. Ideological and political questions are discussed during Sunday Mass and the hierarchy communicates with the faithful through pastoral letters, communiqués, and sermons. Some Catholic factions, such as the followers of the ultraconservative priest Rydzyk, communicate through their own TV and radio stations. The Church actively structures the debate on reproductive health issues since its voice cannot be ignored. Its powerful position affects the political parties, and many feminist observers argue that the boundary between the Church and the state is increasingly blurred, which has a negative effect on women’s rights. Also, conservative NGOs play an important role in pushing the agenda, gaining momentum while the PiS party is in power. Often these NGOs are backed by Catholic organizations and they network internationally.

On the other hand, NGOs advocating for female rights such as the Federation for Family Planning and Women’s Rights, the Women’s Congress, Manifa, and others, mobilize against the conservative backlash—as observed after the “Black Protest.” Grassroots initiatives such as *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* have achieved successes and present an alternative vision of gender norms in Polish society.

In a broader perspective, many scholars see the difficulties of the transformation process as a major cause for the conservative turn. State socialism was quickly replaced by a neoliberal market economy, and in consequence society had to adjust to it. Decades after the transformation, the feeling of “relative deprivation” still has trenchant effects. Women found themselves in a difficult position as the state cut costs on social welfare and childcare facilities, mothers had



to shoulder the bulk of carework and were expected to make sacrifices for the family and community. As Graff sharply puts it, the neoliberal state produced a crisis of care work and abandoned mothers. Rumińska-Zimny and Przyborowska view the sinking birth rates in Poland as the answer of women to the problems of the transformation process.

Apparently, after the transformation of 1989 the problem of how a sovereign, democratic Poland should be oriented seems not to have been solved, and this is now being contested by PiS, which offers its “remedy”—consolidating a conservative model of the family, gender roles, and the nation. Yet, this model seriously hinders gender equality and women’s emancipation. Graff and Korolczuk argue that the “war on gender”—also in its international dimension—is the conservative answer to the insecurities people face from “neoliberalization and globalization.” Gender issues are thus not merely a side effect of general politics—they are a core issue. What is at stake is equality, diversity, freedom of choice, and individual rights. Moreover, gender issues have a great mobilizing power (which is effectively instrumentalized by the Right). In the contestation of diverse worldviews (conservative, liberal, pluralistic), and on the question of how democracy in Poland should be formed, gender and the family are central themes and one of the battlegrounds in a fundamental *Richtungsstreit*, a dispute over the direction of society and polity.

## Notes

- 1 Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus has stated this several times, e.g. in a press commentary concerning the statement of the Minister of Health Konstanty Radziwiłł, who declared that as a doctor he would not prescribe the “morning-after pill” to a woman, even if she had been raped. <https://nowoczesna.org/poslanki-nowoczesnej-oburzono-slowami-ministra-zdrowia-o-pigulce-dzien-po-dla-zgwalczonej-kobiety/> (accessed 15 January 2018).
- 2 In Polish, the verse has a rhyme: *Beata niestety, ten rząd obala kobiety*, see [www.tvn24.pl/wideo/z-anteny/beata-niestety-ten-rzad-obala-kobiety,1568213.html?playlist\\_id=24746](http://www.tvn24.pl/wideo/z-anteny/beata-niestety-ten-rzad-obala-kobiety,1568213.html?playlist_id=24746) (accessed 23 March 2018).
- 3 For a virtual gallery of the billboards: <https://stopaborcji.pl/wystawa-wyberz-zycie/> (accessed 18 January 2017).
- 4 The draft law on the website of the foundation: [www.stopaborcji.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/projekt\\_2016.pdf](http://www.stopaborcji.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/projekt_2016.pdf) (accessed 23 March 2018).
- 5 For the role of social media in the Black Protest, see Korolczuk, Elżbieta “Explaining ‘black protests’ against abortion ban in Poland: the power of connective action,” *Zoon Politikon Journal* 7 (2016): 91–113.
- 6 [www.fafce.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=121&Itemid=218&lang=de](http://www.fafce.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=121&Itemid=218&lang=de) (accessed 24 January 2018).
- 7 Homepage of Ordo Iuris: [www.ordoiuris.pl/kim-jestesmy](http://www.ordoiuris.pl/kim-jestesmy) (accessed 23 March 2018).

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# 11 “Traditional values” unleashed

## The ultraconservative influence on Russian family policy

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### Introduction

The various new Russian conservatives see their unifying bond in a “social conservatism.” Nevertheless, the conceptual ideologists elaborate little on what a conservative social policy might mean that could cover all welfare-state aspects in today’s Russia. Social conservatism results, for them, rather from the recovery of economic and political “sovereignty” and a strong developmental state which will defend the interests of the locally bound “majority” and national real economy, over the irresponsible transnational class of “liberal financialists” (Khazin 2017). It’s about restoring the distributive power of the state through economic growth and a return to a progressive income-tax regime (Glazyev 2015). Labor participation, if mentioned at all, is conceptualized as state-led corporatism.

One field of social policy, however, has the utmost attention of the new Russian conservatives: family policy. Family policy is supposed to translate “traditional values” into practice, to represent the backbone of national security, supporting the envisioned recovery of Russia as global power. This recovery is pictured as heavily jeopardized by a severe “demographic crisis” caused by the withdrawal of the state from economic and social policy since the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Hence, a pronatalist family policy has become the focal point of conservative social policy and a major battlefield for conservative “moral norm entrepreneurs” (Stoeckl 2016).

At first glance, the conservative agenda in social policy has been more successful than in economic politics (see Bluhm; Busygina and Filippov in this volume). Already in 2006, the re-elected president Vladimir Putin activated a pronatalist policy that departed from the logic of the “negotiated neo-liberal” program, as Linda Cook put it in her seminal work on Russia’s welfare state (2007). With the so-called “maternity” or “family capital” that was first introduced in 2007 for a defined time span in order to stimulate an increase in the birth rate, in family policy especially, Russia switched from a liberal-minimalist approach focusing on the poor, back to state intervention that would cover all strata of the society independent of need. However, as in the field of economic politics, the new conservatives did not manage at that point to push through their entire agenda.

The arguments in this chapter are twofold. First, the conservative discourse on family policy is dominated by an ultraconservative coalition surrounding the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) that is both anti-Soviet and anti-liberal. This coalition has been quite successful in spelling out what “traditional family values” are supposed to mean. However, even in this extreme version of new conservatism, the ultraconservative re-invention of tradition does not simply refresh pre-revolutionary values. Second, with the pronatalist turn of Putin’s administration and particularly after the president’s official commitment to “traditional values” of 2013, ultraconservative positions and networks have gained more and more influence and won important battles over family policy. Yet, the implementation of their agenda has remained piecemeal, and contested within the elite.

This chapter proceeds in four steps: in the first part, we analyze the ultraconservative coalition that focuses on family policy. Their networks overlap with the knowledge networks of the conceptual ideologists of the new Russian conservatism, but are not identical (see Bluhm in this volume). In the second part, we explore the ultraconservatives’ normative agenda and reform ideas and show how they combine anti-Soviet and anti-liberal positions. The third part relates the successes, failures, and compromises that have taken place in the translation of the conservative normative agenda into family politics. The conclusion evaluates the results of our inquiry.

### **Forging the ultraconservative coalition**

The Russian Orthodox Church, which considers family issues part of its “canonical territory” (ROC 2013), is a key moral norm entrepreneur in family policy and traditional values, but also associates with a wider network of ultraconservative activists, experts in think tanks and universities, and politicians. We call these “ultraconservative” because within the camp of the new conservatives they are the most fundamentalist coalition. The Church organization and the regional affiliations of ultraconservative civic associations have spread their roots widely in local communities. At the same time there are close ultraconservative ties to the Moscow elite.

The ROC already acted under the previous Patriarch Alexy II as a norm entrepreneur, even when their ideas had not yet been bundled under the formula of “traditional values” and their normative agenda was not yet fully developed. In the 1990s the ROC and other “traditional religious communities” vigorously opposed the application of family planning and reproductive rights concepts propagated by the UN and other international organizations in Russia. They contested the promotion of contraceptives with which the Yeltsin government hoped to combat the high abortion rate in Russia, and the introduction of sex education in Russian schools. Diverse congresses and committees, including those of other, “traditional” religions, devoted themselves to the “protection of motherhood and the family,” were already opposed to the “liberals,” and had an outspoken demographic emphasis. In the 2003–04 election campaign for Putin’s second term, the

ROC used the opportunity to promote a pronatalist turn, though it took the government until 2006 to take the first concrete steps in that direction. From that point on, a coherent demographic and family-political discourse emerged that before was dispersed among different political, ecclesiastical, and academic circles.

A catalyst for the development and public visibility of the ultraconservative coalition were several pro-family congresses, with international participation. The year 2010 was decisive here. One year after the enthronement of the new ROC Patriarch Kirill I, Russia’s first “National Congress on Demography—Russia’s Sanctity of Motherhood” took place in the congress hall of Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow. The congress was sponsored by the national program, “The Sanctity of Motherhood” (*Svyatost’ materinstva*), of a Kremlin-related foundation, and was organized by the ultraconservative coalition in close collaboration with the World Congress of Families (WCF), founded in 1995 by rightist Christian activists in the US (Levintova 2014).<sup>1</sup> The WCF sees itself as part of an “emerging conservative movement” against the new “cultural imperialism” that seeks to punish countries not embracing the redefinition of family. That first national demographics congress in 2010 was followed one year later by a first “World Demographic Summit: The Family and the Future of Humanity” of the WCF at the Lomonosov Moscow State University (MGU) in Moscow, blessed by Kirill.<sup>2</sup> In 2012, a second summit was held in Ulyanovsk. These two summits were meant to test Russia’s bid to host the WCF World Congress held annually at various venues.<sup>3</sup> The World Congress was indeed scheduled to take place in the Kremlin shortly after the Sochi Olympics in 2014, but had to be canceled under pressure from the US government after the Crimean annexation. The largest congress sponsor was the investment banker and billionaire Konstantin Malofeev, who was to assume two-thirds of the congress costs and had previously participated in financing the national summits.

With his close relationships to the highest ranks of the ROC, members of the ruling elite and conservative ideologists, Malofeev is a key broker who bridges different national and international networks, for which purpose he also uses his business positions, charity activities, his TV channel Imperial City (*Tsar’grad*), and the political-analytical think tank Katehon. In 2007 he founded the largest Orthodox charity foundation St. Basil the Great (*Fond svyatitelya Vasiliya Velikogo*), which supports conservative civil society and is an official partner of the WCF. The supervisory board includes Bishop Tikhon (Georgy Shevkunov) and the filmmaker Sergey Mikhalkov (see also Bluhm in this volume). In 2011, the Saint Basil Foundation established the Safe Internet League—with support of Igor Shchyogolev, at the time Minister of Telecoms and Mass Communications. Malofeev became a member of the board of trustees of the League, while Shchyogolev headed the supervisory board of the League. At the end of 2011 the League drafted the “Law to restrict the Internet” that was adopted by the State Duma in 2012 (Shekhovtsov 2018, 182).

Malofeev was also named to the expert council of the Patriarch’s Commission on “Family Matters, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood” (in the

following: “Family Commission”) that Kirill created in 2011. The Family Commission became a major player in the conservative pro-family network when the Holy Synod appointed Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov as its chairman two years later.<sup>4</sup> Smirnov previously headed the Synodal Military Cooperation Division and has worked for the patriarch’s TV channel Savior (SPAS TV) (founded in 2005 in response to Ukraine’s Orange Revolution), and in church educational institutions.

A key academic expert in the coalition is the demographer and sociologist Anatoly Antonov, professor at MGU. In the 1990s, Antonov reached out to American pro-family activists and—according to self-reports—jointly founded with them the WCF. One of his allies is the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), the famous think tank of the Russian president. In 2003, RISS founded the Institute for Demographic Research, whose director became the young conservative, close to the ROC, Igor Beloborodov. The two experts created in 2006 the research network *demographia.ru* that named as partner the Patriarch’s Family Commission. Conservative child and family psychologists who infuse pedagogical language into the ultraconservative discourses have joined the demographers. For a wider public, well known in this regard are Irina Medvedeva and Tatyana Shishova—leading personnel in the Association of Parental Committees and Societies (*Assotsiatsiya roditel’skikh komitetov i soobshchestv*, ARKS).<sup>5</sup> The two pro-family activists have many other affiliations and official positions. Medvedeva, for example, heads the Institute of Demographic Security. In this function she is on the board of the Russian Children’s Foundation and vice-president of the International Fund for Socio-Psychological Support of Family and Child.<sup>6</sup> At the same time she is a member of the Central Committee of the civic movement *Narodnyy Sobor*—an important link to the conservative ideologists (see Bluhm in this volume). The two Orthodox women regularly publish together, on among others the ROC internet journal *pravoslavie.ru*.

One of Antonov’s busiest students is Aleksey Komov, who turned toward conservatism and Orthodoxy after some career steps in the financial sector and as a nightclub owner in the late 1990s. He wrote a doctoral thesis on the ideological roots of the anti-family worldview under Antonov’s supervision. Having grown up in London and New York and being multilingual, he became a front figure for the ultraconservative circles internationally, and in the creation of a “Conservative Internationale.” According to Shekhovtsov (2018, 181), Komov is the head of the international department of the Patriarch’s Family Commission and, among other functions, is a member of the Board of Directors of the WCF, where he is responsible for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and WCF ambassador to the UN.<sup>7</sup> Komov collaborates with Malofeev as a foreign projects manager of the Saint Basil the Great Foundation and supported, as a board member of the Safe Internet League, the censorship of the internet according to Anton Shekhovtsov (*ibid.*).

Like Malofeev and Beloborodov, Komov, born in 1971, belongs to the younger generation of Russian conservatives. With the support of the WCF and



Archpriest Smirnov, Komov set up in 2011 his own pro-family foundation (*Fond podderzhki sem'i i demografii vo imya svyatykh Petra i Fevronii*) and the Analytical Center Family Policy.ru. Later Komov launched together with a close collaborator from the Analytical Center an inter-regional NGO “For Family Rights” (*Za prava sem'i*). Both are also activists in the Russian home-schooling movement. Between 2011 and 2015 Komov’s think tank acted as an advisor to the parliament’s committee on “Questions of Family, Women and Children” chaired by Elena Mizulina.<sup>8</sup>

Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov, Malofeev, Antonov and Komov, Elena Mizulina, and the Yakunins constituted the Russian planning committee for the 2014 WCF World Congress that was supposed to take place in the Kremlin (Levintova 2014).<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Yakunin, close St. Petersburg confidant of Putin, can be seen as an important political patron of the ultraconservative coalition. Although he was at the time of the conference planning still the head of the Russian railway company, he already headed the foundations *Istoki* and the foundation St. Andrew the First-Called (*Fond svyatogo vsekhval'nogo apostola Andrey a Pervozvannogo*), which had existed since 1992. Since 2006, both foundations have been active in supporting pro-family projects, anti-abortion campaigns, and promotion of a “new father role” in families.<sup>10</sup> Yakunin’s wife runs the all-Russian program Sanctity of Motherhood, funded by both foundations. Natalia Yakunina co-organized the national demographic congress in 2010 and regularly invites activists to international forums in close cooperation with the ROC.<sup>11</sup> Her political influence, however, she draws mainly from her position in the governing body of the National Parenting Association for Social Family Support and the Defense of Family Values (*Natsional'naya roditel'skaya assotsiatsiya sotsial'noy podderzhki sem'i i zashchity semeynykh tsennostey*, NPA), which has existed since 2013 and claims to be the largest Russian parents’ organization.

One of the most outspoken figureheads in the ultraconservative coalition in Russian politics today is the Senator for the Omsk district Elena Mizulina, who was in the State Duma for the pro-Kremlin center-left party A Just Russia (*Spravedlivaya Rossiya*) from 2007 to 2015. The lawyer was and still is active in several high-ranking committees for the family, children’s rights, and demography. In 2008 she became the head of the State Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children Issues, replacing the chair of the Association of Women of Russia Ekaterina Lakhova (who conservatives regarded as one of the Yeltsin liberal clan, and was attacked for pushing forward the introduction of “family planning” lessons into Russian schools). Under the direction of Mizulina the Duma Committee launched several legislative projects that aroused heated public debate. When she became Senator in September 2015, more moderate female politicians endorsed her positions. Two years later Mizulina left A Just Russia. The party announced that it is a “secular party” that has long ceased to support Mizulina’s initiatives.<sup>12</sup> Yet she is still the head of the President’s Coordinating Council that Putin created in 2010 to implement the National Action Program for Children 2012–2017.

The ultraconservative coalition was joined in 2011 by the former political adviser and TV moderator Sergey Kurginyan and his wife Maria Mamikonyan, although they are not close to Orthodoxy. Kurginyan advocated for Putin's third presidential term on his internet platform Essence of Time (*Sut' vremeni*), founded in 2011. Although Kurginyan's ideas on state capitalism are close to the ideas of the new Russian conservatives, he argues for a renewed communism, which sets him apart from the intellectual movement we are dealing with in this volume. The couple became influential norm entrepreneurs when they founded their own parents' association called All-Russian Parental Resistance (*Roditel'skoe vserossiyskoe soprotivlenie*, RVS/PBC), which successfully mobilized public outrage against the juvenile justice system in 2012 (see below).<sup>13</sup>

### **The ultraconservative agenda**

The major goal of the ultraconservatives is to reconstruct a “modernized traditional family” for ideological, moral, and geopolitical reasons. In recent years two topics have preoccupied the norm entrepreneurs: (a) the large family as a social norm and its support by the state; and (b) the legal status of the family and the individual family member under the state. Both topics and the suggested solutions are embedded in a diagnostic frame that equates the “demographic crisis” to a crisis of the nation and of Russia as a superpower.

#### ***The fight against depopulation—large families as a new social norm***

The ultraconservatives argue from a diagnosis of three types of crisis: the demographic crisis, the crisis of the family as an institution, and the national crisis. In order to counter these three crises in Russia, a thus far disadvantaged family type—the family with three or more children—must become again the social norm. The demographers point out that over 50 percent of families should have three or more children, and five as an ideal—an extremely ambitious goal, since this type presently accounts for only 6 percent of Russian families, while two-thirds raise just one child. For such a turnaround to succeed, the ultraconservatives have demanded since the early 2000s extensive social policy measures—subsidized housing, low-interest mortgage rates, tax relief, pension amounts dependent on the number of children, and others.

However, all these measures will fail if the values of the younger generation are not drastically altered. Of what use will even generous state support be, asks Antonov, if the desire for offspring is already satisfied with one or two children? That is why conservatives interpret the demographic crisis as the result of a profound “crisis of the institution of the family.” In addition to social spending by the state and pro-family propaganda in the mass media, the ultraconservatives call for a major upgrade in the legal status and social prestige of large families, such that only families of more than two children are viewed as “complete” (Antonov and Borisov 2006; Antonov 2007, 2016; Smirnov 2014, 106).

Ultraconservatives see in the crisis of the institution of family a long-lasting consequence of the destruction of the traditional Russian family by the Bolsheviks and the Soviet system, as the RISS-demographer Beloborodov (2009) states:

After all, it was the Soviet government that first legalized abortion, perverted the procedure for registering a marriage; a woman who had been cut off from the family hearth was sent to work “in the name of a bright communist future,” and a father’s role was reduced to that of an insect, which completely deformed the family structure. In the reign of Tsar St. Nicholas II, Russia’s population increased by 50 million, and in the Yeltsin and subsequent periods decreased by more than 12 million. Are these figures not convincing?<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, the ultraconservatives blame Lenin and Trotsky for their liberalization of abortion and divorce, while they paint an ambivalent picture of the Stalinist period by suggesting that forced collectivization, industrialization, and urbanization was the first major blow against the traditional (rural) family, yet they do not criticize Stalin. Smirnov provides a typical argument in this regard:

When the Bolsheviks set the task of destroying the peasantry precisely as a class, they inflicted irreparable damage to the people. [...] And this tragedy of our people, we still cannot remedy even now. In the very short reign of Emperor Nikolay Aleksandrovich (he was shot when he was 50, he could have perhaps lived for another 20 years), the population of Russia increased by six million people. And now there are exactly as many of us as under Nikolay Aleksandrovich, that is, in 100 years we have not added anything to the population, although we should be already six hundred million, and then we could compete with such countries as India and China. And we would have twice as many people as the United States, so then the conversation would be quite different. But we do not now have enough labor in this country because there was such a destructive policy.

In general, according to the plan of Lenin and Trotsky, the Russian people were to serve as cannon fodder for the world revolution, they were to become soldiers of the revolution, and for this it was necessary to change their consciousness. But it was difficult to make the most conservative part of the population, the peasantry, succumb to these liberal communist ideas; they treated communism suspiciously and were therefore destroyed. This was the first blow that was inflicted.

(Smirnov 2017a)

In the perception of the ultraconservatives, the triple crisis of demography, family, and nation is not just driven by internal causes. The Western-inspired, liberal reforms of the late 1980s entailed a second blow to the family institution, bringing crass social inequality, mass consumption, and individualism to Russia,

including the “contraceptive revolution” of 1997 (*ibid.*). Russian ultraconservatives reject the existence of world overpopulation as “nonsense” (Antonov 2014; Beloborodov 2017), following the arguments of radical American pro-family activists in this regard. Moreover, the conservative Russian norm entrepreneurs *and* ideologists have argued repeatedly that family planning, as promoted by the UN and other international organizations, serves to safeguard Western supremacy over the global South (see Ivanov 2016; Remizov et al. 2014).

The ultraconservative discourse on the crisis of the “family institution” includes an anti-capitalist notion. Antonov (2007) argues that capitalism is “always against the family,” and, “[a]lready Adam Smith wrote that under capitalism an employee with one child and an employee with ten children will receive the same salary.” This criticism repeats the widely used conservative argument, by which the capitalist market economy rests on external sociocultural foundations that it consumes without renewal (see Hirschman 1992), or as Antonov again puts it:

The modern family is experiencing a serious crisis, and this is simultaneously a crisis of the social order itself and of the civilization. In the institutional value aspect, this is the decrease in the mediatory role of the family in the interaction of society and the individual (i.e. the weakening role of the family as mediator in conflict between the disparate interests of the individual and society, due to the contradictory nature of the market economy, state and reproduction).

(Antonov 2014)<sup>15</sup>

Russian conservatives of all colors equate the crisis of the institution “family”—the “reproduction apparatus of the nation”—with the crisis of the “classical marriage” of man and woman, because only from this unification can arise offspring. “Traditional family values” means, in essence, to cherish the marriage bond as lifelong, child-rich, and officially sanctioned (not necessarily by the Church but at least by the state). While in European comparison the readiness to marry in Russia is still significantly higher than elsewhere in the post-communist and Western Europe, the preference of young couples not to register their relationship (this informal bond is called “civil marriage” in Russia), as well as the high divorce rate in the country (above the EU average rate), alarms the ultraconservatives.

With the promotion of the “classical marriage,” the idea of a “natural” labor division between men and women is back, which goes hand in hand with the rejection of the concept of gender as a postmodern, “radical-feminist” attack on traditional values.<sup>16</sup> Conservatives reject therefore the use of the term “gender” in any Russian legislation (see e.g. FamilyPolicy.ru 2012, 4–8). In Komov’s expert report for Mizulina’s Duma Committee, he neatly separates the “old” idea of gender equality, which opposes *negative* discrimination, and the new “gender equality,” which supports only the sexual preferences of a vocal minority and ignores the social function of the male and female sex (*ibid.*, 7).<sup>17</sup> With the

argument of equality for *both* sexes, the ultracons also reject the *positive* discrimination of women through “gender quotas” and other such measures (which existed in Soviet times for the regional and national Soviets, though allowing only a symbolic participation of women in political power).

Even if the suggested tie between the biological sex and social roles is limited to a few basic tasks, the concept of the traditional (child-rich) family implies for the ROC a longer or even permanent withdrawal of women from labor markets in “service to the nation.” For example Kyrill I, through his chair of the Family Commission, Archbishop Smirnov, has stated:

A woman should not be humiliated in society, but, at the same time, she should not strive to imitate male aggression, to achieve success on the professional front, to the detriment of her basic vocation—to be a wife and mother.<sup>18</sup>

[...]

A woman is not meant for this. A woman is given the gift of giving birth to children, the most important gift given to mankind on earth. And this is a very responsible a very high ministry on earth. The Lord through the Apostle Paul said that a woman is saved by childbirth, so sending a woman to some distant wild countries would not be Christian. But such a question, strange to me, is one posed by the Soviets, for whom a woman cosmonaut, or woman hammer thrower, or a woman surgeon is a common phenomenon. However, in fact it is a mockery of the female nature, a violation of it.

[...]

Responding to the remark that “women themselves want this” [...] Father Dmitry said: we must understand that [...] women abandoned their fertility quite recently. In our country, it’s only 100 years old. And there is very little time left, until the entire Christian civilization will simply perish. There are a few dozen years left, at most thirty, well, maybe in Russia it will last fifty, no more.”

(Smirnov 2017a)

While Mizulina sees no problem in combining family and work if the husband and the state are supportive,<sup>19</sup> the demographers Antonov and Beloborodov share the doubts of the ROC about its practicability for a child-rich family. They favor the classic male breadwinner model or at least a modernized version of it, in which the woman contributes to household income on a part-time basis. It is no coincidence that the creation of a “family wage” as a norm is one of their key reform proposals. The idea already emerged during Gorbachev’s perestroika but was never realized. Antonov and others see in the breadwinner model even a way to end the “crisis” of Russian men, whose life expectancy drastically fell during the 1990s and has only slowly begun to recover:

First of all, raise the status of the housewife-mother. Confirm in the public consciousness the image of a real Russian family in which only the income

of the father in the employment sector [...] makes it possible to maintain three or four children. Once a man feels that he is firmly on his feet, the issue of alcohol abuse will disappear by itself. Stories about “Russian drunkenness,” in my opinion, are greatly exaggerated; these “reflections” have turned into a kind of myth. I have been in many countries and am convinced that our people do not drink any more than others.

(Antonov 2007)

On the other hand, Antonov does not at all ignore the employment orientation of Russian women when he proposes to pay women for their reproductive work—an old demand of Western feminism. However, he is quite alone with this idea:

Three children is a mini-kindergarten [...] and four or five, even more so. With so many children, their mother does not “sit at home,” but works intensively, educating the younger generation, forming souls. I propose to recognize motherhood as a profession, and to pay mothers an average salary of 30–40 thousand rubles.

(Antonov 2007)

The role of men in the family is, however, more ambitious than the quotations suggest. Ultraconservatives regard the lack of responsibility of fathers for their families as a problematic legacy of communism that focused on the working mother. The upgrade of the father’s role in the family is not limited to the classic breadwinner model in which the father operates mostly outside of home. The new attention to families has triggered a debate on the place of fathers in the education of children, especially of boys, as well. In January 2018 the first “All-Russian Soviet of Fathers” took place, to provide mentoring and assistance in the complex issues related to the well-being of families and children. Not accidentally, the meeting was opened by the presidential Ombudsman for the Rights of Children, Anna Kusnetsova.

### ***The legal autonomy of the family and children’s rights***

The ultraconservative idea of a modernized traditional family not only refers to values and state assistance, but includes a new movement for family rights. The key mobilizing dispute with the ultraconservatives arose around the juvenile justice system (*yuvenal’naya yustitsiya*), when President Medvedev launched several legislative projects in order to adapt Russian family law to international standards. With these projects the government agreed to implement some basic norms of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children and the European Social Charter beyond mere declarations (Höjdestrand 2016; Kravchuk 2009; Stoeckl 2016). Yet, the reforms also meant improving Russian child-welfare policy, which had become a major concern since Putin’s pronatalist turn in 2006 (Kulmala 2017). The ongoing reforms from 2010 provided the norm

entrepreneurs with the opportunity to form an “Anti-YuYu” movement that they later attempted to export to Europe, for example to Germany. Three Russian reform projects became major battlefields: a specialized *court system for young criminals*; the criminalization and decriminalization of *domestic violence reforms*; and the reform of the Russian *system of social assistance and child protection* (ongoing since 2013).

The arguments of the Anti-YuYu activists are in all three cases almost identical. They reject not only the “Western” origin of the projects, but above all oppose the violation of the “autonomy of the family” and parental rights. The Russian conservative sociologist Leonid Ionin distilled the key arguments, writing in *Update Conservatism* (2010). To paraphrase Ionin, the “children’s rights” approach represents for Russia an entirely new definition of “the social and legal status of the child” following a “radically individualistic approach.” The doctrine knows only two agents: the child and the state, and assumes that (again) the state knows better than the family what is best for the child (Ionin 2010, 205). The “artificial tension between the rights of children and of the parents,” the undermining of the rights and authority of the parents, and the already weak public image of the family institution are standard criticisms in almost all conservative statements. There is even a call for a new family code that re-establishes “the family” as a legal entity of its own (Smirnov 2016).

In one of the many statements of the Patriarch’s Family Commission, Smirnov outlines the Church’s concerns as follows:

The modern approach of a number of countries to juvenile justice (which includes law enforcement practice as well as the legal and social culture that is being formed) is characterized by an artificial opposition of the parents’ rights to the rights of the child, giving the latter an unconditional priority, which contradicts the biblical foundations of family relations, because the rights of children cannot be broadened by narrowing their parents’ rights, artificially contraposing the rights of some to the rights of others. Along with the rights of children, their duties, including those in relation to parents and family, must be recognized. There can be no rights of children to spiritually and morally unjustified disobedience to their parents, to immoral actions and sexual promiscuity, to disrespect toward elders and peers, or bad behavior.

(ROK 2013)

The question of the introduction and dissemination of a juvenile justice system affects many countries located on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. In a number of these countries, the implementation of the juvenile justice system is contrary to the basics of national law that equally guarantees the protection of the family, motherhood, and childhood. Legal guarantees of the rights of the child are based in these countries on the principle of supporting the family in the upbringing of children and the protection of their rights. The family laws of these states also result from the need to strengthen the family, and the inadmissibility of arbitrary interference by anyone in its affairs. Moreover, even

if the juvenile justice system does not contradict national legal standards, it is necessary to correlate its implementation with the traditional understanding of family values, the positions of religious communities, and the opinions of the population (ROC 2013).

The fight initiated by the ultraconservative coalition against the new foster-care system in particular caught the Russian government off guard. In the 2008 document “The concept of long-term socio-economic development of the Russian Federation for the period until 2020,” the Russian Federation announced its intention to reduce the high number of institutionalized orphans, especially “social orphans” who were being deprived of parental care (Kulmala 2017). Many regional projects followed that would replace the Soviet system of state custody by a system of paid foster families and professional social assistance (Höjdestrand 2016). Moreover, the ban on adoption to the US (in 2012) and to countries with legalized same-sex marriage laws met the patriotic mood of the ultraconservatives. In Russia, gay couples are also explicitly excluded from the simplified adoption rules and the foster-care regime. And yet, it was over the same foster-care reforms that the conflict between the ultraconservatives and the state administration escalated. Repeatedly, the ROC and its allies have criticized on the one hand the vagueness of the criteria on which authorities can remove children from their families of origin, which (they claim) opens the door to corruption and child abuse.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, they demand that the money the state spends on the professional foster-family system should go straight to the children’s poor families of origin and their close relatives. In May 2017 Maria Mamikonyan in an open letter accused Anna Kuznetsova, the new presidential Ombudsman for Children’s Rights, of not understanding the issues—although Kuznetsova herself belongs to the ultraconservative camp:

Obviously, you absolutely do not understand the western model of “juvenile justice,” what role interests play in its organization in private hands, you do not understand the involvement of power structures. You are developing a system of foster families, creating a demand for intervention in the families of origin, and taking away their children—in favor of a financially motivated “paid parenting,” where the child receives dozens of times more money than ordinary low-income families. That is, you are helping those whose strange privilege—to educate children and not work anywhere else—is built on other people’s misfortunes and is already becoming a cancerous tumor of the budget of Russia and the regions. Nothing stops you on this path, not even when the latest cases show that other people’s children have become a business for many, and that the pathology of the “market” attitude toward children is leading to severe mental pathologies and often to the death of such children.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to assess how widespread the described abuse of the new child-protection regulations is. Given the proliferation of corruption and arbitrariness of the bureaucratic apparatus, concerns about the widening opportunities for



interference and exploitation in family affairs might have some truth. The endemic distrust toward the state, but also misinterpretations and open falsifications in the media, may have contributed to the remarkable mobilization achieved by the norm entrepreneurs (Höjdestrand 2016, 17–18). The core argument of the ultraconservatives, however, is not restricted to Russian particularities but can also be found in the West. They reject the extension of human rights and a concept of child welfare that has developed over the last two or three decades in the transnational community as state of the art. In doing so, the Russian ultraconservatives refer to the Russian Constitution—otherwise not very popular among them—and to the original UN Convention on Human Rights from 1948, because both documents emphasize the autonomy of the family and parents’ sovereignty over the education of children. As the Association of Parental Committees and Societies puts it: in solving its natural tasks, and in particular, issues of birth, upbringing, education, and protection of children’s health, the family has priority over all other institutions, including the state.<sup>22</sup>

### **Translation into politics: successes and limits**

The pronatalist turn in 2006 can be seen as a first important victory for the conservative agenda against the “demographic crisis.” Already in his presidential address to the Federal Assembly in 2006, Vladimir Putin laid out the low birth rate and the dominant one-child family type as a serious national challenge to be overcome by raising the prestige of mother- and fatherhood (Putin 2006). At the same time, he sees combatting the high mortality rate in Russia and supporting migration as important countermeasures. In 2010 President Medvedev pointed to expert opinions on the need for a “radical increase in the number of families with three and more children” as the “main way to overcome the demographic crisis” (Medvedev 2010). In a similar vein, Putin emphasized in his address of 2012 that in Russia the family with three children should become the norm (2012). Despite these statements, conservative norm entrepreneurs have not stopped criticizing the administration, as we have illustrated in the previous section. Hence, we need to discuss in the final part of our chapter their actual impact on family-related laws and state measures. For this we concentrate on three major issues: (a) financial support to larger families; (b) reproduction rights and gender equality; and (c) the need to maintain the autonomy of the family. We chose these—aware that we can provide only a rough sketch—because the government and the ultraconservative coalition devotes to them substantial attention, and evidence indicates that the growing ultraconservative influence on Russia’s family policy is not just rhetoric.

### ***Conservative contributions to Russia’s turn toward the family***

In the above-mentioned programmatic presidential address to the Federal Assembly, Putin spelled out a range of measures to increase the birth rate. Among them were a housing program for young families and a “maternity

(family) capital” benefit.<sup>23</sup> With its implementation in January 2007, the two- or more-child family became the state-supported ideal image of the family: the law (which does not cover families with one child) assures women giving birth (or adopting) a second or further child, a one-time benefit of currently 453,026 rubles (about 8,000 US dollars). Since 2007 the benefit amount of this maternity (or family) capital has been slightly above the annual gross value added per capita. In many Russian regions the payment even exceeds the annual regional economic output per capita. In 2012 most of the Russian federal subjects introduced a regional maternity (family) capital, which complements the federal program.

In spite of the significant investment, ultraconservatives have often criticized the measures as insufficient and half-hearted for two main reasons: first, because these do not promise a long-term support for young couples and therefore will hardly give them an incentive to start a large family with more than two children. Until today Russia has provided no universal, monthly paid child allowance such as for example Poland does, where since 2016 parents can get a monthly child allowance for the second and further child up to age 18 regardless of their income.<sup>24</sup> Second, for ultracons the “maternity capital” resembles a Soviet-style state paternalism over women and that furthermore mostly ignores the fathers. The addition of the name “family” capital is merely symbolic.<sup>25</sup> Beneficiaries are the mothers only, who have the right to decide how to use the capital within a predetermined set of possibilities ranging from housing and education to savings for the mother’s pension. One constant ultraconservative demand has been, therefore, to transform the “mothers’ capital” into a true “family capital”—but this has yet to happen.

However, since 2006 the range of possible fields in which the “material (family) capital” can be invested has been extended, and in spite of the economic crisis after 2013, the government has prolonged the program until 2021. Originally it was set to run for 10 years (2006–16). Besides the extensive *but one-time* assistance of maternity capital, in Putin’s third term of presidency (2012–18) additional means-tested monthly benefits for families with children were introduced. In May 2012, the re-elected president issued a decree urging the heads of the federal subjects to pay a monthly child benefit equal to the regional minimum subsistence level for every third or further child up to age three, if the family is in need. According to Labor and Social Affairs Minister Maksim Topilin, 60 of the 85 Russian federal subjects had followed this request by the end of 2017. In preparation for the presidential election in March 2018, the Russian government has further expanded its support of poor families with children. From 2018 mothers in vulnerable families can get *children’s* allowances at the regional subsistence level for the first and second child up to the age of 18 months. However, while this children’s allowance for the first child is actually a new benefit, the allowance for the second child is not an additional social benefit, since it is paid out as part of the maternity capital.

Although the government had already provided some support to improve housing for families since 2006, conservative criticism of these measures

prompted it in late 2017 to take a more decisive step. With the 2018 presidential election in mind, the government passed a decree relieving two- and three-child families of the high mortgage rates in Russia. That is, the state will take over interest payments of more than 6 percent for up to three years together with the second child, and for up to five years with the third child.<sup>26</sup> Without changing the high interest rates of banks in general (which face constant criticism from the conservative ideologists and other groups), the government has decided to subsidize selected types of bank customers also in order to stimulate building investment.

### ***Reproduction rights and gender equality***

As the first country in the world, the Soviet Union legalized abortion in 1920 as a cornerstone of women’s reproduction rights (though from 1936 to 1955 it again penalized abortion). Because of the lack of contraceptives and liberal regulations, the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia had one of the highest abortion rates worldwide. Since 1993 the abortion rate has been continuously declining—from 235 abortions per 100 births in 1993 down to 44.6 in 2016. Yet this number is still high in international or European comparison and fuels the conservative discourse about the demographic crisis.

Although the conservatives have thus far failed with their agenda on fully delegitimizing abortion, the passed legislation has gradually set up new hurdles:

- 1 In 2011 the law “On the Foundations of the Health Protection of Citizens of the RF” introduced the so-called “Week of Silence.” Accordingly, there must be at least seven days (from the 8th to 10th week of pregnancy) or 48 hours (in the 4th to 7th and 11th and 12th week of pregnancy) between the first consultation with a doctor for the purpose of an abortion and the actual surgery. Doctors received the right to refuse to perform an abortion.<sup>27</sup> The main demand of the conservatives—to exclude abortion costs from the statutory health insurance coverage, or a ban on the sale of emergency (“morning-after”) contraceptive pills without a doctor’s prescription—became mired in the legislative process. The same fate has met the idea for a law that a husband must agree to the wife’s abortion.<sup>28</sup>
- 2 Since 2012 the law requires women to consult a psychologist or social worker before abortion. Furthermore, recently some—heretofore permitted—social reasons for late termination of pregnancy (loss of child custody, imprisonment, death or disability of the husband) have been abolished. Only in case of pregnancy resulting from rape can abortions be procured up to the 22nd week of pregnancy.
- 3 In order to “protect pregnancy” and enhance “moral pressure” on pregnant women, women have been required since 2016 to look at the ultrasound image of the embryo and listen to its heartbeat before they can get permission to undergo abortion.
- 4 From late 2017 only specially licensed clinics may perform abortions.<sup>29</sup>

Closely linked to the debate on abortion is the question of “baby-hatches.” Ultra-conservatives proposed a ban on these facilities where mothers can bring newborns and abandon them anonymously in a safe place to be cared for. Such a bill, put forward by Senator Mizulina, did not get through parliament in 2017. There is still no legal regulation on the baby-hatches, which have existed since 2011 in some regions of Russia. The State Duma is currently debating whether to allow the regions to regulate this, which could lead to baby-hatches being allowed in some regions, while banned in others.

In the field of gender equality, a similarly indecisive picture emerges. While ultracon demographers and the ROC conclude that the child-rich family as dominant family type can best be restored when women return to their “natural role” at home, the Russian government shows little intent to strengthen the housewife status. It even has no problem in combining the propaganda for “traditional values” with extensive investments in public childcare. Since 2012 the care of preschool children in kindergartens has been massively expanded. According to vice minister-president Olga Golodets, from 2012 to 2014 the Russian government spent 135 billion rubles (approximately US\$2.4 billion) to create 1.36 million additional kindergarten places.<sup>30</sup> By 2021 the Russian government also intends to have created the presently lacking 272,000 nursery places.<sup>31</sup>

The official strategy papers, however, lack a clear direction in gender-equality policy. A draft law on gender equality has been stuck in the legislative process since 2003. In 2017 the Russian government at least demonstrated concern for how to better combine women’s career ambitions with family life. The National Strategy of Actions in the Interests of Women addresses such problems of compatibility of family and career—if a bit vaguely.<sup>32</sup> Despite the cautious formulations and a lack of legal power for the National Strategy, the ultraconservative parental association ARKS was outraged about the term “gender equality” allegedly used in the paper. It considered it a first step toward the Western “ideologies” of homosexuality and transgender, failing to outline how to defend the interests of pregnant women and mothers of small children.<sup>33</sup> The term “gender,” however, does not even appear in the strategy, only the notion of “equality between men and women.” Parallel to the work on this Strategy, a “Concept Paper of the State Family Policy in the Russian Federation until 2025” (initiated by Mizulina) has been passed that emphasizes “traditional family values and the traditional family way of life” as well as the “preservation of spiritual and moral traditions in family relationships and family education” (Mizulina 2014).

### ***Foster care and domestic violence: battlefields of family autonomy***

As outlined above, the government and its experts scarcely foresaw the confrontation with the ultraconservative coalition. The latter stepped in as systemic change was already well under way. While in the Soviet Union and through the 1990s orphans were primarily kept in institutions, by the mid-2000s the state had started to promote family-based care in the form of both unpaid guardianship

and paid foster families. With this de-institutionalization of the foster care system, Russia undertook a paradigm shift following an international trend (Kulmala 2017; Biryukova et al. 2013).

The ultraconservatives reject this shift from state institutions to private families, in spite of the fact that it is supposed to ease the state’s interference in families, delegating state functions toward non-state actors. At first glance the data indicate that the coalition mobilization efforts against removal of children from parental custody seem to show some effect. The number of children whose parental rights were terminated or limited has decreased by a third since 2007 (Biryukova and Sinyavskaya 2017, 373). This may be seen as a success of preventive social work within families, but also as a growing reluctance of the state to meddle in parental rights as demanded by the ultracons.

Yet, from the legal perspective, the ultraconservative norm entrepreneurs have not managed to restrict the range of criteria in the family codex justifying state intervention in the autonomy of the family. They were also unable to cut back the paid foster care. On the contrary, the number of children placed in foster families has grown more than tenfold from the mid-2000s up to today (while in 2005 only 2 percent of all children without parental care were placed in foster families, in 2015 it was 24.4 percent). And the share of children returned to their biological families has been steadily declining since 2011 (*ibid.*, 378).

There are also few signs that the government administration plans to cut back on the professional care system of state and non-commercial actors that supervises and accompanies the foster parents. Instead, in order to reduce social spending and still increase the quality of social services, the Russian government has announced a steady growth in third-sector non-private organizations and private enterprises. In his presidential address of 2015 Putin asked the regions and municipalities to gradually appropriate up to 10 percent of their social services budgets to, among others, such non-profit organizations (Putin 2015).

In another field, the ultraconservatives were much more successful in their struggle against the alleged crisis of the family. In February 2017 Putin signed a law that decriminalizes some forms of domestic violence—which the coalition had vehemently campaigned for—because the criminalization of domestic violence is perceived as an inadmissible interference in family matters. Just seven months earlier, this criminalization of domestic violence had found its way into the Criminal Code on the initiative of NGOs and feminist activists. For the first time in Russian history, battery—a lesser crime than assault—perpetrated by family members became a more serious offence than it would be if committed by strangers (Johnson 2017). This interim success of women’s rights activists led to an outcry from the ultracons, who finally won the battle. The All-Russian Parents Resistance in particular collected more than 213,000 signatures protesting the “anti-family provision” of the 2016 reform.

## Conclusion

Putin's conservative turn from 2011–13 and the subsequent systematic suppression of liberal forces has unleashed an ultraconservative and in some regards fundamentalist movement in Russia. Though this movement, including the ROC, parents associations, and other civic organizations, has solid roots in the regions, it can hardly be described as grassroots, since it essentially is rather a mobilization from above (see Højdestrand 2016). The mobilizing coalition of ultracon norm entrepreneurs has close ties to the ruling elite and is involved in internal elite battles. Its members show, in principle, loyalty to Putin and also play an active part in promoting Russia's "conservative soft power" abroad.

However, the ultracon movement is not directed by the Kremlin administration. The ROC and its associated experts, activists, and politicians already formed their coalition before Putin's third presidential term. They interpret and translate the "traditional values" in their own, more radical way, which fuels internal elite conflicts not only with the "system-liberals" but also with the social and political technocrats whose ideas for solving the demographic crisis do not always mix well with the ultracons' agenda-setting. The ROC as a player in its own right (see also Köllner in this volume) also cannot be underestimated here.

The ultraconservative translation of "traditional values" into politics is driven by an authoritarian anti-liberalism and anti-communism (to an extent not shared by other elite factions). Its anti-liberalism fits into the Russian discourses of the new illiberal conservatism of the ideologists, favoring collective (family and nation) rights over individual rights. Moreover, the norm entrepreneurs gave this concept a more powerful voice in the wider public. The same holds true for "anti-genderism." To some extent, the ultracons are more coherent in their agenda than the Russian government, as they detect liberal and neoliberal elements in Russia's social policy even when those elements are no longer framed as such. They deeply distrust the state's overwhelming and corrupt bureaucracy as well as its ongoing attempts to outsource state functions to a loyal third sector and commercial actors. Many of the ultraconservative sociopolitical suggestions tend to promote an increase in state paternalism. Yet, in their emphasis on the autonomy of the family—sanctified as canonical territory of the Church—they reject a Soviet-type liberation of women as working mothers, and the paternalism of the Communist Party that allowed the party-state to intervene in families and family-based education in order to create a "new man." In this regard, they resemble the Christian fundamentalist and right-wing pro-family movements in the US to which their relations are well established in spite of the general anti-Western, anti-American tone of the ultraconservative movement in Russia.

Despite the ultracons' successes in dominating the Russian public (media) discourse and in promoting their agenda in several legislative processes, they can hardly be taken as the main agenda-setters in Russia's social policy as a whole. The reasons for this are threefold at least: first, because they are just one player (though loud and powerful) among others. Second, their agenda as such is restricted to a few well-worn topics around which they argue and mobilize.

Third, the academics engaged in and advisors to the coalition have not managed to develop sufficient expertise for detail beyond the core topics of their camp. Hence, the government administration still seems in many fields of social policy to trust more its own pragmatic and technocratic advisors.

## Notes

- 1 Medvedev’s wife, Svetlana Medvedeva, opened the conference, see: <http://en.kremlin.ru/misc/9621/photos>, accessed 5 September 2017.
- 2 See more <http://worldcongress.ru/демографическийсаммит/>, accessed 4 September 2017.
- 3 The WCF also met in Western Europe and Latin America. The post-communist region is well represented among its organizers of the annual international conferences. The first took place in 1997 in Prague. The Czech capital was followed by conferences in Warsaw (with an address by Polish President Lech Kaczyński), Tbilisi and Budapest, where Viktor Orbán gave the opening speech.
- 4 Smirnov became also the deputy chairman of the Patriarch’s Bioethics Commission.
- 5 The head of the ARKS is Olga Letkova, who among her other functions is also director of the ARKS Center for Legal Expertise and chairman of the ARKS Council for the Protection of the Family and Traditional Family Values that acts as an advisory working group to the Children’s Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation. See: [www.arks.org.ru](http://www.arks.org.ru), accessed 16 March 2018.
- 6 Irina Shishova is vice-president of the foundation Socio-Psychological Support of Family and Children.
- 7 [www.worldcongressoffamilies.org/directors.php](http://www.worldcongressoffamilies.org/directors.php). Komov is also honorary president of the Lombardy-Russian Cultural Association and has close links to the Lega (Nord) in Italy (Shekhovtsov 2018, 175–89).
- 8 Komov also founded a consulting company which offers a variety of services from business development to market research. Larry Jacobs, once vice president of the WCF, is a partner, though he says he draws no salary, describing the title as a flourish to signal financial expertise when he and Komov consult with “family values” start-ups outside of Russia (Levitova 2014).
- 9 Antonov, Komov and N. Yakunina had already organized the national summits in 2011 and 2012.
- 10 See <http://istoki-foundation.org/en/program/all-russian-programme-sanctity-of-motherhood/>, accessed 16 March 2018.
- 11 See <https://mospat.ru/en/2015/11/27/news125573/>; [www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/02/world-congress-families-us-evangelical-russia-family-tree/](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/02/world-congress-families-us-evangelical-russia-family-tree/), accessed 16 March 2018.
- 12 See [www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5885a32b9a7947751b653476](http://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5885a32b9a7947751b653476), accessed 16 March 2018.
- 13 See <http://rvs.su/rvs>, accessed 27 February 2018.
- 14 See also Beloborodov (2017).
- 15 Very similarly argues, for example, the parent association ARKS. See <http://arks.org.ru/index.php/deyatelnost-arks/nashi-proekty/108-proekt-vozhrozhdenie-semi-v-rossii-nasnovе-traditsionnykh-dukhovno-nravstvennykh-tsennostej>, accessed 16 March 2018.
- 16 See, for example, <http://arks.org.ru/index.php/zashchita-traditsionnykh-semejnykh-tsennostej/natsionalnaya-strategiya-dejstvij-v-interesakh-zhenshchin-na-2017-2022-gg/698-gendernye-teorii-kak-orudie-unichtozheniya-traditsionnykh-tsennostej>, accessed 16 March 2018.
- 17 See <http://familypolicy.ru/rep/rf-12-029>, accessed 16 March 2018.
- 18 See [http://demographia.ru/articles\\_N/index.html?idArt=1565](http://demographia.ru/articles_N/index.html?idArt=1565), accessed 16 March 2018.

- 19 See interview with Mizulina <https://iz.ru/news/556354>, accessed 16 March 2018.
- 20 See, for example ROC (2013), <http://arks.org.ru/index.php/yuvenalnaya-sistema-v-rossii/iz-yatie-detej-iz-semi/802-nuzhdayushchimsya-semyam-nuzhno-pomogat-a-netobirat-u-nikh-detej>. In expert opinions by “FamilyPolicy.ru” for the Duma Committee on Children’s Rights, the experts argue that in foster families violence is employed toward the foster children much more often than in families of origin. The “analytic text” pleads then for the rejection of an introduction of broadened rights for the state to intervene in the family (FamilyPolicy.ru 2011).
- 21 See <http://rvs.su/statia/vremya-trebuot-otchyotlivosti>, accessed 16 March 2018.
- 22 See <http://arks.org.ru/index.php/deyatelnost-arks/nashi-proekty/108-proekt-vozhrozhdenie-semi-v-rossii-na-osnove-traditsionnykh-dukhnovno-nravstvennykh-tsennostej>, accessed 16 March 2018. (See also Smirnov 2017b).
- 23 Federal Law No. 256-FZ of 29 December 2006 “On Additional Measures of State Support for Families with Children.”
- 24 However, the Russian government provides a subsidy of 40 percent of the monthly salary of the childcarer, for children up to 1.5 years, if the carer was previously formally employed. Furthermore, there are targeted monthly social benefits for families with children (level and need criteria are determined regionally), as well as social benefits related to childbirth.
- 25 Fathers are only entitled to maternity (family) capital benefits if they are the sole adoptive parent, or if the mother dies or loses custody of her child.
- 26 Order of the Government of Russia No. 1711 of 30 December 2017.
- 27 Federal Law No. 323-FZ of 21 November 2011 “On Fundamentals of Protection of Public Health in the Russian Federation.” Art. 56.2, and Art. 70.3.
- 28 See [www.gazeta.ru/social/2011/06/01/3636057.shtml?updated](http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2011/06/01/3636057.shtml?updated), accessed 27 February 2018.
- 29 Order of the Ministry of Health No. 572n of 1 November 2012, paragraph 104, [www.rosminzdrav.ru/documents/5828-prikazminzdrava-rossii-ot-12-noyabrya-2012g-572n](http://www.rosminzdrav.ru/documents/5828-prikazminzdrava-rossii-ot-12-noyabrya-2012g-572n), accessed 27 February 2018.
- 30 Transcript of the parliamentary session on 8 February 2017, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/4593/>, accessed 27 February 2018.
- 31 See <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4892489>, accessed 27 February 2018.
- 32 Resolution of the Government of Russia No. 410-r of 8 March 2017.
- 33 See <http://arks.org.ru/index.php/zashchita-traditsionnykh-semejnykh-tsennostej/natsionalnaya-strategiya-dejstvuj-v-interesakh-zhenshchin-na-2017-2022-gg/705-za-cto-borolis-premer-podpisal-natsionalnuyu-strategiyu-dejstvuj-v-interesakh-zhenshchin>, accessed 27 February 2018.

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# 12 Religious conservatism in post-Soviet Russia and its relation to politics

## Empirical findings from ethnographic fieldwork

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### Introduction

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2016,<sup>2</sup> my research project analyzes the relationship between Orthodox religion and politics in contemporary Russia by looking at conservative ideas and practices. Although Russian conservatism in its post-Soviet appearance is in itself heterogeneous, as Katharina Bluhm (2016, 1) rightly emphasizes, some topics, nevertheless, dominate the discussion: anti-liberalism and anti-Americanism as well as a particularly strong emphasis on finding “the Russian way.” Thus contemporary Russian conservatism could be described as a historically embedded counter-movement to other ideologies (Mannheim et al. 1984), and as a situational ideology (Freeden 1996) meant to provide the intellectual basis for concrete action. In particular, this chapter examines Russian conservatism in its close connections with religious actors and institutions. We must see these efforts, I suggest, as attempts to introduce new “spiritual-moral values” (*dukhovno-nravstvennye tsennosti*) into Russian society and to produce and sustain the legitimacy of the state in order to govern the population (Rogers 2009, 8). These attempts, however, are intimately linked to Russian Orthodox religion because “what is happening in post-Soviet Russia is thus part of a more general shift of transformational hopes toward religious institutions” (Luehrmann 2011, 16).

My description, however, differs from widespread notions that describe a very dominant state in its relation to religious denominations on the national level.<sup>3</sup> Instead, my observations during long-term fieldwork show that this is not equally true on the local level, where conflicts occur far more often and can have different results. Here the dominance of the state administration is not as clear-cut as it seems at first glance. For this reason I analyze the role of Russian Orthodoxy in its own right (see also Stoeckl 2016, 132 for the role of the ROC in the international sphere). In so doing, I introduce the concept of “entangled authorities” that offers a new perspective. Herewith I follow earlier attempts emphasizing the multitude of factions, discourses, and practices within Russian Orthodoxy (Papkova 2011; Richters 2013; Stoeckl 2014; Verkhovskiy 2003).

The entanglements between Russian Orthodoxy and politics have been described before, though their description has remained rather anecdotal. Therefore I try here to examine these phenomena in more detail and to structure them accordingly. A first finding draws attention to the fact that at least three ways of entanglement have to be delineated: personal, ideological, and institutional. This allows for a more precise description of the entanglements, and conclusions that have relevance in a broader perspective. In addition, a second finding draws attention to the misunderstandings, unintended consequences, and open conflicts in the relation between Russian Orthodoxy and politics. This shows clearly that despite their close cooperation, the interrelation between the two spheres is much more complicated than seems at first glance.

Thus I cannot provide a simplified picture of Russian conservatism as a state ideology, exclusively introduced from above. Instead I argue that the repertoire of ingredients in Russian conservatism may vary, and includes a combination of local cultural elements with more idealized and general connotations and ideas. But for this it is necessary to analyze the interrelation between the federal “center” and the local “periphery.” For a first analysis on this topic I draw on Luehrmann (2011, 10), who analyzed political agitation in the Soviet Union and its repercussions for the educational sector in post-Soviet Russia. In her perception, the impression of an all-encompassing Soviet state being able to provide the resources and means for country-wide indoctrination is misleading. Instead, the central authorities in the Politburo gave the initiative and incentives but, to a large extent, drew on local cadres to implement the ideas.

Adapting these ideas to post-Soviet Russia allows for a similar reading of the interrelation between central authorities and local elites, I suggest.<sup>4</sup> Ideological initiatives often originate in the “center” and proliferate into the “periphery”; here the central authorities and President Putin, in particular, are very keen to set the agenda and develop new ideas. But, in the process, these ideas change significantly, are adapted to local situations and interpretations, and take on new, unintended and sometimes even contradictory meanings. In addition, the efforts to provide a new state ideology based on conservative thinking, paraphrased as “drawing on genuine traditional moral values” (*traditsionnye nraivstvennye tsennosti*), receive only minimal central resources. Because of this, efforts at the local level are centrally mandated but rarely completely prepared and spelled out, and rely on local initiative and improvisation. This leads to considerable variation across the Russian Federation when ideas originating at the federal level are adapted to suit the local situation and interpretation. Here it becomes clear that Russian conservatism is a complex and idiosyncratic phenomenon based on entanglements between the local and the national level on the one hand, and religion and politics on the other.

Accordingly, current state policies and many initiatives undertaken by conservatives I interpret as attempts to actively regulate public discourses and attitudes by propagating moralizing positions. To cite Pierre Bourdieu, we know that “every established order tends to produce [...] the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” (1977, 164). In Russia, however, this is of divisive contemporary

interest because its future is anything but “settled” and the official ideologies are anything but uniformly distributed within the population. This point in a different context has been expressed by Herzfeld, who cautions: “Even people who talk as though they fully endorsed and agreed upon the ideals of national unity do not necessarily mean the same things by it” (1987, 152). I emphasize the role of Orthodox clergymen and lay activists in this moralizing discourse, who often take very conservative positions but do not necessarily share the same perceptions when talking about similar phenomena. To sum up, I argue that the joint efforts of these religious and politically conservative circles are meant, first, to counter more progressive strands in Russian society such as liberalism and consumerism and, second, to rebuild regional identities and a meaningful world, something Douglas Rogers calls the “post-Soviet cultural front” (2015, xiii).

### **Traditional moral values**

For years, developments in the Russian Federation have borne witness to the growing importance of the concept of “traditional moral values.” This is a case in point for the ideological convergences and entanglements between Russian Orthodoxy and politics which I have introduced above. Despite differences in many details, the idea is broad enough to include many different issues that both spheres are interested in. Following Kristina Stoeckl (2016), who draws on earlier debates in international relations, this could be described as “norm entrepreneurship” or “norm protagonism”:

Norm entrepreneurs “create” norms by calling attention to issues that hitherto have not been “named, interpreted and dramatized” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 910) as *norms*. They construct cognitive frames, often in opposition to rival frames, effectively causing a shift in public perceptions of appropriateness.

(Stoeckl 2016, 133, emphasis in original)

This allows an interpretation of how norms are created by Orthodox clergy and laymen in cooperation with the state administration in order to challenge vigorously other notions of moral appropriateness.

Another important issue for traditional moral values in Russia are attempts to enunciate the differences between “the West” and the Russian Federation. Quite often these discourses essentialize the differences and propose that they are of a qualitative kind. On a more practical level, traditional moral values can also be a useful tool in the hands of the state or the church. These moral issues are political insofar as “various parties seek to impose their understandings of proper persons and relationships on one another” (Rogers 2009, 13f.). The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Orthodox activists are particularly active in this respect since the amendment to the 1997 “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” that includes the concept of “traditional faith” and anticipates many of the issues that have proven important later on (for more details

on this law see Richters 2013, 38; Knox and Mitrofanova 2014, 58; Gerlach 2015, 105). The most obvious case in point of the use of politics as an instrument in the moral sphere, however, is the anti-gay movement prominently supported by Orthodox activists and some clergymen (see Attwood 1996; Gal and Kligman 2012 on gender and homosexuality in post-Soviet countries).

Yet another recent example is the protest surrounding the showing of the film *Matil'da* by Aleksey Uchitel' since late 2016 in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladimir and other places (Shustrova 2017; Golovinov 2017). The film depicts the pre-marital affair of Tsar Nicholas II with the Polish ballet dancer Matilda Kshesinskaya. Conservative Orthodox believers declared the film “blasphemous” because it showed sex scenes with the future saint (Tsar Nicholas II was canonized in 2000 by the Russian Orthodox Church). In their protests these Orthodox believers were supported by Natalia Poklonskaya, a young member of the Russian Duma. She has declared the film an insult to the religious feelings of Orthodox believers: “You can't touch saints. You can't show them having sex because that offends the feelings of believers” (Rainsford 2017). She started several initiatives to ban the showing of the film, drawing on Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on offences to the religious feelings of others. Poklonskaya's activism clearly shows the personal entanglements between conservative groups in politics and Russian Orthodoxy. Despite her efforts the film was not banned, and even Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev publicly requested more tolerance and dialogue on the part of Orthodox activists (Akimov et al. 2017; Kremlin 2017). In this case, activists were not able to implement their ideas, but this was different in another case brought to my attention by an acquaintance during fieldwork.

In the Vladimir region, the small town of Bogolyubovo is famous for having an important religious heritage relevant to the whole Russian Federation—the Church of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin on the river Nerl'. In addition, the town hosts a big monastery for women, of a particular conservative orientation, which receives pilgrims from all over Russia. In May 2016, the pharmaceutical company Bergus announced plans for the investment of about 40 million rubles (about 500,000 euro) in the Vladimir region in order to produce sanitary goods like nappies, bandages, and preservatives (condoms) (Khromova 2016). At the time, the announcement received little attention because details of the place of production were not announced. In late 2016, however, it emerged that the company wanted to invest in the area of a former brick factory in Bogolyubovo, an industrial zone where several other companies were located (Pressservice-33 2016; Portal-Credo 2016). Although the industrial zone is several hundred meters away from the monastery and other religious sites, the plan to produce preservatives “in the vicinity of church or monastic sites” was criticized by hieromonk (*ieromonakh*) Nikon (Levachev-Belavenets) of Moscow. He is an important conservative thinker and monarchist in Russian Orthodoxy who was a leader of the organization For Faith and Fatherland (Lenta 2016a) and one of the editors of the monarchist newspaper *Imperial Gazette* (*Tsarskiy vestnik*) (Obshchestvennyy Sovet 2018). His criticism was taken up by conservative

circles in the monastery and by its lay supporters, who wrote letters to Patriarch Kirill, to the governor of the Vladimir region, Svetlana Orlova, to the public prosecutor, and to the media, demanding the investment be stopped and reminding them that sinful behavior is punished “from above” (Lenta 2016b). As Nikon, the Orthodox activists consider the use of preservatives regrettable but not sinful, yet their production is “sinful” (*grekhovnaya*) from their perspective (Kolokol Rossii 2016).

Bergus, however, declared that it could not stop the investment because already a considerable amount of money had been spent and they had been searching for such a location for more than a year before the site was approved by the regional administration. Thereupon the Orthodox activists started to organize public protests in November and December 2016. During a meeting of the investors with the municipal administration, the activists arranged protests on the street, voicing their objection to producing the articles near this “holy place,” the monastery. They even criticized any production of these products at all in Bogolyubovo, with its historic and religious importance. According to Tatyana Borovikova, one of the leading protest organizers and the head of the Association of Families with Many and Adopted Children, the site of the Church of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin on the Nerl’ was selected by the Virgin Mary herself, who appeared to Prince Andrey Bogolyubsky during a dream and advised him to build a church there. Because of this, the existence of the church makes Bogolyubovo a place of particular holy status, which should be kept in mind in planning the production of such items as condoms.

The representatives of the company, irritated and overwhelmed by this unexpected protest, did not know how to react best. They claimed that they were supporting the local community by creating new jobs, and that it was the regional administration who had selected the site. In addition, one leading company official felt obliged to declare: “I am an Orthodox believer, father of a family with many children and adhere to traditional values as well” (see also Kolokol Rossii 2016).<sup>5</sup> Despite his attempt to associate himself with them, the Orthodox activists challenged his position, attacking him personally by questioning the sincerity of his faith. The activists thus remained skeptical and continued to demand the end of the project. This, however, was no possibility for the company, as its representative explained they had already made an investment of about 200 million rubles (ca. 300 million euros) (*ibid.*). In contrast to the Orthodox activists, the Vladimir eparchy officially voiced no criticism of the project because they “did not want to get involved in questions of economic decisions” (Provladimir 2016). The eparchy secretary declared the position taken by Nikon to be his personal opinion and not that of the ROC (Portal-Credo 2016). The activists criticized this lack of support and intended to write to Putin as well as involve UNESCO, because they felt the heritage of the town was endangered.

Despite the company’s first attempts to secure its investments and continue “business as usual,” it turned out that opposition continued. In December 2016 the Bergus company finally gave up and declared its intention to halt its plans

for the production of condoms in Bogolyubovo (NTV 2016; Vedomosti 2016). Meanwhile, the case had gained attention nationally and in Moscow. Certainly, the fame of the religious sites in Bogolyubovo contributed to the growing attention to the conflict in the whole of Russia. Probably very relevant to the full victory over the company, but scarcely visible, was the relation of the monastery with conservative groups and important political actors on the federal level. This shows the personal entanglements as introduced before. Nikon's public recognition contributed substantially.

For the company, however, the episode turned out to be a success as well. The resulting substantial attention in social media and support from young Russians helped sales to rise considerably thereafter, so that the company was able to invest in another production plant outside Bogolyubovo. They were still able to produce nappies and cosmetic products in Bogolyubovo, and the condoms in the second location. Nevertheless, the affair demonstrates clearly the growing importance and involvement in everyday life of conservative circles within Russian Orthodoxy.

### **Religious conservatism and the re-emergence of Cossack groups**

Historically, Cossack groups emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and were a typical border phenomenon in the Russian South, in the Ukrainian territory, and in Siberia (Slezkine 1994, 194; Stammler 2005, 122). These groups left the Russian Empire and tried to escape the reign of the tsar. From the sixteenth century onwards, however, they sometimes aligned with the expanding Russian Empire and the tsar. Cossack groups guarded the borders or penetrated into new territories in search for resources (for example furs). As a result, forms of direct or indirect rule were installed in these territories (see Golovnev and Osherenko 1999, 44). In many cases, Cossack groups came into trouble with other groups outside the Russian Empire that were of a different faith and adhered to paganism (Siberia), Islam (Caucasus), or Catholicism (Ukraine). For this reason, the Cossacks were described as “defenders of Orthodoxy.”

In contemporary Russia, however, recent years bear witness to a re-emergence of Cossack groups and their spread over all of the Russian Federation. Here strong ideological convergences between the Russian state and Orthodox groups can be noticed. These ideological convergences are largely related to currents of patriotism and militarism which attempt to actively rebuild the image of a strong and internationally relevant Russian state. Especially addressed is the traditional image of Cossacks as stout defenders of Orthodoxy that plays an important role until today. A growing number of new Cossack organizations have been formed with new personal and institutional entanglements. Many of the new Cossack groups have connections with and are supported by Orthodox lay believers and activists (ROC 2015). In 2010, the collaboration between Cossacks and the ROC received official recognition when a Committee of the Holy Synod of the ROC for the Cooperation with Cossacks was formed (*Sinodal'nyy komitet po*



*vzaimodeystviyu s kazachestvom*) (ROC 2010). Herewith all three forms of entanglements (personal, ideological, and institutional) become visible. This committee is headed by Mitropolit Stavropolsky and Nevinnomyssky Kirill (Pokrovsky), who since 2012 has also been on the Council for Cossack Affairs of the President of the Russian Federation (*Sovet po delam kazachestva pri Prezidente Rossii*), which was formed in 2009 (ROC 2010, 2012). Accordingly, I interpret this development to be part of a general rise of nationalism, patriotism, and militarism in the Russian Federation. Although these trends became more virulent after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, they build on previous developments such as the formation of officially recognized Cossack organizations and the strong rhetoric of President Putin and Patriarch Kirill. Though events on the local level follow federal trends, they give additional impetus to the emergence of other bottom-up initiatives elsewhere, as I show in the following.

In the Vladimir region, so-called unregistered Cossack groups (*nereestroye kazaki*) had already existed for several years, whereas an officially “registered” Cossack local group was only formed there in 2013 (Start-33 2013). Both forms of group need to have a state registration as a nonprofit organization (*nekommercheskaya organizatsiya* NKO) for their establishment. The main difference between the two forms is the recognition by the official Cossack organization of the Russian Federation. With this official recognition the registered Cossack groups become part of state services, although most local groups do not receive financial support from the federal budget (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the general trend in the region is sympathy toward the establishment of Cossack groups, and the governor of the Vladimir region, Svetlana Orlova, became a Cossack herself in August 2013 (*ibid.*). The Cossack movement was also reinterpreted to fit important local history and figures such as Il’ya Muromets, to whom an official connection was declared. This, however, is historically questionable and not verified by any archival sources. Despite this, the already well-known historic figure of Il’ya Muromets has increased in popularity locally.

The Cossacks were not a mass phenomenon in the Vladimir region and up to 2013 only 297 persons were registered members of (“unregistered”) Cossack groups (*ibid.*). Since then, however, the number must have risen considerably, although no updated figures are available. They receive increasing attention in the media, with reports of Cossacks patrolling several localities for drug trafficking and undocumented persons, or on duty with fire fighters in forest-fire prevention. The Cossacks’ self-understanding as a paramilitary group seems to predominate, with a number of them having served in the Russian military or participated in armed conflicts (*ibid.*). Drawing on these experiences, a number of Cossack groups offer pre-military training to young people, which could become part of a patriotic upbringing and education (see Benovska-Sabkova et al. 2010; Köllner 2016). With such programs the Cossacks have been able to considerably enhance their influence in Russian society.

During fieldwork I participated in a similar event where Cossacks were involved. In consequence of a 2009 presidential directive, a new school subject had been introduced into state schools from 2012, called Fundamentals of

Religious Culture and Secular Ethic (*Osnovy religioznykh kul'tur i svetskoy etiki*, ORKSE) (see for more details Köllner 2016; Willems 2010). Part of this subject is one module called Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture, where pupils acquire basic knowledge of Russian Orthodoxy in its secular aspects (history, dogma, and culture). But at the time of my fieldwork (2013 to 2016) the content of the subject varied to a great extent and largely depended on the attitude of the teacher, who could be a convinced atheist or a devout Orthodox believer. In a small town in the Vladimir region I was present at such lessons in Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture. The teacher organized a class excursion to the parish community buildings where Cossacks were present, who together with some Orthodox believers showed the pupils the church and surroundings. After that the Cossacks ordered the pupils to line up in the yard and engage in different sports activities. As the pupils were at first giggling at the Cossacks who were a new experience for them, this soon came to an end, as these more loudly and resolutely voiced their commands again, and very soon the pupils decided to obey. The teacher and the church devotees seemed to appreciate this enforcement of discipline and to be grateful to the Cossacks for it.

### **Celebration of the end of the “Great Patriotic War” in Vladimir**

In 2014, the sixty-ninth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany was celebrated all over Russia. 9 May was one of the most important festive anniversaries in the Soviet Union and continues to play a role of distinction in post-Soviet Russia up to today (see Gabowitsch et al. 2017). On that day, commemoration festivities take place at monuments around the country, such as at the Eternal Flame dedicated to the losses of human life suffered during the Second World War. Another national focus is the military parade in Moscow showing the current strength of the Russian Federation’s armed forces. Other events take place naturally at the local level. In Vladimir, my main fieldwork site at this time, a sports competition was held by the city administration in one of the stadiums where the best pupils from different schools participated. More pupils were brought in great numbers to attend the competition. The event, however, was not observed by the pupils and their teachers alone—on hand were local dignitaries and their families, politicians from the leading parties, commanding officers of the police, servicemen and women from the Russian Army, and ROC clergy. Other schools and even children in daycare were required to attend the event. The stadium was profusely decorated with Russian flags and military equipment was on display too.

Before the sport competition a number of talks were given by the dignitaries. All of them underscored the lasting importance of the war victory and the strength of the Russian army still today. The most remarkable speech, however, was given by a clergyman famous for his conservatism and his closeness to the military even among other clergymen, as I was told. He praised the Russian army and its military strength:

It is a holy duty [*svyashchennyi dolg*] for every one of us to defend the Motherland! The Church supports this and blesses its defenders [*osvyashchayut zashitnikov rodiny*]. Russians have always been soldiers and transferred this from generation to generation [*peredali eto ot pokoleniya v pokolenie*]!

With the Russian Army only recently having occupied Crimea and involved in a more-or-less hidden conflict in Eastern Ukraine, this strong emphasis on the defensive orientation of the Russian army is contradictory. In addition, the speeches given during the event were couched in religious language and religious symbols were on display. In this way, the impression of a strong connection between the Russian army and Russian Orthodoxy was created and a positive image of the army among the children and young adults was fostered. For the small ones it was obviously fun to dress up like tank soldiers, attend the competitions, and see the military vehicles. Moreover, I was told by attendees that the sport competition was meant to find pupils suitable for a neighboring sports school which was in close cooperation with the army administration on the opposite side of the street (personal entanglements). Accordingly, the event was not only indirectly meant to improve the image of the Russian army (ideological entanglements), but served it quite obviously to help establish contact with athletic young people who could be recruited in the future. This is part of a more general trend to institutionalize such contacts with different groups of the population. An important success for the ROC in this respect has been the introduction since 2009 of the chaplaincy into the Russian army (Richters 2013, 58).

### **The “Day of Mercy” at the Orthodox High School in Vladimir<sup>6</sup>**

The “Day of Mercy” was a project organized by the Orthodox High School in Vladimir, a private institution closely related to the Russian Orthodox Church, founded in 2001 under the auspices of the Vladimir Archbishop Evlogy. The high school was also accredited by the state administration and thus gained in prestige. In contrast to public schools, the Orthodox High School education has a clear religious orientation including prayers, church singing, and Church Slavonic language in the curriculum. In 2014 it had 12 classes and more than 160 pupils. The school is headed by Father Vladimir, who is about 60 years old and serves in a parish as well. During visits to the Orthodox school I talked to teachers and took part in lessons and other events. One important school event during my fieldwork was the project “Day of Mercy,” which lasted from 2013 to early 2014. In the project, two classes from the Orthodox school and two classes from a neighboring state school—all fourth-grade pupils (around the age of 10)—commemorated the 100-year anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. The idea was Father Vladimir’s, and so the preparation was mainly organized by the Orthodox school. Its pupils together with teachers prepared and rehearsed a play complete with scenery and costumes.

The culmination of the project was a war re-enactment event at the Orthodox High School. For this all four classes met in the yard of the Orthodox school and were divided into four teams (*brigady*). In addition to the teachers from the Orthodox High School, staff from the Ministry for Emergency Situations (*Ministerstvo po chrezvychaynym situatsiyam*, MChS) took part. The head of the MChS group was a man in his mid-forties with the rank of captain (*mayor*) and a close acquaintance of Father Vladimir. Accordingly I perceive this to be a form of entanglement that I have described as personal. After all pupils had gathered in the yard, the captain and Father Vladimir explained the event, the rules of the competition, and the historic importance of the First World War for Russia. Here the ideological convergence between both dignitaries became obvious as they highlighted the importance of Russian Orthodoxy for the defense of the motherland. After the speeches all the brigades received a plan of the different stations in the competition, which the children were to visit in a certain order.

The stations, scattered within a nearby park, had been prepared by the teachers beforehand, with names such as “hospital,” “war pharmacy,” “zone under attack,” “Kiev,” or “zone under chemical attack.” In the “hospital” the children had to take care of a person pretending to be wounded and in the pharmacy they received information on emergency measures. At “Kiev,” a Second World War veteran was waiting to tell them about his experiences on the battlefield. In the “zone under attack” a woman gave signals to the children who had to follow her instructions and crawl beneath an improvised shelter. At the last station, “zone under chemical attack,” they received gasmasks and the MChS staff explained their proper use. Then, they had to carry an injured person away from the zone under attack. After all the teams had completed the stations, they needed to return to the Orthodox High School as soon as possible, since the first brigade to finish all stations successfully was the “winning” team.

Back at the school, everyone gathered in the assembly hall and the pupils of the Orthodox High School performed their play, *The Merciful Sister* (*miloserdnaya sestra*). The main actors portray a group of nurses in a Russian field hospital at the German–Russian front during the First World War. The nurses take care of Russian soldiers wounded in a German chlorine gas attack. Then, one of the “merciful sisters” starts to pray for all the deceased on their way to heaven, and for the prevention of further killing. She reads out the names of the fallen Russian soldiers with their religious and ethnic affiliation, such as “Ivan Ivanovich, Russian, Orthodox.” After the play, all the brigade members (pupils) received diplomas for their successful participation in the “Day of Mercy” and the “winning team” was especially praised.

Afterwards, all pupils, teachers, and guests went to the school yard again. Together with the school staff, the MChS had prepared a traditional Russian meal (*kasha*) in a big military field kitchen tent. Sweets were offered to the schoolchildren. It was the last day before the school vacation and the children played happily for a while, then left. After that we met together with teachers, Father Vladimir, and his assistant priest in the principal’s office. Bottles of liqueur and vodka circulated and the day’s events were discussed. The teachers

laughed about the children and the clumsy way they solved some of the tasks at the stations. Father Vladimir was quite confident that everything had gone smoothly. I was—despite this nice close to the day and all the hospitality—left rather uneasy by the affair. The whole day was filled with images and slogans from tsarist wartime Russia: “Iron in the hands—Christ in the heart!” (*Zhelezo v rukakh, Khristos v serdtse!*) or, “War till a victorious end!” (*Voyna do pobednogo kontsa!*), not to mention the barely disguised pre-military training. Again, this was a demonstration of the ideological entanglement of Russian Orthodoxy with the state administration, both of whom imagine and desire a strong and militarily powerful Russia. Pre-military training in schools seems to be one of the instruments conceived for implementing this vision. The implementation I witnessed, however, was not organized or advised from above, but drew on local initiative and local networks (personal entanglements). Nevertheless, it is evidently the result of a more general trend toward conservatism in Russian society. But an interpretation of the two levels as neatly interrelated seems misplaced, as the ethnographic material presented shows.

## **Conclusion**

In the Russian Federation recent years have witnessed both the re-emergence of a liberal opposition connected with the protests against falsified elections, and the opposite trend toward conservatism and authoritarian measures. At the present time, the conservative trend seems to be prevailing in Russian society for several reasons; one is the role of Russian Orthodoxy in this context. Although there are different factions inside Russian Orthodoxy, the liberal position has lost considerable ground and today nationalist and fundamentalist circles seem to be prevailing (see Verkhovsky 2003 for more characteristics of these factions). Accordingly, most of the conservatives’ pressing issues are couched in religious language, decorated with religious symbols and supported by clergymen or Orthodox activists. Because of the prominence of the ROC in Russian society and the trust put into the institution, I interpret the support by conservative Orthodox groups to be crucially important in the general trend toward conservatism on the national and local levels. Here the general disappointment with liberal thinking dating back to the permanent economic, political, and social crises in the 1990s has to be kept in mind (Shevchenko 2009). As a result, many people joined conservative movements and embraced conservative positions.

I have described as another reason for the success of conservatism the personal, ideological, and institutional entanglements between Russian Orthodoxy and Russian politics. Up to now these different entanglements have not been examined and analyzed separately. To do this I have introduced the concept of “entangled authorities,” which I hope will also give a new impetus to further theoretical approaches to the interplay between Orthodox religion and politics in contemporary Russia. The concept challenges the widespread picture of an all-powerful state using religious groups primarily for its own legitimation. Instead, the relation church/state in contemporary Russia is a complex interplay between

two powerful institutions characterized by both cooperation and conflict. Here-with a biased picture is corrected in favor of one that emphasizes the oscillation between instrumentalization, close cooperation, competition, and conflict.

In addition, the interplay between the local, regional, and national levels is crucial. The examples show how conservative issues are stimulated from above as well as from below, with the national and local levels tightly interconnected, so that they have to be analyzed in relation to one another. Although conservative actors close to Russian Orthodoxy do not always win (as in the “Matilda” case), they quite often do exert influence through entangled channels, and it becomes thereby obvious that they provide important ideological underpinnings for institution- and nation-building. The Cossack groups and their spread all over Russia, and the new ideological and religious trends in education, are also instrumental in this context. Herewith a more detailed description of the interplay between Orthodox religion and politics becomes possible which avoids simplifications and allows for an analysis of both sides in their own right.

## Notes

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- 2 The research draws on ethnographic fieldwork and largely follows the “ethnographic research cycle” (Spradley 2005) and grounded theory approaches (Glaser and Strauss 2009; Strauss and Corbin 1998). As field site I chose the Vladimir region, where I had already conducted other fieldwork where I was interested in the interrelation between Russian Orthodoxy and Russian businessmen (Köllner 2012, 2013a, 2013b). In addition, I visited St. Petersburg to compare my findings from Vladimir to the situation there. Nevertheless, it is not “multi-sited ethnography” because I almost exclusively draw on ethnographic data from the Vladimir region. Vladimir is the capital of the region of the same name and situated about 180 kilometers east of Moscow. This city of about 380,000 inhabitants has been historically important up to today. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal’ was an important power in the northeast part of the Kievan Rus’ before the capital was moved to Moscow in the fifteenth century. It is famous for architectural monuments dating back to the thirteenth century, thus making the city one of the key locations in the so-called Golden Ring. During the research, I conducted participant observation, 48 semi-structured recorded interviews, and a number of conversations without recording. Among my interlocutors were priests, monks, nuns, believers, politicians, teachers, journalists, scientists, and people working in museums and planetariums.
- 3 Curanović, for example, describes the relationship between religion and the Russian state in foreign policy as being guided by the principle to “grant freedom of conscience ‘by concession’, according to an institution’s ‘degree of loyalty’” (Curanović 2012, 242, see also 104f.).
- 4 Here I cite Gel’man (2002), who draws attention to the importance of the local government, and Rogers (2015, 6), who argues that “the Russian state [...] [is] constituted

along a center-region axis in which regions are just as often the driving force as the federal center.” This means that there is a dominance of the center ever since President Putin strengthened the federal authorities, e.g. in the Yukos affair, or when federal inspectors were installed to monitor the governors of the regions. This does not mean, however, that the decisions taken by the center are fulfilled in the way intended (see also Gabowitsch 2016).

- 5 In recent years, fertility issues have received growing attention, leading to the (re-) introduction of the title “Mother Heroine,” the “Order of Parental Glory,” and compensation for giving birth and successfully raising many children (see Selezneva 2016 for more details on the legal framework). Families with three or more children have a special status in the Russian Federation.
- 6 In one of my recent articles (Köllner 2016), I draw on the same ethnographic material but with more concern for religious education, whereas here the more important focus is on conservatism among Orthodox clergymen.

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# 13 Ready for diffusion?

## Russia's "cultural turn" and the post-Soviet space

*Sebastian Schiek and Azam Isabaev*

### Introduction

From the perspective of regime stability, Russia's "cultural turn" is most of all a means of discursive legitimation in times of a fuzzy course of development and contentious politics (e.g. Tsygankov 2016; Laruelle 2013). Self-legitimation and mobilization of supporters can be relevant for post-Soviet autocratic leaders as well as politicians in hybrid regimes. The question as to whether Russia's "cultural turn" is ready for export had already been raised some time ago (March 2012), but not yet answered from the perspective of recipient states. This chapter is a contribution to the debate, studying the diffusion of Russia's law against "homosexual propaganda among minors" into former Soviet republics. Laws and practices, which have traveled before around the post-Soviet space, usually belonged to the sphere of "hard politics," for example of constitutions and electoral or media law. Post-Soviet republics learned from each other because of their numerous linkages, such as a common history and a shared lingua franca, but also because of similar problems, many of them connected to the authoritarian nature of their regimes.

The Russian "anti-propaganda" law had a primarily symbolic function: specific politicians and eventually the regime wanted to legitimize themselves, mobilize supporters, and delegitimize opponents in a time of an acute crisis. To make self-legitimization work, the regime aimed to resonate with the attitudes of moral conservatism, anti-homosexual resentments being among them. Moral conservatism is not so much an explicit ideology; rather, it exhibits beliefs shared among the majority of the society. It received its imprint during the Soviet era. Moral conservatism is thus not only the dominant cultural predisposition in Russia, but in the whole post-Soviet space. Given this shared history and cultural predispositions, and assuming a continuing need for self-legitimation in post-Soviet republics as well, one could expect that the adjacent regimes regard the Russian law as an example and copy its texts or ideas. Indeed, several former Soviet republics announced similar laws shortly after the Russian law was registered in the Duma.<sup>1</sup> Legislative procedure never got started in most of these countries. Only in two countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, laws inspired by Russia were debated in the national parliaments. In Kyrgyzstan only was the

topic supported by the president, leading legislative reforms. Kyrgyzstan ultimately did not copy the specific Russian law, but emulated the idea: the parliament adopted a constitutional amendment which banned homosexual marriages (although they have never been legal before).

How can we make sense of this diffusion process, which led to six announcements, two draft laws, and eventually also to a constitutional amendment, supported by the head of state? Shared history, language, and proximity might explain the initial intention to copy, but it remains unanswered why the vast majority did not copy it, and why Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are outliers. The type of regime also does not provide a clear picture: Russia at the time of the law's adoption was an electoral autocracy. Among the countries that did not copy it are both autocracies (for example Belarus) and hybrid regimes (for instance Armenia). Kazakhstan is a fully consolidated autocracy, Kyrgyzstan is an electoral democracy. Linkages with Russia or the West do not provide a strong explanation either: Belarus and Armenia are financially dependent on Russia, so is Kyrgyzstan, but Kazakhstan's number one trade partner is the European Union. Russia is an important partner for Kazakhstan, but the latter also continuously tries to keep its northern neighbor at arm's length and rejects any attempts to institutionalize shared identities.

In order to shed light on this puzzle, we open up the diffusion process, taking into account structural factors as well as the interests of political actors. As stated above, the cultural predisposition of moral conservatism is dominant in the entire post-Soviet space. However, what matters for diffusion is the structural politicization of moral conservatism, which developed only in Russia and Kyrgyzstan under the condition of hybrid or weak regimes, but not in other autocratic states. Post-Soviet autocracies avoid politicization of any kind, sticking to technocratic styles of government. Second, what matters at the level of actors is the will to employ and thus enforce politicization, something even the Russian leadership tried to avoid for a long time in the case of the "anti-propaganda" law. In Russia and Kyrgyzstan, perceived internal weakness and the urgent need for power consolidation or voter mobilization led state leaders to employ the already politicized predisposition of moral conservatism. Only at first glance is this understanding at odds with the case of Kazakhstan—a consolidated autocracy with no politicization of moral conservatism. Although the law was adopted by the parliament, the legislative process in Kazakhstan was at no time subject to significant politicization with regard to the self-legitimization of "local importers" or for regime stability. Rather, the Kazakhstani case can be described as

*Table 13.1* Politicization of moral conservatism and need of power consolidation

|  | <i>Russia</i> | <i>Kyrgyzstan</i> | <i>Kazakhstan</i> |
|--|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Politicization of moral conservatism   | Yes           | Yes               | No                |
| Need of power consolidation/voter mobilization at the time of adoption/promotion | Yes           | Yes               | No                |

technocratic emulation, not emulation for reasons of legitimation. The law was rejected after international protest, but, as we argue, primarily to avoid domestic politicization.

We develop our argument in the following way: the theoretical section connects the concepts of legitimation and politicization, which are key to understanding the diffusion process. In the sections that follow we will elaborate on today's moral conservatism, its roots in Russia and Central Asia, and the diverging patterns of its politicization. The next two sections take a closer look at Russia, and we argue that the adoption of the "anti-propaganda" law was tightly connected to an acute power crisis. We also ask whether Russia promotes its conservative ideology abroad. This will be followed by an analysis of the "receiving" or "importing" side, where we pay attention to the domestic importers and the role of the power centers.

### **Diffusion of moral conservatism**

One of the main findings of diffusion theory is the fact that changes in one country do not necessarily, or not only, depend on domestic factors, but on factors outside the country. Diffusion is typically connected to structural factors, for example it can be observed among countries, which share the same region, have a common history, or face similar problems. But structure is not a sufficient explanation; actors do play a role in the process too. For example, domestic actors in "receiving countries" learn from other countries, how to solve problems, or they copy norms or laws from great powers, which they perceive to be prestigious. The role and interests to adopt or reject imported laws or ideas can differ between different actors in a country, for instance between the domestic importers and the political power center (e.g. Weyland 2017).

Authoritarian cooperation and the diffusion of ideas, institutions, and laws, which has been studied by scholars on post-Soviet affairs, took place to a large extent as instrumental learning in the sphere of "hard politics," such as authoritarian institutions (election fraud), repression, or the control of social media. The law under study in this chapter diverges from these well-studied patterns of diffusion. Its character is first and foremost of a symbolic nature and part of discursive legitimation. Legitimation might be seen as a "soft" but no less important mechanism of power consolidation. For some time, scholars assumed that autocracies do not need to legitimate themselves vis-à-vis their societies. In fact, discursive self-legitimation is omnipresent in autocratic regimes historically and in the present (Schatz 2009; Gerschewski 2013). It becomes all the more important when economic performance is weak and the level of dispute is high. Legitimation also plays a role in hybrid regimes, for example in electoral democracies such as Kyrgyzstan. Political actors engage in self-legitimation to mobilize voters or supporters during and after elections.

There are different methods of discursive legitimation. One is to bring up "reasonable" arguments (for example "autocratic stability is better than chaos"). Politicians can also engage in wide-ranging discursive and symbolic action.

These can be public speeches and festivities, but also symbolic laws. Such actions aim to resonate with cultural predispositions that are prevalent in their societies. Predispositions, such as moral conservatism, which we will describe in more detail below, are rather implicit cultural beliefs and practices, which are "taken for granted so that they seem inevitable parts of life."<sup>2</sup> There are several mechanisms politicians use in attempting to resonate with such beliefs. They can stress commonalities and thus try to create positive feelings. They can also aim to evoke negative feelings: widespread methods are self-victimization and putting forward narratives of a common enemy (Benford and Snow 2000, 622).

The manner in which politicians engage in discursive legitimation depends upon several factors. One of these factors is politicization. Cultural predispositions can exhibit passive beliefs that are resources for political actors to resonate with. For instance, President Nazarbayev sometimes talks about being called "Papa" by subordinates (Isaacs 2010). This can be seen as an attempt to generate traditional legitimacy by trying to speak to the shared beliefs of Kazakhs, who attach high importance to families and stick to the traditional role of the father as the head of the family. However, most probably such attempts are barely noticed consciously by society; it resembles more the touching of a chord (Benford and Snow 2000).

By contrast, specific parts of cultural predispositions can be also more or less politicized. Social issues "are politicized when they become the subject of deliberation, decision making and human agency where previously they were not" (Hay 2007, 81). Usually, issues are purposely politicized by societal or political actors. But not all decision-making involves politicization by default; it can be beneficial for decision-makers to legislate in a technocratic style and keep issues below the radar of the society. Politicization can evolve if a certain space of open deliberation exists in a society, and if deliberation leads to public controversy. Such a process can unfold into contingent political action, for instance street protests and other symbolic forms of discourse (*ibid.*).

But what is the impact of politicization for autocratic and hybrid regimes? With regards to discursive legitimation, the meaning of politicization is ambivalent for state leaders. It can be a resource and an instrument for legitimacy claims. If specific political issues or part of cultural predispositions are already politicized, regimes can try to make use of politicization. Politicization leads, *inter alia*, to the increased salience of a topic and an increased polarization between conflicting camps: "diametrically opposed coalitions of societal groups at extreme position" (Wilde et al. 2015, 6). Fueling this conflict can be a strategy to generate support of one of the sides, and marginalize the other. Politicization can also be a threat to regime stability, because open deliberation in critical areas can threaten the discursive hegemony of the regime. It can also lead to societal conflicts, entailing the risk of developing into anti-regime conflict.

Under conditions of authoritarian control, open deliberation is much more difficult or even impossible. Contingent political action, for example street protests or political violence, are harshly controlled or restrained. Thus, politicization is more likely in hybrid regimes, where the state has reduced its grip on the

society or even lost control. Post-Soviet leaders, especially those in autocratic states, avoid politicization of any kind. They fear that public controversy can lead to social conflicts and societal “radicalization,” difficult to control.

Historically, according to Massad, the politicization of homosexuality in non-European societies has often been linked to the import of the Western concept of a “gay identity.” Speaking for the Arab world, Massad argues that same-sex love was tolerated and conflict-free in many non-Western societies, but regarded as an exclusively private topic, not meant to be deliberated in the public space. When local or foreign actors imported the political idea of a “gay identity,” they moved the issue to the political and thus public sphere, often against the will of local homosexuals (Massad 2002). There is evidence that this holds true for the post-Soviet space. In Russia, the politicization of specific issues took place in the social arena during the hybrid phase of the late 1980s and the 1990s. Now an autocracy, Russia under Putin is an exception amongst the post-Soviet non-democratic states, as the regime “plays” with societal politicization, primarily in the form of nationalism but also of moral conservatism (Kon 1997, 238).

### **Moral conservatism in the post-Soviet space**

Moral conservatism received its specific imprint during the era of the Soviet Union and is deeply embedded in the majority of its successor societies. When we speak of moral conservatism as a cultural predisposition which is dominant in the whole post-Soviet space, we do not intend to blur the differences between the societies in the (post-)Soviet republics. The Soviet era did not extinguish these differences; nonetheless, societies in the post-Soviet republics can be treated “as forming a broad class of societies more similar to one another, in certain organizational respects, than to other societies” (Verdery 1994, 229).

In the pre-Soviet phase, the existence of, perception of, and political approach toward homosexuality differed between Russia and Central Asia. With regard to Russia, scholars see a long history of same-sex love, which was viewed as normal and was partly even tolerated by the Orthodox Church. Only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did homosexuality become incrementally delegitimized, partly because of cultural influence from Europe, when Russian “genteel society began to feel uneasy about homosexuality” (Kon 1997, 222). Historically, Kazakh and Kyrgyz people on the Central Asian Steppes were nomads. Little is known about homosexuality among these nomads. However, the available data suggest that the situation differed very much from Russia. Anthropologists believe that it only existed among the Sarts, the sedentary people in the South of Central Asia, but not among the nomads.<sup>3</sup>

Family policy was an important issue in the Soviet Union and subject to explicit ideologies. Verdery qualifies the specific connection between the family and the state as the “zadruga-state”: “it was composed of individual nuclear families, but these were bound into a larger familial organization of patriarchal authority with the Father-Party at its head” (Verdery 1994, 230). The central role of the nuclear family was anchored in Article 53 of the 1977 constitution, in

which the family was put under the protection of the state. Socialism changed male and female public and household roles and favored the nuclear or small family. For instance, a special school course for pupils was not only intended to make children become aware of their special male and female roles, but also to instill the sense of the family as the basic cell of socialist society (Attwood 1990, 186).

The promotion of the Soviet family model included the promotion of the norm of heterosexuality and the exclusion of other forms of relationships and sexualities. After an initial liberalization in revolutionary Russia, the Soviets began strictly regulating sexuality, not only promoting the classic family model but also fighting homosexuality (Bernstein 2007, 8, 59). From 1934 until the mid-1980s, homosexuality was criminalized, prosecuted, and became an "unmentionable" topic, while continuing to exist (Kon 1997, 223–5). Compared with Western Europe, there are commonalities and differences. The role of women in society significantly differed in socialist and emerging European capitalist societies. But the emergence of the exclusivity of the nuclear family as the only model during modernization in Western Europe had much in common with the Soviet Union. The difference is that in Western societies, powerful movements effected profound social change, which led to a strong pluralization of life models and, among other developments, the emergence of LGBT activism. Similar movements emerged in Russia after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, which led to a politicization of the issues. Yet these movements and associations never developed a strong impact, comparable with European or North American societies.

Moral conservatism in Central Asia relates back to the Soviet Union. Pre-Soviet Central Asian societies were conservative in the sense that they were non-pluralistic. The new restrictive policies which came from the power center in Moscow were also applied in the Soviet Republics and enforced by the Soviets.<sup>4</sup> In today's Central Asia, the Soviet cultural heritage is still pervasive and, on a cultural level, the particular "Sovietness" transcends the Orthodox Christian–Muslim division between Russia and Central Asia. This continuity cannot only be found on the political stage, but "in literally every sphere of life [...] [it means] specific routines and identities that were instilled in the population in the Soviet period, regardless of their religious or national affiliation" (Abashin 2014).

Both in Russia and Central Asia, moral conservatism is reflected in strong sentiments against homosexuals. There is a high level of societal disapproval of forms of sexuality other than heterosexuality. This is partly fueled by the media, which display homophobic attitudes. This is the case for Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani media, but most importantly for Russian media, which is consumed all over the former Soviet Union. Moral conservatism is also reflected in public opinion polls on attitudes toward sexual minorities. In 2013 and 2015, 68 and 65 percent of Russian respondents respectively expressed their negative attitude (in different ways) toward homosexuals (Levada Center 2013, 2015). In Kazakhstan, according to a survey, more than 60 percent of people were in support of the re-criminalization of homosexuality and more than 97 percent think that homosexuals should be isolated from the rest of the society (Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan

2009, 33; Umbetaliyeva et al. 2016, 107). However, although homosexuality is disapproved of all over the former Soviet Union, there are differences between countries with respect to whether the topic is perceived as a political or a private issue.

### **Politicization of moral conservatism**

Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan have in common that the breakdown of the Soviet Union led to a—narrow—societal pluralization and a liberalization of sexual norms. This change resulted, to different degrees, in politicization and social conflicts in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, but not in Kazakhstan.

#### ***Russia***

As early as the mid-1980s, there were reports of initial signs of liberalization. Homosexuality became more visible and public discourse began to take place among experts. It became a “fashionable topic for newspapers, art, and salon conversation” (Kon 1997, 236). There was also a growing local community of pro-gay activists, which politicized the topic and employed “foreign” protest repertoires. In 1991, one of the early gay organizations “decided to operate through street meetings and protest demonstrations, employing trenchant political slogans aimed more at the Western press than at Soviet citizens” (ibid., 229). As a response, social groups started to openly oppose homosexuality and engage in a “battle for ‘traditional’ values” (Sozayev 2012, 7–14). These rhetorical controversies were accompanied by more and more visible street conflicts in Russia. Since 2006, activists had tried to organize “gay pride marches” in several regions of Russia. Although official permission for such events was regularly denied, unauthorized demonstrations took place, which often led to clashes on the street, caused by assaults from conservative and right-wing extremists as well as ensuing police violence.

Politicization took place under conditions of Russia’s hybrid regime of the 1990s. Later, the political system transformed not only into a competitive but eventually an electoral authoritarianism. The regime also started to make use of moral conservatism and to deploy its politicized nature.<sup>5</sup> On a discursive level, as early as 2006, Putin introduced the term “traditional values” for the first time (Erofeeva 2013, 1931; Wilkinson 2014, 367). In his pre-election speech in 2012, in the midst of the crisis, he took up the widespread perception of a general decline after the breakdown of the Soviet Union and linked it to an ostensible moral decline due to the collapse of the Soviet values system (Muravyeva 2014, 635). At the policymaking level, regional politicians made use of—and thus also promoted—moral conservatism with anti-homosexual law projects. Long before 2013, when the law was adopted at the national level, several federal regions came up with laws, hinting at a symbolic or de facto discrimination against homosexuality. We can speak of the politicization of moral conservatism and an ongoing construction of explicit ideologies surrounding it.



### **Central Asia**

In the early 1990s, Central Asia underwent a narrow liberalization of sexual norms, noticeable, among other signs, in the decriminalization of homosexuality. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan differ from each other to the extent that Kyrgyzstan experienced a politicization of the issue. However, it was less polarized than in Russia and the regime neither made use of politicization, nor did it construct explicit conservative ideologies.

Political activism in Kyrgyzstan started in the 2000s and was tightly connected to foreign activists. The beginning of a public debate was initiated by a pro-homosexual article, published in 2000 in a university's newspaper. The author, a student from Ukraine, later started to organize LGBT activism in Bishkek (Kirey 2007, 15–17). The activists founded the LGBT organization Labrys, funded by donors from the Netherlands, organized public roundtables on gay rights and homophobia in Kyrgyzstan (COC Netherlands et al. 2012; Kirey 2007). In 2004 and afterwards, international NGOs published several human rights reports (Van der Veur 2004; Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan 2007; Human Rights Watch 2008).

In contrast to Russia, politicization took place exclusively in the social arena. Until 2010, the regime in Kyrgyzstan was authoritarian, but rather weak. There were no attempts and probably no capability to interfere in these social conflicts between gay activists and opponents of liberalization. Until the diffusion of the law, authoritarian leaders or post-2010 politicians did not deploy moral conservatism to generate legitimacy claims.

Kazakhstan received less attention from international activists. In 1995, a Kazakhstani citizen founded the local NGO "Kontrast," which, however, never received international support comparable with that received by the activists in Kyrgyzstan. It started some initiatives to debate the situation of homosexuals in Kazakhstan, but never did so within the country, but rather at the international level (Queer Resources Directory 1998). Some reports were published, but no indigenous discourse evolved (Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan 2009). Despite strong resentments against homosexuality, the topic continued to be considered as a private, not public, issue. On a broader level, the Kazakhstani regime strongly avoided politicization by societal actors and the outburst of social conflicts, most of all ethnic conflicts.<sup>6</sup>

### **Russia's urgent need for power consolidation**

As already mentioned, there were some state activities on moral conservatism and discrimination of homosexuals in Russia. Local parliaments had already adopted laws against the propaganda of homosexuality; Putin talked about "traditional values."

However, the respective policies of the central state were on a liberal track, decriminalizing homosexuality. The regime in Moscow hesitated in adopting the anti-propaganda law for a very long time. Deputy Aleksander Chuev had

initiated laws against propaganda on behalf of homosexuality three times. Each time, up through 2009, the initiative was rejected by the Duma (Human Rights First 2013).

The Russian law was finally pushed through during and after the election and anti-regime protests between 2011 and 2012. The protests, sometimes called the “December movement,” which started in Russia in December 2011 as a response to election fraud and quickly developed to anti-regime protests, were not the first of the civil protests in Russia, but surpassed its predecessors in strength and the perceived threat to the regime (Volkov 2012). The protests’ repertoire of protest techniques as well as the goals had changed and were broadened when compared for example with protests in the 1990s. An example of both aspects is the protest group Pussy Riot. The group employed creative and new forms of protest and strong visual symbols. It also combined their protest against Putin with advocacy for minority rights, including the rights for LGBT people (Kontury 2011; Robertson 2013, 12). Western actors supported the protest groups in Russia (Brown 2012) and Western media were euphoric about the protest and expressed high hopes for its potential outcomes.

Thus, the law can be read as part of the broader social and political conflict, and promised to solve urgent power issues and ensure the survival of the regime in Russia. The language of cultural conservatism deeply resonates with anti-homosexual sentiments among the majority of the Russian society (Levada Center 2013, 2015). In a time of social protest against Putin, the law could be read as a counteraction to mobilize the conservative majority of society in the support of the regime, including the Russian Orthodox Church as well as nationalist and other right-wing groups (Wilkinson 2014, 367; Engle 2013, 8). At the same time, the law was a means to delegitimize protest groups, which advocated gay rights and are perceived as Western rather than as local groups. Ultimately, the topic also helped the regime to mobilize against the West.

### **Russia as a sender of moral conservatism?**

One of the two main stances of the literature on authoritarian diffusion and cooperation focused on the role of authoritarian great powers, Russia being one of them (Bank 2017). There is some evidence for this at the regime level. Russia does not generally prefer regime convergence in its neighboring countries. It can also give preference to pro-Russian state leaders, stability, or economic considerations over regime (Tolstrup 2014; Bader et al. 2010; Way 2015; Obydenkova and Libman 2014). Russia has supported authoritarian regimes to prevent the diffusion of revolutions and external democratization (Jackson 2010; Cameron and Orenstein 2012; Melnykovska et al. 2012; Tolstrup 2014) or supported authoritarian power consolidation after revolutions (Bader et al. 2010). Russia and China are also objects of learning, for instance in the field of election laws and the prevention of revolutionary diffusion (Bader 2014; Jackson 2010; Koesel and Bunce 2013). However, neither of the great powers have the mission of promoting their regime model (Tansey 2016),

nor is the Russian regime perceived as an attractive model, to be adopted or emulated by the smaller states.

All these patterns of diffusion and cooperation, identified in the literature, concern the level of regimes. The questions of whether Russia promotes its "cultural turn" has not yet been addressed in a comprehensive manner. Various Russian intellectuals have constructed concepts of Eurasianism, which differ from each other. Some of these conceptualizations comprise the idea of "traditional values," some also claim to be a valid ideology not only for Russia but for all of its neighboring countries (see Bluhm's chapter in this volume). The Russian Orthodox Church also promotes concepts of traditional values, valid not only for Christians but also for Muslims in the *Russkiy Mir* (the Russian sphere of influence).

However, attempts to create ideologically charged institutions were rejected by Russia's neighbors. For instance, Russia tried to integrate post-Soviet republics within the framework of a Eurasian Union with a strong political character and political symbols. Kazakhstan and Belarus, who joined this union, not only deprived the union of Russia's idea of its political character, making an economic union out of it; they also prevented the creation of strong symbols for the union (Libman 2018).

There is no evidence that Russia promotes its "cultural turn" in regions such as Central Asia. Although there might be pull effects by domestic actors (Lewis 2015), it is more likely that the broader cultural camp of moral conservatism is sometimes more implicitly, sometimes more explicitly, transmitted in Russian media, which are still very popular in the post-Soviet space.

## **Diffusion in Kyrgyzstan**

The import process of the Russian law took place against the background of two dynamics: first, the issue of homosexuality was already politicized by a polarization of the public debate and open conflicts between proponents and opponents. Second, the post-2010 political system in Kyrgyzstan changed political dynamics in the country. It can be best described as an electoral democracy: effective elections take place and public space for social movements exist, but other typical features of democracies are weak or absent (Schedler 2002, 37). The new system enabled political actors independent of the government to engage in discursive politicization for their own purposes.

In the first place, the anti-homosexual discourse was pushed forward by societal associations. As a response to a Human Rights Watch Report, the social movement Kalys organized a gathering in front of the US Embassy in Bishkek to protest against the US funding of non-governmental organizations, which Kalys blamed for "promoting homosexuality" (Sheralieva 2014). Later it organized another protest in front of the Parliament, this time demanding a prohibition of "gay-propaganda among minors" (Denisova 2014).

This was eventually taken up by political actors during the campaign for the parliamentary elections, which took place on 4 October 2015. One of the

initiators and most visible promoters of the law was Kurmanbek Diykanbayev, member of the parliamentary fraction of the party Republic. By the time of the law's registration in parliament, the group already consisted of 28 deputies from all parties represented in the parliament (Kenesh 2015). Among them was also a member of the Presidential Social Democratic Party (*Sotsial-demokraticeskaya partiya Kyrgyzstana*, SDPK). However, there were no high-ranking politicians in this group.

The Kyrgyz lawmakers continued politicization of the issue by pushing forward polarization. They went far beyond just copying the law, and increased the repressive character in the draft law. While Russia and Kazakhstan introduced the clause into the administrative law, Kyrgyzstan criminalized the promotion of homosexuality in the Criminal Code, stipulating punishments up to imprisonment for 6 to 12 months (Tynaeva 2014). Second, the Kyrgyz draft exceeded the Russian version, as it prohibited promotion completely and not just that directed toward minors.

The lawmaking process was accompanied by a discourse which clearly attempted to resonate with anti-homosexual sentiments and which also further politicized the issue. One policymaker stated that

homosexuals try to achieve for themselves the same rights as in Europe, for example, adoption of children or allowing same-sex marriages. But in Kyrgyzstan it is impossible. It is contrary to our traditions. I am against this and I believe that any appearance of LGBT should be banned.

(Ibid.)

Complaints about violence and demands for nondiscrimination on the part of LGBT were denounced as “gay propaganda” as well (ibid.).

To conclude, the import of the Russian law (or the idea of the law) took place against the background of an already politicized environment, the ground was “prepared” by social associations, and finally political actors took up the idea, pursuing specific interests during the election campaign. Some of the importing actors were not only seeking to mobilize domestic support and voters. More speculatively, speaking the language of moral conservatism might have also been a strategy to receive financial and political support from Russia. Since 2010, Russia has become the most important partner of Kyrgyzstan in terms of trade and financial assistance (Lewis 2015), which was reinforced when Kyrgyzstan joined the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union. Specific Kyrgyz businessmen benefited from this significantly and developed an interest in close relations with Russia. The leader of the social movement Kalys, for instance, later ran an unsuccessful election campaign for the party *Zamandash*, which is organized around the Association of Compatriots Abroad (Radio Azattyk 2015). The latter mainly consist of labor migrants in Russia and stand for close relationships with Russia, specifically for the development of business and cultural-societal relations with Russia.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The president's weakness***

Despite the growing politicization by social and political actors of the topic, Kyrgyzstan's President Atambaev steered clear of the issue for a long time. The shift came three months ahead of the election, when Atambaev took up the public indignation about the movie "I'm Gay and Muslim," which activists presented in Kyrgyzstan: "We have human rights defenders, who have come down to promote the film 'I'm gay and Muslim'. [...] These people do not read the Koran, but carry out [foreign] commands. We need to develop the country without external pressure" (MSN 2015).

Thus, it is remarkable that Atambaev, at least indirectly, supported the law. He became the first president in the post-Soviet space who spoke openly on the issue and supported the adoption of the law inspired by Russia. The law was not put on ice, further deepening the conflict with international and Western actors, who protested against the initiative (Human Rights Watch 2015).

By default, the formal competencies and the overall power of the president in Kyrgyzstan are much lower than in authoritarian states such as Kazakhstan. The president's power and his ability to implement policies depend on support from parliament. From the perspective of Atambaev, his power and parliamentary support were too weak to implement important reforms. His main source of support was the SDPK. In December 2013 he publicly called the SDPK party the "presidential one" and expressed his wish for this party to have a stronger presence. During the pre-election campaign in 2015, he directly and indirectly supported the SDPK (Ayyp 2015). As the pre-election campaign did not yield the envisaged success, Atambaev finally changed his strategy and took up anti-Western and anti-homosexual rhetoric. In the summer of 2015, this was a promising strategy, because the social conflict over moral values and external, most of all "Western," interference was salient. By speaking the language of moral conservatism and by supporting the law, Atambaev was aiming to mobilize voters, but also to receive support from parliamentary deputies.

Kyrgyzstan's external weakness is tightly connected with its internal weakness: besides Atambaev's problems with implementing policies, Kyrgyzstan is economically weak, with weak state capacity. From the very beginning, the country was highly dependent on diverse external actors, including Russia and Western countries. This changed in 2010, when Russia started to increase its grip on the country. Parallel to this increasing dependency on Russia, there was a significant deterioration of relations with the United States. Conflict between the US and Kyrgyzstan took place against the background of general attitudes that were pro-Russian and critical of the US amongst the majority of society (Lewis 2015).

Kyrgyzstan ultimately did not copy the specific Russian law but emulated its "idea." In 2016, the parliament adopted a constitutional amendment which banned homosexual marriages. The amendments were supported by a popular referendum. According to the Central Election Commission, 80 percent of voters

backed the amendment. The fact that same-sex marriages have never been legal before in Kyrgyzstan, underlines the symbolic intention of the lawmakers (Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty 2016).

### **Diffusion in Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan differs from the Russian and Kyrgyzstani case significantly, because the issues of moral conservatism and homosexuality were in no way politicized. As argued above, the regime avoids politicization of any kind. It fears public deliberation, public controversies, and social conflicts. Social actors who attempt to politicize specific issues, such as nationalism, face harsh repression by the state. Against this background, it is puzzling why and how the Russian law made it to the Kazakhstani parliament.

A closer look at the process reveals two aspects. First, the domestic importers, who were not part of the power center, did pursue individual interests. The importers were members of the so-called Presidential Party “Nur Otan,” mostly affiliated with the Parliamentary Committee on Social-cultural Development. Even before the diffusion of the anti-propaganda clause, the deputies were monitoring Russian lawmaking. The Russian Child Protection Law from 2010 had already been discussed by the Kazakh Parliamentary Committee. After Russian lawmakers introduced the anti-propaganda clause into the Child Protection Law (and some other relevant laws), their Kazakhstani counterparts followed at the end of 2013 (zakon.kz 2015). Monitoring the Russian lawmaking process is not unusual in Kazakhstan, but laws are not imported by default. One factor which facilitated diffusion was the specific socialization of the members of the committee. The leading proponent of the draft law, Aldan Smayyl, has long been known as a particularly Soviet-conservative and old-school lawmaker.<sup>8</sup>

Second, the import did not aim at a polarization of the issue of homosexuality. This holds true for the law itself. Compared with Russia and Kyrgyzstan, the Kazakhstani lawmakers literally hid the clause on “gay propaganda.” They did not create a new paragraph but introduced this clause into an existing paragraph on “information types prohibited for children.” The legislative process was accompanied by statements by deputies, which were also published on a government-affiliated online platform. For example Deputy Kairbek Suleimenov stated that “[t]he traditions of our people—Kazakh, Russian and the representatives of all other nations who live on the territory of Kazakhstan—Kazakhstani ideology and Kazakhstani psychology are alien to and against such tendencies that are present in the West” (Tengrinews 2013). But these harsh statements never became part of a broader regime-driven campaign to politicize and polarize the issue. The same holds true for the group Bolashak, who started to support the legislative initiative in September 2014 (Khegay 2014). Thus, the import of the law remained under the radar of the country’s important media, all of them under government control.

### ***Avoiding politicization in a consolidated autocracy***

In Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev and the central government never publicly supported the law. The law was adopted by the parliament, but finally dropped by the constitutional court. Two reasons can be put forward. First, the government did not want to risk domestic politicization of the issue. Moreover, by contrast to Russia and Kyrgyzstan, there was no urgent need to make use of it. Kazakhstan was at this time (and still is) a consolidated autocracy with no potentially dangerous protest movements. It was neither necessary to mobilize supporters with risky methods, nor to delegitimize opponents.

The Second Chamber of the Parliament had already adopted the law, but only three months later it was dropped: on 18 May 2015 the Constitutional Council decided that it was unconstitutional.<sup>9</sup> However, this was not a question of constitutionality or unconstitutionality. Formally, the Constitutional Council verifies the constitutionality of laws upon request. After both parliamentary chambers had adopted the law and sent it to the president, they subsequently asked the Constitutional Council for verification (Konstitutsionnyy Sovet 2015), which rarely happens in Kazakhstan. According to an expert, "the Constitutional Council is a very dependent structure, and it is very likely that the draft law was sent to it from above."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, according to the same expert, the Council did not provide substantive reasons for its decision.

Hence, the law was rejected because of interests and not because of constitutional concerns. The lawmaking process purposefully did not lead to politicization; there were no social conflicts or growing polarization. But the risk of domestic politicization became real, when international organizations and foreign states protested against the adoption of the law. The international actors used Kazakhstan's bid for the Olympic Games to exert pressure on Kazakhstan not to adopt the law (International Partnership for Human Rights 2015). Of course, there was also an interest in avoiding disadvantages, but in other cases, Kazakhstan did not bow to international pressure.

Second, there was no serious threat to the regime caused by a protest movement. Admittedly, the Kazakh regime was greatly concerned about a possible spillover of revolutionary movements to the country during the Color Revolutions, and thus implemented countermeasures (Jackson 2010, 106). At any rate, the likelihood of a powerful protest movement was rather small in the country. There were no organizations experienced with and capable of organizing protests, and the overall "protest culture" was rather low in Kazakhstan. Given the fact that revolutionary movements must try several times until they succeed (Bunce and Wolchik 2006) and that there had been no such attempts in the country before, the risk of a successful revolution was very low.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have asked whether Russia's "cultural turn" is ready for diffusion to adjacent post-Soviet states, studying the diffusion of the Russian law that

prohibits “homosexual propaganda among minors.” Diffusion theory suggests that geographical proximity, shared history and language, and previous cases of learning or emulation make it likely that recipients continue to study the experience of others to learn from or to emulate. We posit that shared cultural predispositions might be another factor, generating diffusion in the field of symbolic laws. This assumption was nurtured by the fact that several countries announced similar laws. But then, legislative process only started in two countries, and only in Kyrgyzstan was it followed by lasting (constitutional) amendments. We posit two factors which make sense of this process: first, the politicization of moral conservatism and especially the politicization of sexual norms, visible through controversial deliberation, polarization, and contingent action. Second, it was ultimately the urgent need of state leaders to consolidate their power or to mobilize voters which made them adopt or support laws politicizing homosexuality. Both factors were only given in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan is an odd case. On the one hand, it represents those countries where neither factor is present. Under the conditions of a full autocracy, politicization of specific issues by societal actors was impossible; President Nazarbayev has preferred technocratic styles of government and used non-politicizing methods of self-legitimation. On the other hand, the clause on homosexual propaganda was debated in the Kazak Parliament and, before being rejected by the Constitutional Council, was even adopted by the Second Chamber. However, the whole process was not subject to politicization; it remained under the radar of the public, and resembled a kind of “technocratic emulation.”

What broader conclusion can be drawn from this analysis? The “anti-propaganda” law, adopted in Russia and pending in Kyrgyzstan, should be seen as part of broader social and political conflicts and as strategies for consolidating power. From a normative and human rights perspective these laws are problematic, because they contribute to the politicization and polarization of sexual norms in an antagonistic way. Although they are not necessarily followed by discriminatory measures by the state against homosexuals, they heat up the debate and can generate hate and discriminatory action.

The fact that most state leaders in post-Soviet republics up to now have preferred de-politicized societies and hesitate to politicize cultural issues, such as sexual norms, has prevented the spread of the “anti-propaganda” law. However, if state leaders might feel threatened or undergo a phase of perceived or actual weakness, they might be tempted to change their strategy and make use of this instrument, tested in Russia and Kyrgyzstan before.

## Notes

- 1 After registration at the Russian Duma in March 2012, in at least six other countries, similar laws were announced: Ukraine (December 2012), Moldova (July 2013), Armenia (August 2013), Kazakhstan (December 2013), Belarus (January 2014), Kyrgyzstan (April 2014).
- 2 We follow Swidler’s definition of culture, which “consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies as well as



informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life" (Swidler 1986, 273). An example for an explicit political ideology ("highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system") is the role of Islam in the political system of Iran or the communist ideology in the Soviet Union or post-revolutionary China.

- 3 According to anthropologists, homosexuality existed among the sedentary people in Central Asia (e.g. in the Uzbek emirate of Bukhara). Social institutions, such as Batsha in Uzbekistan, were explained by specific family structures with a rather isolated social role for women (Baldauf 1988). Social structures and especially the role of women in nomadic societies were very different from those of sedentary people. Anthropologists believe that such institutions, such as the Uzbek Batsha, were either very rare or non-existent among the nomads on the Kazakh and Kyrgyz Steppes (Kushelevsky 1891).
- 4 Baldauf shows how Soviet policies terminated homosexuality in the Uzbek Soviet Republic (Baldauf 1988).
- 5 For such attempts on the international level, see Wilkinson (2014); see also Laruelle (2013).
- 6 On Nazarbayev's modes of self-legitimation see Omelicheva (2016).
- 7 Telephone interview with Aliya Moldaliyeva, activist and former chief editor of *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 1 September 2015.
- 8 Information based on a telephone interview with Olga Didenko, a Kazakhstani non-governmental legal expert who participated in the lawmaking process, 1 September 2015.
- 9 Formally, the object of the verification process was the Law on Child Protection, which contained the "anti-gay propaganda" clause.
- 10 Telephone interview with a Kazakhstani non-governmental legal expert who participated in the lawmaking process, 1 September 2015.

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# 14 The emergence and propagation of new conservatism in post-communist countries

## Systematization and outlook

*Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga*

### Introduction

Back in the 2000s—and even more so in the 1990s—it hardly seemed possible that the time would come when liberalism would seriously be challenged. Most European countries still had political landscapes that encompassed many more political currents, from social to Christian democracy, but the principles of liberal democracy—building institutions to safeguard political, cultural, and religious pluralism—seemed to apply across the continent, or at least, those holding power paid lip service to them. Liberal democracy most often went hand in hand with a market economy: despite many differences between European countries in their levels of welfare expenditure and the consultation of trade unions and business associations in important decisions, market economies converged in regarding private actors as the key actors of the economy, and in restricting the state’s involvement in the economy to fiscal and monetary policy, abstaining from industrial policy. However, this convergence is no longer taken for granted and the Right is now virulently contesting liberal democracy and the market economy. The concepts that scholars and the public media use for this new phenomenon are “populism” and “nationalism.” In this volume, we have argued that both concepts are insufficient for describing what the conflict is about not only in post-communist Europe, but here in particular. Targeting the middle of society, “the resurrection of conservatism” has developed into a battlefield for the recombination of ideas and concepts against neoliberalism *and* the progressive left. East Central Europe (ECE) and Russia are crucial in this respect, for several reasons.

First, the reforms in post-communist countries were based on the neoliberal script and loaded with high expectations and promises about the subsequent welfare gains that would improve life for the vast majority. The famous dilemma of simultaneity (Elster 1990; Offe 1991) was solved by an elite project that pushed through these reforms without much democratic participation, and without in the end delivering on its central promise of catching up with the West in terms of living standards.

Second, in the transformation process, “the West” not only turned out to be a moving target that could hardly be caught up with as quickly as hoped and

promised (if at all), but it had also—within a relatively brief time span—lost its appeal to the newcomers to the world of capitalism and liberal democracy. Disillusionment on the part of Russia and the former pioneers of Western integration (Poland and Hungary) has far-reaching consequences for the West itself and for Europe in particular.

Third, in all three countries, the term “conservative” was not taken by other political forces and represented a more or less unused ideational space that could be occupied by the new conservatives and linked to their own country’s past for the sake of societal and political renewal—a renewal supposed to better serve common people and the nation. All three countries also have the intellectual and organizational resources for creating new knowledge networks and discourses in opposition to the global/European neoliberal mainstream and its domestic representatives.

In this final chapter, we want to consolidate the findings in the different chapters into one broader picture of conservatism in these three countries. We first discuss the similarities and differences between the national variants of new illiberal conservatism in the three countries. The key argument emerging from this juxtaposition of similarities and differences is that conservatism contests liberalism not just in terms of a critique of economic liberalism, but also constructs policies across a wide range of domains, from industrial to family policy, corresponding to a core idea of development through tradition. The following subsection shows how approaching conservatism as a multi-layered phenomenon—involving intellectuals, state actors, NGOs, and Church actors—allows a more precise tracing of the spread of conservatism and cooperation among conservatives more generally: cooperation, while highly unlikely at the top level of conservative ideology production across all three countries because of the enmity between Poland and Russia, becomes possible at what we refer to as the lower level of ideology production. We end the chapter by discussing one particular difference between Russia on the one hand and Hungary and Poland on the other: namely, the relationship between political power and conservatives.

### **Conservative counter-movement: Similarities and differences**

One common element on the agendas of post-communist conservatives is the dissatisfaction with the results of transition, as well as with the legal and political order that emerged with the fall of communism. Our contributors emphasize how conservatives portray “post-communism” in a specific way, namely as a deeply problematic, illegitimate political (and economic) system. Liberalism has weak roots and was mainly experienced as market liberalism. It had fewer buffers—“social embeddedness”—than in many parts of “old” continental Europe. Furthermore, conservatives credit liberalism with having created an ownership structure that they consider illegitimate, either because of the dominance of foreign investors and capital (Poland and Hungary), or because it allowed a few people from the Soviet nomenclature to get very rich in Russia.

While earlier comparative work has insisted upon presenting conservatism in ECE as mainly concerned with historical memory, the contributions in this volume show how contemporary conservatism in post-communist countries has developed into a comprehensive agenda addressing various aspects of politics, the economy, and society, united by a concern to ground change and development in national traditions. A key interest of conservative thinkers is not just defeating their opponents in debates about the communist and pre-communist past, but also producing and transmitting knowledge that can challenge the perceived intellectual domination of liberals and the Left (“left” and “liberal” are almost indistinguishable categories for conservatives in all three countries).

In all three countries, the conservative intellectual current remains diverse, and at least in the case of Poland and Hungary there is still a conservative undercurrent that prioritizes, in a Thatcherite manner, a minimal state and free markets. In Russia, too, there are “liberal-conservatives” who are deeply worried about the return of state dirigisme and the extension of state ownership and want to cut back the state. What “liberal” precisely means is highly disputed. The majority of new active conservatives, however, is predominantly *statist*. It favors a strong state that is at least capable of correcting market failures and of defining and pursuing its own interests in all areas of policy. The concept of “national interest” is repeated emphatically in order to stress priorities. Concerns about the loss of state sovereignty to the European Union are especially acute in the case of Polish and Hungarian conservatives. But they are no less serious in Russia, where they are linked more directly to vulnerability vis-à-vis global financial markets (exposed to heavy crises in 1997–98 and 2007–09) and the global division of labor that had a negative impact on Soviet-era industry. Against this background, conservatives blame the liberal reform program for being a “great plan” to debilitate Russia’s role as a world power through the agency of external transnational forces and their internal “compradors.” That is why Russian ideologists and elites more generally (not just the conservatives) have embraced a left-wing anti-colonial discourse that they combine with the concept of Russia as a center of its own in a multipolar world. Conceptual ideologists elegantly bridge the latent conflict between the ambition to form a Russian-centered “macro-region” and the concept of classic national sovereignty as a foundation of a “new world order” by arguing that smaller countries will join the macro-region according to their correctly understood self-interest, as well as because of cultural proximity. It is important to note that Polish conservatives actually share with their Russian counterparts this highly emotional, anti-colonial, self-victimizing discourse, reflecting the dissatisfaction with their country’s position in Europe and the world.

With world power status out of reach, Polish and Hungarian conservatives limit their ambitions to overcoming their countries’ semi-peripheral position *within* Europe. But in all three countries, the urgent need to upgrade one’s position in the international division of labor is a major driver and source of legitimacy for the conservative counter-movement against the ideas, concepts, and actors that are made responsible for this position. To what extent this change is called a revolutionary one varies between the countries. While in Russia many



conservatives avoid such phrasing, Hungarian and Polish intellectuals and politicians do not mind speaking of a “conservative revolution,” or a “new republic.” As in Russia, in Hungary and Poland this also includes the conviction that “the West” no longer serves as a developmental model, and that repositioning involves an opening toward the East. Polish conservatives see their chance in a new European order open to Eastern Europe, but without Russia.

Polish, Hungarian, and Russian conservatives agree on the need for an authoritarian “hard government” that is supposedly democratic because it claims to serve the interest of the domestic working majority (Table 14.1). They reject procedural democracy because of its lack of “substance” (Dąbrowska in this volume), and regard institutionalized checks and balances as unnecessary restrictions on the efforts of new, morally upright ruling elites to overcome the stage of “post-communism.” Their explicit statist version of economic neo-nationalism can be traced back to historic legacies in the region; but legacies are defined in the present, not in the past. The return to an authoritarian statism should be understood—so a major claim of this book—as a search for a new, non-neoliberal economic development model: a model that better serves the overarching goal of developmental catch-up, according to the new conservatives.

The renewal of the state and the elite is legitimated as necessary for a decisive paradigm shift in political economy toward a heterodox economic model, combining neo-Keynesianism with scholarship calling for an increased role of the state not only in maintaining demand, but also in fostering and encouraging innovation in particular among domestic, small, and medium-sized companies. Furthermore, conservatives in all three countries strive for a developmental state that generates more—or in the Russian case, less oil-and-gas-dependent—domestic income by increasing the strategic coordination of the central executive and by strengthening the redistributive capacities of the state. Supposedly, only a sovereign national state is capable of pursuing this path. Such a path implies “intelligent” protectionism for domestic business from outside competition, but also goes beyond it. It includes a selective renationalization of formerly privatized assets and concentrated investments by the state in infrastructure and innovation; in Poland and Hungary, it involves increasing the tax burden on sectors dominated by multinationals, and efforts to re-establish control over national banks at the expense of European Union banking oversight institutions (Dąbrowska, Buzogány and Varga in this volume; Sebök 2018; Méró and Piroška 2016). This understanding of a developmental state is prone to “thinking big”—projects realized by concerted action, directed from the center (Jasiecki in this volume). Although the urgency and way this is spelled out varies across the countries and in different conservative groups, this also represents a common feature. It subordinates the economy to politics and weakens the autonomy of socio-economic actors; as such, actors have to serve the public (national) good. At the same time, the weak “middle class”—regarded as an important pillar for domestic business that can be made responsible for national interests and goals—is a major concern in all three countries, indicating the limits of the post-communist development path and the failure to catch up.

The redistributive dimension is of great importance in all three countries. The new conservatives regard themselves as “social conservatives”; this is a key element in their counter-movement and not just a populist attempt to get votes from the “losers” of globalization. However, their social conservatism is paternalistic and selective: paternalistic, because the empowerment of non-state labor representatives to improve their position vis-à-vis employers, in order to fight for employees’ interests, is not part of the conservative agenda (on Poland, see Jasiecki in this volume); selective, because it prioritizes family policy and tries to link other elements of social policy to it. Active family policy is perceived as a crucial tool for restoring and strengthening the national community, and is even regarded as an issue of national security. At the same time, family policy is also seen as the basis for socio-economic development, for which liberals and the Left did not provide any solutions, in particular with regard to solving the demographic crisis and, in Poland, the massive “youth export” to the low-paid job market in Western Europe.

The new conservatives combine their social concerns with a pronounced moral conservatism. In all three countries, “tradition” plays a twofold role: restoration and reassertion of “national tradition” is necessary for (radically) changing the path of development, *and* for overcoming the alleged social and moral crisis. The traditional or “natural” family, ideas about restricting women’s reproduction rights, anti-genderism, and state subsidies for families with many children are all part of their agenda—as is the rejection of “externally imposed,” “transnational” human rights. In all three countries, churches have been close to nationalist and new conservative knowledge networks for a long time, and (ultra-)conservative moral norm entrepreneurs have campaigned for restricting reproductive rights and promoting “traditional” family values. And it is especially the case in Poland that an electorate particularly supportive of following “traditions” has rallied around PiS, the main political party emphasizing conservatism (see Roose and Karolewski in this volume). The Polish Catholic Church shares with the conservative ideologists its non-acceptance of the elite compromise of 1989/90 that led the alleged “totalitarian merger of neoliberalism and communism” under “post-communism.” With that, Church actors renounce their earlier “contract” with transition elites to support democratization in exchange for the further tightening of Europe’s most restrictive abortion law. However, the harsh restrictions on reproduction rights in Poland caused massive public protests in 2016. In Hungary the tightening of abortion legislation is even rejected by the majority of Fidesz supporters, but Church actors and their political allies have also had important successes, including the new constitution of 2010 passed by Fidesz, which states that “the life of the fetus shall be protected from the moment of conception,” or the 2012 successful campaign against the “abortion pill” mifepristone (Balogh 2017). In Russia, the Orthodox Church (ROC) has become a key actor in an ultraconservative coalition since President Putin acknowledged the need to fight the demographic crisis in 2006, and especially since 2010. Confronted with a strong societal and elite opposition to banning abortion, the coalition has still managed to restrict the very liberal

Russian law and to place enormous moral pressure on women to serve the nation with their “God-given gift.”

Despite striking similarities, the precise meaning of “tradition” varies between the different conservative camps and between countries. Its concept depends primarily upon how conservatives define the “nation.” Do conservatives follow a classic way of understanding the nation and situate it within “Europe” (or “European civilization”), as in the case of conservatives in Poland and Hungary? Or do they define their nation as a civilization of its own, as in the case of Russian cultural sovereignty? In Poland and Hungary, “nation” is homogeneously understood as an ethnic “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) of Poles and Hungarians. In Russia, civilization implies a multi-ethnic concept of “nation” that is bound together by a leading (Russian-Orthodox) culture and a sacralization of the state as the power that constructs the nation. This sacralization stands in stark contrast to the actual criticism of the neo-patrimonial state administration.

Second, tradition also varies with regard to the ideational canon to which conservatives refer. In all three countries, the reference to some Western authors is strong (e.g. Carl Schmitt but also Edmund Burke and US American conservatives of the twentieth century). However, Polish and Hungarian conservatives see their ideational roots mainly in a joint Western European intellectual horizon, while Russian ideologists are working on a re-invention of their own conservative ideational classic period, which they merge with Western conservative thought to varying extents. There is one Russian philosopher mentioned in both the Russian and Polish conservative discourse—Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948)—a decided anti-communist who saw in a vivid Christianity the solution to restricting all types of totalitarianism. Yet in both conservative discourses, he only plays a minor role. Despite Putin’s recommendation to read Berdyaev’s work, many Russian conservatives consider him too liberal, while among Polish new conservatives, the inclination toward European philosophy is much stronger.

Third, the struggle with the tension between modernity and tradition varies across the three countries. Interestingly, with their reference to the European conservative philosophical tradition of the mid-twentieth century, Hungarian conservative intellectuals resemble radical Russian anti-modernists such as Aleksandr Dugin, as they reject even the first period of modernity and the European Enlightenment, with its rationalism and individualism, as the cause of later decay. However, for most conservatives the rollback of modernity does not sit well with an interest in fostering economic development, and in the case of Russia, with a strong interest in securing “scientific technical progress,” a term openly used. Not accidentally, in Russia we observe intellectual efforts to reconcile the concept of rationality and notions of progress from the “first” organized and industrial era of modernity with a reconstructed conservatism. This includes a rejection of “environmentalism” as a Western, postmodern ideology that is imposed on the developing world to block their catching up (see Bluhm in this volume).

Fourth, unlike in Russia, conservatives in Poland and Hungary are radically anti-communist. Communism for them represents a model imposed from the

outside that froze the countries' position as Europe's semi-periphery. Similarly, neoliberalism and liberal democracy are also perceived as having been forced upon their countries by foreign powers and local representatives of those powers. Furthermore, conservatives attack the compromise between the old and new elites at the beginning of the transition toward a market economy that allowed a peaceful transfer of power. At the heart of the criticism lies the accusation that thanks to that compromise, former communists could retain their influence well into the post-communist decades. Russian conservatives have to be more careful with their anti-communist attitude if they want to reach the societal mainstream. Their position toward communism is therefore more difficult and ambivalent. On the one hand, they value the Soviet Union for its successful catch-up modernization under Stalin and for regaining and extending the Russian sphere of influence and its world power status, while post-communism is equated with the loss of both. This does not exclude criticism of the methods behind such catching-up, Stalin's Terror, and the systemic flaws of the planning system. But they tend to downplay these facts. On the other hand, Bolshevism as "liberal communism" is blamed for its totalitarian progressivism, which devalued and destroyed tradition and its fundamental institutions. Hence, the restoration of tradition mean neither a return to a "Soviet Union 2.0," nor to a pre-revolutionary idyll. Tradition works as a kind of benchmark for a future-oriented renewal of society.

Russia's entry into the European and world history of thought was, since the nineteenth century, combined with a mission, as Paul Robinson reminds us in this volume. The new version of this mission aims at changing the global order, but also includes Europe. Russian conservatives offer to assist post-modern Europe, or "Post"-Europe, in recalling its Christian roots and traditional values, which in the Russian civilizational discourse is associated with the Catholic confession as a related "Other" (e.g. as the foundation of another civilization not belonging to the Russian "traditional religions"). In this ambition, they seem to converge with Hungarian and Polish conservatives in particular, who call for a similar return and claim to be leading forces in this respect as well. To that extent, they are also prone to missionary thinking—a base that is open to both collaboration and competition.

Table 14.1 summarizes the similarities and difficulties identified, and groups them under four headings: heterodox economic policy, concept of tradition, international orientation, and critique of "liberal democracy." Although briefly touched upon in this subsection, the remainder of this chapter discusses the latter two headings, as the differences identified here deserve a separate discussion.

### **"Authoritarian diffusion" and Trojan horses? The international orientation of new conservatives**

Our volume also addresses the literature on authoritarian diffusion that has researched the extent to which authoritarian regimes learn from one another, and the extent to which autocratic practices spread across countries, most notably from Russia and China throughout the post-communist region and beyond

(Ambrosio 2010; Melnykovska et al. 2012; Hall and Ambrosio 2017; Soest 2015). One claim arising in the context of authoritarian diffusion is that concerning Moscow's European "Trojan horses" (Orenstein and Kelemen 2017; Müller 2014), the idea that Russian authoritarianism might be spreading not only throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but also to new member states of the European Union; Hungary in particular is allegedly playing "a leading role in a process of political backsliding in eastern Europe" (Müller 2014). Our volume helps to add nuance this picture.

First, while "authoritarian learning" from Russia and cooperation with Russia take place across the region, such cooperation has clear limits, and "receiving" countries are very selective in what policies or laws they copy from Russia, even if they come closest to Russia in terms of authoritarianism (Schiek and Isabaev in this volume). Second, in the case of Hungary, where there are clearly identifiable cases of cooperation between Orbán's government and Russia, there is little evidence that such cooperation has an ideational basis (Buzogány 2017). Quite to the contrary: rather than supporting any ideological defense of cooperation with Russia, Hungarian conceptual ideologists work on strengthening cooperation with Poland and Western European conservatives (in this volume: Buzogány and Varga; Dąbrowska, Buzogány, and Varga); and despite his rants about Russia's and other countries' "illiberal" path also being the one to follow for Hungary, Viktor Orbán did more to cultivate his relationship with the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (a party he regularly visits) and the late former chancellor Helmut Kohl than with Putin and Edinaya Rossiya.<sup>1</sup>

The basis for Hungarian–Polish cooperation is perceived identification with "the West," a "true Europe" around Western Christianity that clearly excludes Russia. It is indeed between these two countries—Poland and Hungary—that we find the strongest diffusion or collaboration on the basis of shared ideas and ideology (in this volume: Buzogány and Varga; Dąbrowska, Buzogány, and Varga). This cooperation became a starting point to strengthen contacts with European conservatives, not Russians. For Polish conservatives, Russia is an "other" that is rarely broached as a topic, and most often perceived as a menace; after the Smolensk airplane crash, some of the most influential conservative intellectuals—among them Legutko, Krasnodębski, Marek Cichocki, and Dariusz Gawin—increasingly voiced their discontent vis-à-vis Russia's conduct, and in particular over the Russian presidency. Hungarian conservatives, most active in shaping a pan-European conservative alliance around the Amsterdam-based Center for European Renewal (CER), do not mention Russia (see Buzogány and Varga in this volume). Issuing their biannual publication titled *The European Conservative* in May 2017, the CER published a document entitled *The Paris Declaration: A Europe we can believe in*, which provides a good glimpse of the basis on which European conservatives cooperate across borders. Written by 10 European conservative intellectuals, including Legutko and CER chairman Láncki, the document sees "Russian adventurism" and "Muslim immigration" as threats to Europe, second to what they see as a far greater threat, "the false Europe" of multiculturalism, reneging on its Christianity ("The universal

Table 14.1 Similarities and differences of new conservative thinking in the three countries summarized

|  | <i>Russia</i>  | <i>Poland</i>  | <i>Hungary</i> |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| <i>Heterodox economic policy</i>                                     |  |  |                |
| Restrictions on capital freedom, aversion versus speculative capital | Capital control and restriction of capital outflow, restriction of currency trade, control over central bank | Increased taxation of sectors dominated by foreign or multinational companies; increasing state ownership in national banking sectors and control over central banks |                |
| Selective protection of domestic markets                             | Yes  | No (tricky to pursue under EU legislation)   |                |
| Selective renationalization of key sectors                           | Yes (also by force: Khodorkovsky case)   | Yes (by means of buying shares)  |                |
| State as development agent of the economy                            |  | Present in all three cases   |                |
| Increase of wages as element of domestic market development          |  | Present in all three cases   |                |
| Positive attitude towards social spending                            |  | Present in all three cases   |                |
| <i>Tradition</i>   |  |  |                |
| Concept of national tradition  | Divided but mostly multi-ethnic civilization with Russian lead culture                                       | National-homogeneous but part of a “threatened” Western Christianity   |                |
| Concept of “organic” change  | Hesitant to use the term revolution  | Can take the form of a “conservative revolution” in the name of tradition  |                |
| Mission  | Global and European  | European   |                |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <i>International orientation</i>  |   |  |
| Anti-colonial/question the recent global/European order from a periphery/semi-periphery position                                    | Present in all three cases                                    |  |
| Solution to perceived decline of the West   | Multipolar world  |  |
| <i>Critique of "liberal democracy"</i>  |   |  |
| "Hard government" — recentralization of power and strategic coordination from the top   | Alliance of Eastern EU states and Ukraine (Intermarium)       | Pragmatic cooperation with Russia; principled alliance with Poland |
| Dismantle checks-and-balances in the name of the national majority  | Present in all three cases                                    |  |
| Direct state subsidies for child-rich families based on "traditional values," anti-genderism, and critique human rights as ideology | Present in all three cases although less pronounced in Poland |  |
| Equation of liberal left with neoliberalism as form of new totalitarianism  | Present in Russia and Poland                                  | Tax breaks favored over subsidies in Hungary                       |
| Combined with strict anti-communism   | Present in all three cases                                    | Yes  |
| Liberals in their own country as "compradors" of foreign interests  | Present in all three cases                                    |  |

spiritual empire of the Church brought cultural unity to Europe”). The document is equally clear in seeking to distance itself from the Far Right, for instance by means of numerous mentions of civicness or “civic loyalty” as a crucial “European tradition,” the importance of protecting “those who speak reasonably” of “mortal threats,” praising the “vital democracies” of post-World-War-Two Western Europe and their “civic vitality” (Center for European Renewal 2017).

Our volume thus explains why Russian new conservatives are more successful in courting the European Far Right rather than fellow conservatives, despite the many similar ideas that conservatives in Russia, Poland, and Hungary share. Further complicating the prospects of conservative cooperation is the fact that since 2012–13, conservatism in Russia has become a foreign policy tool to exert “soft power” abroad, a counterweight to the liberal democratic soft power of the West, which had reached Russia during perestroika.

This is where the multi-layered character of conservative ideology production becomes clear, an aspect that we would like to highlight as a central conclusion of the present volume. Multiple layers of ideology production participate in enacting conservatism as “soft power” in Russia. An important presence in such efforts is the knowledge network of those we have referred to as conceptual ideologists: the conceptual ideologist Aleksandr Dugin is particularly well known by Western media for his long-lasting connections to the West European Far Right and the Orthodox Church in Southeast Europe. The ultraconservative philanthropist and ideological networker Konstantin Malofeev plays at different levels by supporting analytical think tanks, mass media, and a conservative civil society. Another example is the former diplomat Natalia Narochitskaya and her EU-hostile, Paris-based European Institute of Democracy and Cooperation. She is not only well connected in France, but also to the “national conservative” AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*, “Alternative for Germany”) and the journal *Compact. Magazine for Sovereignty*, which is close to the party.

A further stratum is that of “the moral entrepreneurs” around the ROC, and the ROC itself, which rejects the idea of a political religion as an abstract set of ideas, but works as an ambassador on behalf of Russian civilization and culture, as well as an ultraconservative moral norm entrepreneur within and outside Russia (see Bluhm and Brand; Köllner in this volume). The ROC maintains close relations with the US-based World Congress of Families (WCF) and other conservative pro-family organizations in the US. As argued by Bluhm and Brand in this volume, this collaboration takes place at a lower level of ideology production, defying the increasing anti-Americanism in Russia. The WCF further represents an important, if not the main, venue facilitating contacts with Central- and Eastern-European partners, including with Polish and Hungarian pro-life activists (see Wiercholska in this volume; Graff and Korolczuk 2017).

This cooperation is not an instance of the “diffusion” of the ideas of Russian conservatives to other countries; it is more a reciprocal recognition of like-mindedness which also allows some mutual inspiration and confirmation. At times, this cooperation has even encouraged the Russian side to export its campaigns, such as the highly successful mobilization against juvenile justice



(however, a demonstration held in 2013 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, which only attracted a small crowd, confirmed the need for an interested internal “recipient” in order to make authoritarian “diffusion” effective). Somewhat more successful has been the cooperation with the American Christian Right, but in the opposite direction. Larry Jacobs, a high-ranking WCF official, for example, is proud to have advised Russian Orthodox leaders in drafting a new restrictive abortion law and in advising on the law criminalizing “homosexual propaganda” in Russia (Levintova 2014).<sup>2</sup>

In response to a Russian regime that they perceive as increasingly menacing, Polish conservatives envisage a resurrection of Józef Piłsudski’s idea of the “Intermarium” (*Międzymorze*), a military and political alliance of the countries situated between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Adriatic, including Ukraine. Long propagated by think tanks such as *Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej* (“Center for Political Thinking,” see Dąbrowska in this volume), the idea recently came closer to realization when Poland and Croatia announced the creation of the “Three Seas Initiative” in 2016, comprising 11 former communist countries and Austria and aiming to foster cooperation in the fields of energy, transport, and communications infrastructure.

### **A differing relationship between ideologists and state power**

A central difference between Russia on the one hand and Poland and Hungary on the other is the relationship of conservative ideologists with the inner circle of the power elite. In Russia’s competitive authoritarianism, this relationship is more complicated than in the other two cases. As Busygina und Filippov argue in this volume, after 2012 conservatism became a political code in Russia, helping to identify and punish potential critics and political opponents of Putin’s rule. Conservatism did not, in this way, become an official “state” ideology, but works as a central frame for all actors wishing to show their loyalty to the existing regime. The new conservatives played an important part in bringing about this development, for which they were co-opted into elite positions in return. This demonstrative loyalty, however, is combined with substantial criticism “from within,” even though it is presented as aiming to improve the system. Russia’s conservative conceptual ideologists are not just “ideologues for hire” (Shekhovtsov 2018, 80) but active participants in an internal elite struggle. Their criticism is mainly addressed to other elite coalitions (the “system-liberals” and liberal-conservatives), but also at Putin himself and his reluctance to fully adopt their recipes and concepts while instead preferring to rely on liberals such as Aleksey Kudrin, especially when it comes to macroeconomic policy. From their perspective, Putin’s administration is doing too little to promote development and achieve the status of not just a military, but also an economic, superpower. The right development path for Russia is thus the topic of an ongoing heated debate between different ideological and elite camps, and there are few signs that Putin in this fourth term as president of the Russian Federation will clearly decide for one side.

This relationship looks different in the case of Poland and Hungary. Conservative intellectuals—of the type that we referred to as “conceptual ideologists”—have stated their full support for the agendas of the ruling PiS and Fidesz. In both countries the political parties in power today welcomed conservative politicians into their ranks early on. Hungarian right-wing intellectuals, concerned with what they perceived as the continuous influence of former communist officials in public life long after the demise of communism, joined Fidesz around the mid-1990s and from then on have shaped its increasingly confrontational course with liberalism. They have also shaped the party’s economic policy and fully endorsed or defended Fidesz’ programmatic “National Cooperation” legislation of 2010 (see Buzogány and Varga in this volume). Századvég, the think tank close to Fidesz, has since the 2000s fostered a discourse around the importance of “national interests” and “hard government” that has gained in strength; this position is explicitly referred to as “conservative.” In Poland, conservatives joined PiS as a platform in 2003, secured important ministerial and media positions in the first PiS government of 2005–07 and in the advisory team of president Lech Kaczyński (see Dąbrowska, this volume). Prior to the elections in 2015, they participated in drawing up the electoral program of PiS. Under the new government, they have accepted ambassadorial positions or joined the European parliamentary faction of PiS (Ryszard Legutko, Zdzisław Krasnodębski), with one of them—Krasnodębski—currently serving as vice-president of the European Parliament. Meanwhile, the public presence of conservative intellectuals has grown from a few university positions in Cracow and Warsaw to numerous think tanks, foundations, and publications. Influential examples include the Cracow-based Center for Political Thought, bringing together the articles and books of the country’s most important conservative intellectuals, and *Ordo Iuris*, the Warsaw-based organization of lawyers initiated to launch the 2016 campaign for the total ban on abortion (see Wierzcholska in this volume).

Over the decades that have passed since the fall of communism, conservatism has developed in all three countries into a complex network, spanning from academia to the political parties in power, with a strong presence in media, and with an interest in controlling the production of knowledge to guide the work of politicians. To return to the point of conservatism’s multi-layered character, it is important to note that as in Russia, in Poland and Hungary the production of conservatism as an ideology has several sources, and spans two generations. Next to academia, the Church—and a sentiment that the Church and religious values also need to be defended after communism—represent an important point around which conservative positions coalesce. The political sphere attracted members from these milieus, or converged with think tanks and other organizations populating the academic and Church milieus. These individuals, and at times their organizations, have formulated important concepts preparing the way for the systemic critique of “post-communism” unleashed by PiS and Fidesz (see Dąbrowska in this volume), and are formulating the programmatic documents of the two parties, or publicly defending their programs. In Russia too, and roughly at the same time as in Poland and Hungary, new intellectual circles and milieus

have emerged, perceiving themselves as conservative in a new way. They reject Western “liberal-conservatism,” especially its “neoliberal” and “post-modern” shift of the last three decades. Whether Vladimir Putin and the “party of power” (United Russia) have an ideology—and even more importantly, follow one—is heavily disputed. However, Putin’s openly conservative “turn” after 2011 grew out of a longer development that also started in the early 2000s. Russian new conservatives, like their Polish and Hungarian counterparts, today oversee an impressive conservative infrastructure of think tanks, foundations, clubs and publishing houses, partly supported and co-opted by the ruling elite, but in fierce competition with other elite fractions over the way forward for their country.

The three post-communist countries we have focused on in this book can easily be dismissed as too peculiar, too much shaped by the particularities of transition to be relevant to understanding the increasingly virulent contestation of liberalism. Quite often their illiberalism and statism is explained in terms of peculiarities rooted entirely in the post-communist transition and commonalities of the communist past, with little reference to broader trends, and their containment is commonly assumed to be a simple matter, if only the EU would do something about them. However, it is striking that conservatives in these countries perceive themselves as an *avant-garde*, setting the trend for a European or even worldwide contestation of liberalism. After the failure of the left-wing anti-globalization movements to establish new global rules for financial markets and capital transfers, the most virulent contestation of liberalism now comes from the Right: the contestation is no longer just about the economy and the social questions overlooked by market reforms; it also targets political liberalism. The new activating conservatism proposes not just “economic nationalism”—a subordination of the economy to self-defined “national interests”—but ties economic policy to social and family policy, seen as investment policy and not just as measures mitigating the effects of markets; and it also involves a thorough reform of the state, and a reorientation of international alliances. It does not just question economic liberalism, but the struggle to reorient state action across a wide range of domains from the perspective of national traditions.

While criticizing Russia’s “offshore oligarchs,” or Hungary and Poland’s strong “dependence” on international capital, most new conservatives in the three countries (and not only there) downplay any fears of authoritarianism—and even regard the dismantling of institutions curbing the powers of rulers (checks and balances) as an important prerequisite for development. In their preference for leadership and for material over procedural justice, they are pronouncedly anti-institutionalist. While careful to promote alternatives to economic liberalism and construct policies across numerous domains, new conservatives discard checks and balances and procedural democracy, notions they vilify without offering replacements that could control the rulers that they now so openly celebrate. The limits of the state in subordinating the economy and society, counterbalances, and control over rulers are left to the moral integrity of a new elite and to a patriotically awakening, but not independent, civil society.

## Notes

- 1 Orbán boasted with his close relationship to Kohl, even presenting himself as a “pupil” of Kohl in 2016, in ways he never spoke of Putin; and despite the allegations that Putin needs Hungary and other “Trojan horses” such as Cyprus or Greece in order to prevent the prolongation of sanctions following the annexation of Crimea, Orbán declared that he did not even think of using his country’s veto to stop the sanctions (Kaminski 2015).
- 2 The WCF together with five other US organizations also supported the law, collecting the signatures of 100 groups from around the world on a statement endorsing the law (Bluhm and Brand in this volume).

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