

Evils of the Istanbul Convention. Discourse analysis of Latvian press publications (2016)

Los efectos negativos del Convenio de Estambul. Análisis del discurso de publicaciones de prensa letonas (2016)

MARITA ZITMANE

*University of Latvia. Faculty of Social Sciences
orcid ID: 0000-0002-1672-9520*

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Abstract. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence caused heated discussion both in society and media in Latvia. The controversy was caused because Convention is based on the understanding that violence against women is a form of gender-based violence that is committed against women because they are women. The discussion showed that there are various interpretations and misinterpretations of gender as a concept. As well as hostility towards gender equality interpreted as a propaganda against so called traditional family values.

The mass media play an important role in shaping of public thought. The mass media today are the main source of information – a source which not only offers reportage about important events, but also determines the public agenda. By offering commentary on various subjects, the media construct public attitudes towards those subjects. The aim of this article is to examine how the Istanbul Convention was represented in Latvian daily newspapers, what discourses were dominating in media; what information regarding the Convention, gender and gender equality were communicated.

Keywords: gender, discourse, fear, Istanbul Convention, right-wing.

Resumen. El Convenio del Consejo de Europa sobre prevención y lucha contra la violencia contra las mujeres y la violencia doméstica ha generado un acalorado debate tanto en la sociedad como en los medios de comunicación de Letonia. La controversia surgió porque el Convenio parte de la premisa de que la violencia que se ejerce contra la mujer es una forma de violencia de género que se ejerce contra las mujeres por el hecho de ser mujeres. El debate puso de manifiesto que existen diversas interpretaciones, erróneas algunas de ellas, del concepto de género, así como hostilidad hacia la igualdad de género interpretada como propaganda contra los llamados valores familiares tradicionales.

Los medios de comunicación desempeñan un cometido importante en la formación del pensamiento público. Hoy son la fuente principal de información; una fuente que no solo informa de acontecimientos importantes, sino que también configura la agenda pública. Al comentar diversos temas, los medios construyen actitudes públicas hacia esos temas. El objetivo de este artículo es examinar cómo se representó el Convenio de Estambul en los periódicos letones, cuáles fueron los discursos dominantes en los medios de comunicación, y qué información se comunicó con respecto al Convenio, el género y la igualdad de género.

Palabras clave: género, discurso, miedo, Convenio de Estambul, ultraderecha.

*marinasolagarcia@gmail.com

Introduction

Although the notion of «gender» has entered public discourse only recently, there is a growing number of social actors (organisations, grassroots groups, networks, and online communities, as well as state institutions and political parties) that, in Western countries too, oppose gender equality and minority rights. A recent report by the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF) shows that anti-sexual and reproductive rights organisations are on the rise in Europe – currently 490 of them are active in 32 European countries, and the majority is faith-based (Catholic, traditionalist Protestant, and Orthodox). The report points to the growing professionalization of these groups and shows that while many of them operate on the national level, some engage in transnational networking and EU-level advocacy (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, retrieved from www.osce.org/odihr/78432). Some of these organisations and groups were established only recently, while others have been active since the 1990s. Their agendas also differ – some are nationalistic, openly homophobic and racist, others mainly stress the need to protect families and parents' rights to guide their children's upbringing.

Anti-gender voices have been vocal in addressing their disdain towards various gender equality initiatives. Those voices take different forms and are expressed in different ways through different channels.

Anti-gender rhetoric and right wing activities

Right-wing movements have arisen in various settings, whether in parliaments or as clandestine groups (Köttig & Blum, 2017:1). Several EU member states recently have seen substantial increase in anti-emancipatory activism. Right-wing extremism has gained momentum, particularly in the countries of the former so-called Eastern Bloc and in the countries north of the Mediterranean, but also in the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Federal Republic of Germany (Köttig & Blum, 2017:4). It encompasses a seemingly odd medley of activities pursued by a multitude of different local initiatives all over Central and Eastern Europe, all of which strongly promote tradition over equality. The current conservative trend seems to be a mixture of global influences and local mobilisations. In many cases these groups appear to be backed and inspired both by influential US-American «pro-life» organisations as well as the Kremlin's «Gayrope» propaganda, which aims to discredit the European Union as a place of moral decline (Korolzcuk, 2015:7).

The Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism “Re:Baltica” conducted an investigation on Latvian organisations, which stand for ‘traditional and family values’ and anti-gender worldview. They position themselves as parent’s organisations. Three parent movement organisations have been formed in Latvia since 2013. They are “Kin”, “Let’s Protect Our Children” and “Our Children.” Together, the three organisations lobby for changes in laws to prohibit the “propaganda” of homosexuality, oppose adoption by foreign families, and fight against excessive power of social services (Sprinģe, 2016).

Although right-wing contested policies address different areas – such as same-sex marriage, the reform of juvenile detention centres or laws protecting women and children from domestic violence – they are frequently related to transnational treaties on gender equality, children's rights, or the non-discrimination of sexual minorities. Importantly, they are often initiated and /or sponsored by international institutions. Thus the main scapegoats for the purported <demoralisation> of society are supranational agencies such as the UN and EU, and / or foreign-sponsored NGOs promoting them at the national level. Moreover, despite the different areas they focus on, most of them concern a similar issue, namely, they legitimise state intervention in the private /domestic sphere and the protection of the rights of individual family members rather than having a focus on the family as a whole (Korolzcuk, 2015: 47- 48).

Omnipresent is the discourse of foreign forces (like EU, UN, WHO) imposing something on our countries in order to weaken them as nation and destroy traditions (Kováts, 2015:176). With a few nuances, Latvian “family values” groups hold similar ideology. In press interviews and lectures the group members say that dark forces stand behind the fight for gay rights. The aim of the dark forces is to control population on planet Earth, which already suffers from overpopulation. To do that, non-gender people are being raised and early sexualisation is promoted among children. But no one is able to name those dark forces. Often “traditional value” defenders mention international organizations and donors like the United Nations, the World Health Organization, billionaire George Soros and very often simply, “corporations” and “the state.” In this sense Latvian “family values” groups are in line with the right-wing rhetoric.

In the case of the European anti-gender discourse, the concept of “gender ideology” proved to be a tool to create a ‘them/ us’ divide in the sense of antagonism and through it delegitimize different groups in society and politics: in this understanding “gender ideology” and those who are perceived as its lobbyists are not acknowledged as legitimate opponents and are blamed for not sharing any common ground and the same political association. Anti-gender movements in this sense are similar to far-right movements in that they acknowledge the political but negate pluralisms. Therefore they pose a challenge to liberal democracy and to the actors committed to it (Kováts, 2015:178).

In Latvia, as a result of these organisations’ influence, the parliament adopted changes to the law that banned use of school teaching materials that promote an immoral way of life. Amendments to the Education law in 2015, sort of Latvian version of Russia’s “anti-gay law”, united the pro-Kremlin parties, Latvian nationalists and conservatives alike around the idea that “use of immoral education materials” shall be banned in Latvian schools.

Organisation “Family” were quite vocal against adopting Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in Latvia. The Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence are similarly being opposed in different countries. Anti-gender movements claiming that the Istanbul Convention propagates ‘gender ideology’ as it defines gender as a socially constructed category.

The attack on gender equality structures in general has the same ideological background in many Eastern European countries – the so-called ‘war on gender’, interpretation of gender equality as an ideology that confuses biological sex with socially constructed gender and that promotes a gender equality equivalent with free choice regarding abortion and gay marriage – and thus an ‘ideology of death’. ‘Hypersexualised’ culture of liberal capitalism is linked with gender ideology, and sexual education means popularising paedophilia (Juhász, 2015:30-31). Gender as symbolic glue integrates anti-EU, anti-liberal, anti-communist and homophobic attitudes (Felix, 2015).

Media and gender

Mass media have also contributed to the spread of ‘anti-gender’ ideologies in society. The media one can observe a surprisingly unequal representation of gender issues, which often favouritises populist traditionalism rather than gender equality and LGBTI rights. For example, the idea that gender is an anti-family, pro-gay, and anti-life ideology spreads much faster in Hungarian public discourse than had notions of gender equality (Juhász 2015, 28).

The role mass media plays in the shaping of public thought must be stressed. They can ensure that specific behavioural norms or gender stereotypes are upheld in terms of public thinking. The media also facilitate emergence and strengthening of biases, including gender bias.

Some mass communications theories express the view that knowledge about the world and its society are created almost exclusively by the mass media. In their everyday lives, people usually accept the idea that the world is as it is, and differences in views are the results of “subjective” thinking, experiences and memories. The research approach, however, emphasises that we must think about knowledge which concerns the world as a system that is created and disseminated by the mass media (Luhmann, 2000).

One of the functions of the mass media is to serve as an information channel which presents symbolic codes. The coded information is decoded or interpreted by an active audience in line with its experience, with the existing social context and with the audience’s knowledge about the language that is used by media outlets to transmit their messages. This, in turn, determines whether a recipient understands and how a recipient interprets the message, as well as the roles and relationships to the communicator of the message that are included in the discourse as symbolic mechanisms of language. This understanding of the function of the media is related to the discursive language environment and to the approach of constructivism – the world and our social concepts about reality are based on the words with which the reality is described.

The mass media today are the main source of information – a source which not only offers reportage about important events, but also determines the public agenda. By offering commentary on various subjects, the media construct public attitudes toward those subjects. One can claim, therefore, that the mass media are of great importance in the development of gender discourse.

The dialogue with society that is shaped by the mass media is of great importance in a transitional society (which Latvia still is in some shape and form), when a new phenomenon such as gender and gender roles must be defined and assigned a role in social thinking. Analysis of the discourse that is constructed by the mass media is one way of doing this.

Methodology

Discriminatory utterances tend to be 'coded' in official rhetoric. Ruth Wodak uses discourse-historical approach (DHA) to understand and deconstruct right-wing populist rhetoric. The DHA focuses on texts – be they audio, spoken, visual and/or written – as they relate to structured knowledge (discourses), are realized in specific genres, and must be viewed in terms of their situatedness (Wodak, 2015:51). DHA allows relating the macro- and meso-level of contextualization to the micro-level analyses of texts. Such analyses consist primarily of two levels: the so-called entry level analysis focusing on the thematic dimension of texts, and the in-depth analysis which scrutinizes coherence and cohesion of texts in detail. Wodak states that 'general aim of the entry-level thematic analysis is to map out the contents of analysed texts and then to assign them to particular discourses' (Wodak, 2015:50). The key analytical categories of thematic analyses are discourse topics, which summarize the text, and specify its most important information. The in-depth analysis is informed by research questions and 'consist of the analysis of the genre, the macro-structure of the respective text, discursive strategies and of argumentation schemes, as well as of other means of linguistic realization (Wodak, 2015:51). In this article I am using entry level analysis mapping out discourse topics. My goal is to apprehend the existing discourse in daily national press in Latvia. My research questions are: What is media created discourse on Istanbul convention? Do newspapers take a certain position on the Istanbul Convention? What arguments are used in forming this position?

Research material is national daily newspapers in Latvia: *Diena*, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, *Latvijas Avīze*, *Вести сегодня* (daily newspaper in Russian for Russian speaking minority in Latvia). I have chosen all the existing national daily press in Latvia for the analysis. It must be noted that the media market in Latvia is quite small. Latvia is nation of 1 million 950 thousand inhabitants (Central Statistical Bureau), which determines the limitations of the media industry. Each of the analysed newspapers positions itself to a specific target audience. Newspaper *Diena* is Western type newspaper which concentrates on an urban professional reader, focusing on news and feature materials. *Lauku Avīze* is a newspaper for non-urban reader, focusing on matters important for people living outside the big cities of Latvia. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* is newspaper with specific political stand that promotes conservative and nationalistic values. *Вести сегодня* focuses on social issues and rights of Russian speaking minority in Latvia.

Thus each of the analysed newspapers has its own specific way of talking to its reader. In this research it is important to determine if and how positions of newspapers differ

on the issue of the Istanbul convention; how those different newspapers create discourse on gender equality issues and on the Istanbul convention in particular.

All genres of articles were analysed if given that they mentioned the Istanbul convention: news, analytical materials, round table discussions of experts, interviews with opinion leaders and editorials or remarks. The period of the research is the first half of 2016 (January-July) during which discussion on the Istanbul Convention begins and then fades with the minister of Welfare signing the convention. At the end of 2017 the Convention is not ratified by parliament yet.

The analysis involved going over each issue of the selected newspapers (altogether 620 issues in aforementioned period of time) and identifying materials reporting, analysing, discussing or commenting on the Istanbul convention. Altogether 31 materials on the Istanbul convention were identified in the newspapers.

Results

The newspapers in question have different dynamics of the thematic debate on the Istanbul convention. The biggest numbers of materials of various genres were published in the newspaper *Neatkarīgā* – 21 articles, *Latvijas Avīze* – 5 articles, while newspapers *Diena* and *Вести сегодня* published significantly less material, 3 and 2 articles respectively. The newspaper *Neatkarīgā* provided the largest discussion on the Istanbul Convention. However, the number of publications still does not mean a full-fledged discussion of the topic.

Summarizing analysed material one can see that there are several conclusions about the nature of discussions regarding the Istanbul Convention and the nature of information provided to the public. It should be noted that there were few analytical articles on this topic in newspapers explaining the meaning and objectives of the Convention, summarizing views and arguments of both supporters and critics of the Convention. Analytical articles were published the most frequent numbers, thus preventing readers from creating their own views based on provided information and knowledge. There are 12 editorials, 3 analytical articles, 8 news articles, 6 interviews and 2 round table discussions published in the analysed newspapers. Opinion articles are dominant over news reports about the Istanbul Convention. The purpose of an opinion article is to offer to the reader a viewpoint on a particular case, an event or a person; it does not have to be neutral or impartial. In opinion pieces, the journalist can express his or hers subjective opinion, as well as emotions, giving the reader a certain attitude, a viewpoint. In a situation where opinion articles prevail over news and analytical articles, the reader cannot create an unaffected viewpoint of the matter.

The greatest genre variety is observed in the *Neatkarīgā* newspaper. However, it should be emphasized that in this newspaper, opinion articles on the Istanbul Convention dominate over news reports providing readers with loaded information.

Analysis of Discourse topics

Several discourse topics can be identified by mapping out the contents of analysed texts and then assigning them to particular discourses.

Discourse on naming of gender

It must be noted that issue of translation of English term 'gender' into Latvian language is not fully resolved. Latvia and Latvian language is not unique in this problem. For example, word "gender" does not exist in Hungarian and the English word is used (Juhász, 2015:29). Official translation in Latvian dictionaries of 'gender' refers only to its linguistic meaning of the word. In most cases in academia term 'dzimte' (literal translation of term 'gender' into Latvian) is used. Term 'dzimte' has the same linguistic origin and meaning as 'gender'. There are however opposition to the term 'dzimte'. Some academics propose to use term 'dzimumsocialitāte' (sociality of sex) instead. This is a wider discussion which I will not cover in this article.^{1*} However the term 'dzimte' has not been adapted in public discourse and is quite unknown in general public. The Istanbul convention Latvian translation used term social sex – sociālais dzimums. This ambiguity caused circulation of many different versions of term 'gender' and it crated the discourse of naming gender.

Here are all versions of term 'gender' used in analysed newspapers:

'sociālais dzimums' / social sex
 'sociālais dzimums' jeb dzimte / social sex or gender
 dženderisma ideoloģija / ideology of genderism
 sociālā dzimuma teorija / theory of social sex
 'sociālais dzimums' jeb 'gender' / social sex or 'gender'
 genderisti / genderists
 'genderisma' ideologi / ideologists of genderism
 ģenderisms / genderism
 "dzimte" (angliski "gender") / "gender" (in English "gender")
 gendera ideoloģija / gender ideology
 tā dēvētā sociālā dzimuma / so call social sex
 "džendera studiju pētnieki" / "gender studies researchers"
 sociāli konstruēti dzimumi jeb "genderi" / socially constructed sexes or 'genders'
 sociālā dzimuma ideoloģija / ideology of social sex

Newspapers used different approaches to translation of term 'gender'. There is also a very large variety, even inconsistency, in used terminology in a single newspaper.

^{1*} For futher discussion see Cimdiņa, A. (2015). Tulkojot *gender* latviski: dzimums, dzimumsocialitāte un dzimte. In: Cimdiņa, A (red.). *Dzimums, literārā konvencija un jaunrade no baroka līdz postmodernismam*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

The term 'gender' is relatively rarely used. The concept of 'social sex', which is used in the Istanbul Convention, is also used together with added labels that largely obscure this notion. The media not only used several translations of 'gender' in the Latvian language – gender/ dzimte, social sex/ sociālais dzimums, but also offered their own innovations in terms of translation. For example, they used such translations as 'gender' (spelled in Latvian), 'dženders', 'genderism' and 'dženderisms', which should be considered as a direct translation of the English term into the Latvian language.

Such a variety of concepts is very confusing and places emphasis on gender as something foreign. Plus, the direct expression of English terms in Latvian emphasizes the notion of non-Latvian origins of this word. A reader is given the message that gender is something complicated, incomprehensible – it is not even possible to find an adequate representation of it in the Latvian language. It is coloured as an overseas concept that is inappropriate for our language, culture and traditions.

Discourse of naming gender creates lots of confusion. I would even suggest that its sole purpose is to create confusion among readers. People can relate to the thing they understand, but term 'dzimte' is still quite unknown to the wider public. Media however did not help their audience to understand it but created confusion instead.

Explanation of gender

Due to the lack of knowledge on the term gender and its meaning, many articles focused on explaining 'gender' to their readers. It must be stressed that only two publications used definition/ explanation of 'gender' provided by the Ministry of Welfare. The Ministry of Welfare is in charge of policy making regarding gender equality in Latvia, and acted as a supporter for ratification of the Istanbul convention. There were no voices and explanations given by gender studies scholars and or gender equality experts.

The explanations of term 'gender' given in various newspapers are sometimes contradictory and even misleading. One of the techniques used to explain the concept is non-separation of 'gender' and 'sex,' as well as the use of notion of the concept 'sex' to explain the notion of 'gender' concept. Gender is mixed with the sex, inaccurately explaining the nature of the gender, mixing it with the sex. In principle, merging of both concepts takes place.

Such a technique is widely used in explaining gender in opinion pieces – the combination of both concepts and transformation of gender expressions, nature, and social functions into sex:

(...) It defines sex as a social construct, that is, properties that are not inherited, but a person can choose by itself. (Neatkarīgā, 20.-22.05.2016.)

In the quote above sex is positioned as a choice, as a social construct, although the gender is a social construct, but the sex is a biologically appropriate. Therefore, a reader is not only provided with a substantiated explanation of gender, but misled with false information.

The concept of social sex or "gender" has two meanings: one is biological, the other social. (Neatkarīgā, 25.05.2016.)

Merging of sex and gender is to be regarded as an overtly misleading tactic, which not only gives readers a false premise of gender, but also gives fears of a threat to the world as we know it. The transfer of social functions of the gender to the sex opens doors to manipulations with idea of sex (rather than gender) as an object of choice.

Sex / gender merging and attributing one function to another is the main applied tactic for interpretation of the term 'gender'.

Sex as a choice

This discourse is made possible by the misleading explanation of term 'gender'. Since the gender is explained in the same way as the sex, it acquires attributions of both of the terms. Discourse 'sex as a choice' exploits attributions of the gender as a social construction in regards to the sex. This discourse crates notion that the sex can be matter of one's choice.

(...) for a laugh, not the genitals and chromosomes determine your sex, dear reader, but your social role and your whims. (Neatkarīgā, 11.05.2016)

It links the Istanbul convention or the meaning of social sex/ gender used in it with anarchy of everybody changing and or choosing ones sex.

(...) people will be able to choose for themselves their social sex, regardless of biological sex. (Neatkarīgā, 25.05.2016.)

This discourse is another strategy to crate fear towards the Istanbul convention. Contrary to nature, tradition, nation

This discourse again is made possible by misleading interpretation of the term 'gender' that is attributing characteristics of the sex to the gender. The purpose of this discourse is to stress the unnatural character of the gender and thus the Istanbul convention. Quotes like these are used to draw focus on 'artificial' nature of gender:

Because this [gender] word is unnatural (Neatkarīgā, 25.05.2016.)

Social constructs which are contrary to nature (Neatkarīgā 16.02.2016.)

In English: *socially constructed*. Thus it is something artificial, created with special purpose (Neatkarīgā, 25.05.2016.)

The idea of gender as artificial and constructed thing is used to create opposition to traditional values and national values:

(...) not compatible with the preservation of traditional folk culture and spiritual values. (Neatkarīgā 29.04.16.)

(...) transform societies and change the essence of human shaped and developed by thousands of years. (Neatkarīgā 29.04.16.)

Discourse constructs the gender as a foreign-imposed threat to traditional family and national identity. "Gender ideology" appears as a threat to the traditional values and even to society as such. Thus fear is created regarding the outcome of ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Enforcement of "gender ideology"

In this discourse the Istanbul Convention and gender in general is depicted as something that 'outsiders' want to force into the country. International bodies and local liberals who are cooperating together in the line of the 'gender ideology' are represented as enemies.

"... notorious Istanbul Convention, which will be audacious imposition of genderism ideology on Latvia. (Neatkarīgā, 11.05.2016)

the Convention intends imposition of 'social sex' or 'gender' on countries. (Neatkarīgā 23.02.2016.)

Ratification of the Convention which is an act of a country's free will is falsely equated with forced imposition from unnamed foreign forces.

One more strategy used by this discourse is to compare false notion of imposition of the Convention with totalitarianism experienced in the Soviet past.

"... social experiment as implementation of Marxist theory into practice. (Neatkarīgā 16.05.2016.)

As gender equality and emancipation are associated with socialism and forced emancipation in society, the anti-communist attitudes are used for mobilisation against the "gender ideology" as a communist idea. Awaking memories of the Soviet past by linking voluntary ratification of the Convention with imposition of laws in Soviet times creates a strong notion of fear.

Trojan horse

This discourse hints that the Istanbul convention and 'gender' in general have a hidden intent. In the vision of the far right the "gender ideology" is a part of some bigger plans of background powers.

Trojan horse is led into the state for completely different issues to linger through the back door. (Neatkarīgā, 14.06.2016.)

The supposed hidden intent of the Convention is painted as evil. One article even compares Convention to the Satan – “He-Goat legs of the Convention are more and more visible” (Neatkarīgā, 25.05.2016.). Idiom ‘he-goat legs’ in Latvian is used to name the Satan without directly saying its name. By providing such strong connotations a journalist is creating fear about possible consequences of ratifying the Convention.

The supposed hidden agenda of the Convention is not reviled. There are hints that combating violence is not the true intention of the Convention. The true intent is never said out explicitly; however, implicitly the notion of LGBTQI rights is raised.

Defenders of this Convention shun telling what its real intent is. Not fighting the violence! (Neatkarīgā, 14.06.2016.)

The Istanbul convention is represented as a secret tool to impose the ‘gay propaganda’ in Latvian society. Homophobic attitudes are widespread in Latvian society. Only 23% of Latvian population can agree with the statement *there is nothing wrong in a sexual relationship between two persons of the same sex* and only 19% agree with *the same sex marriages should be allowed throughout Europe* (Eurobarometer. Discrimination in the EU in 2015). This is the reason why any hints regarding LGBTQI issues creates quite negative attitudes. Therefore insinuating that the Istanbul convention promotes gay rights journalists also evoke negative attitudes and fear.

Conclusions

The discourse on the Istanbul convention is created mainly by journalists themselves. Very few public actors are used in the newspapers. The opinions on the issue are voices by journalists. In *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* which is the most active newspaper on this issue, the greatest impact is made by journalists commenting on the Convention and creating an anti-gender discourse. Non-journalistic sources quoted and actors interviewed are mostly politicians from political parties supporting nationalistic ideologies. Those parties are right-wing National Alliance and a political newcomer called the Latvian Regional Alliance. Re:Baltica journalist Inga Sprinģe notes that her interviews with politicians and some opinion leaders showed that to some extent they were believing in these myths [false arguments about gender policies]: some fully, some just partially, if they corresponded to their world views (Sprinģe, 2017). The Archbishop of the Latvian Evangelic Lutheran Church is interviewed once on this topic voicing his opinion – pro fighting violence against women, but in same time anti gender as notion. The Ministry of Welfare is used as source of information providing the official explanation of gender and intent of the Istanbul convention only on two occasions. None of ‘family rights’ groups are voicing their opinions in newspapers. But the same thing can be said on gender equality and women’s rights organisations or prominent feminists. The discourse is constructed mainly by journalists voicing their opinions.

To conclude, there are several discourse topics in newspapers regarding the Istanbul convention. Discourse topics are *naming gender; explanation of gender; sex as a choice; contrary to nature, tradition, nation; enforcement of gender ideology* and *Trojan horse*. Construction of several of these discourses is made possible by very wrong notion of the 'gender'. By attributing the essence of the concept 'sex' to the concept of 'gender', by basically merging the 'gender' and the 'sex' provides means to manipulations and twists over the purpose of the Istanbul Convention. As well as wide range of tools for creating fear.

Hyperbolic, fear-arousing language, equating gender equality with pathologies and deviations, are used by anti-gender and anti-sex education campaigners around the world (Petö, 2015:133). Its appeal is due to the fact that different countries are questioning the universal human rights framework of politics based on their "cultural" exceptionalism (Petö, 2015:127).

A fight for "family values" in Latvia unites the Kremlin's friends and ideological foes. "Let's Protect Our Children" founders are three pro-Kremlin activists. "Family" has mobilized Christians in ethnic Latvian churches, actively encouraged by the Latvian Christian Radio support of the right-wing political party National Alliance. Another group that had found a listening ear in the parliament is called "Our Children". It lobbies the right-wing National Alliance's sworn political enemy – the left-wing party Harmony. The "traditional values", it turned out, is an issue that can unite political forces, which hold opposing views on important national questions. Though one won't see this unity represented in national daily newspapers. Latvian papers use Latvian politicians and experts as news sources. Russian language newspapers don't support opinions from Latvian nationalistic political parties even on the issue of the Istanbul convention.

The 'war on gender' is not just a local phenomenon, and current right-wing strategies have to be understood as, on the one hand, transnationally «designed» rhetorical and political tools against progress in the area of LGBTQI and women's rights, and, on the other, as efforts to control the fear and frustration caused by the global economic crisis and diminishing levels of social security. Anti-gender movement is a new phenomenon in European politics which requires new methods and frameworks of thinking for meaningful reactions by the progressive forces (Petö, 2015:130).

Media play an important role in shaping of the public opinion. Representation of the Istanbul Convention in Latvian daily newspapers can be regarded as an unused opportunity for discussion. There is only one view in the discourse, since *Neatkarīgā* is the only newspaper that constitutes and maintains the discourse of the Istanbul Convention. Other newspapers, whose position and view on this issue might differ from the *Neatkarīgā* newspaper, do not publish articles on this topic. Thus, a discourse is driven by the single press outlet, expressing a definite, anti-convention point of view. The most naive interpretation is that anti-genderism is a misunderstanding by ignorant people, and that if the concept of gender and gender equality is explained in an understandable way they will know that there is nothing to fear. This interpretation proved wrong when "let's explain it to them" strategies failed. Unfortunately, in Latvian daily newspapers even this strategy is not to be seen.

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