

Scandal and upheaval hits the ‘anti-gender’ movement in Poland

Sunday 19 June 2022, by [KOROLCZUK Elżbieta](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2022).

The Ordo Iuris Institute, which opposes women’s and LGBT rights and wants to ban abortion, is in the headlines again - but for all the wrong reasons

Organisations that oppose reproductive justice and women’s and LGBTQ+ rights, as well as gender studies and anti-discriminatory legislation – what they term ‘gender ideology’ – have been growing in visibility and strength across the world in recent years.

In Poland, the most vocal proponent of these so-called ‘anti-gender’ campaigns is the ultra-conservative Ordo Iuris Institute, which has [claimed](#), for example, that “in many regions of the world, the natural notion of the family is being undermined and the social functions of family and marriage are being disregarded.”

So, when reports emerged in February that two well-known employees of Ordo Iuris had been having an extramarital affair and had filed for divorce, social media went wild.

The duo in question, Tymoteusz Zych (former vice-president of Ordo Iuris) and Karolina Pawłowska (former director of the institute’s international law centre), have both [confirmed](#) their pending divorces. Neither has commented on reports of their romantic involvement, although Ordo Iuris president Jerzy Kwaśniewski has [suggested](#) that they are true. He also confirmed that the organisation had split.

Just a couple of months earlier, Zych had participated in a debate entitled ‘Should divorce be banned in Poland?’ And in 2021 Ordo Iuris published a report highlighting the social and financial costs of Poland’s rising divorce rate and saying that mediation should be obligatory (which would effectively prolong the divorce process).

Within hours, the internet was flooded with memes and commentary poking fun at the couple’s perceived double standards. A popular meme showed the pair sitting next to each other at the institute’s headquarters with the caption: ‘We found love in a hopeless place.’

A new think tank

At the end of January, before the news of their affair broke, Zych and Pawłowska (and several other Ordo Iuris employees) announced that they were launching a new conservative think tank, the Logos Institute. They also said it would address a much broader range of economic, social and cultural issues than Ordo Iuris, including housing and climate policy.

Logos’s founders [claim](#) that it will promote “rational” debate, which they say is being hampered by “the canons of political correctness that restrict the freedom of expression and research” and “ideological dogmas that obscure reality”. It is also meant to have a more moderate profile. In an [interview](#), Zych stressed that what had driven him and Kwaśniewski apart were differing views on

communication style. “We believe that our communication should be based on arguments, rather than antagonistic messages,” he said.

Pawłowska even seems to have changed her opinion on ‘traditional’ family values. In an interview, she [claimed](#): “I don’t want to be seen as a person who supports the traditional gender division of labour between women and men. My views are conservative, but [...] in reality there are authentic problems we should face.”

Such claims are surprising considering that for several years both Pawłowska and Zych held key positions in an [organisation](#) that pushed for a blanket ban on abortion; strongly opposed legislation aimed at countering discrimination against women and LGBTQ people; and fought against sex education in schools. How do we interpret their new-found love for more moderate language and a more mainstream agenda?

The global ‘anti-gender’ movement

The conflict between the two parties – Kwaśniewski on the one hand, and Pawłowska and Zych on the other – reflects a division between two strands of the ‘anti-gender’ movement, which is visible not only in Poland but worldwide.

The global anti-gender movement is a fairly diverse network that encompasses religious fundamentalists (Catholic, Protestant, evangelical or Orthodox); secular NGOs (including La Manif Pour Tous in France, Demo für Alle in Germany and Ordo Iuris in Poland); and organisations with transnational reach. The latter include the US-based World Congress of Families (WCF); the transatlantic Political Network for Values; Tradition, Family and Property (TFP), which has roots in Brazil; and Spain-based CitizenGo, which is very active in Europe and Africa.

Despite common goals and a shared focus on ‘gender’ as a threat to children, family and ultimately Western civilisation, these organisations differ in terms of their political leanings, communication strategies and religious affiliations.

Some, such as TFP, which helped establish Ordo Iuris in Poland, are not shy about their religious fundamentalist roots: TFP’s website features articles on [16th-century prophecies](#) in Ecuador and a “[Satanic conference](#)” in Arizona. Others, including WCF, prefer to use secular language and describe themselves as “family heroes” protecting children from “sexualisation” and mothers from poverty and lack of state support.

Ordo Iuris (founded in 2013) tried to position itself as a voice of reason and a protector of women being lured by feminists and “genderists” into choosing abortion and childlessness, which they will later regret.

Many of Ordo Iuris’s campaigns and proposed bills were widely perceived as extreme, cruel and harmful to women

Many of its campaigns and proposed bills, however, were widely perceived as extreme, cruel and harmful to women. In response to a bill introducing a [blanket ban on abortion](#) that was drafted by Ordo Iuris and submitted to Poland’s parliament in 2016, thousands of women took to the streets on ‘Black Monday’ to express their fear and anger, calling the proposal “barbaric” and accusing the organisation of being a group of religious fundamentalists.

‘LGBT-free zone’ campaign

Another notorious campaign concerned LGBTQ+ rights. In 2019, Rafał Trzaskowski, mayor of

Warsaw, introduced an '[LGBT+ Declaration](#)', including specific provisions such as a hostel for homeless LGBTQ youth and anti-discriminatory measures in education.

Ordo Iuris criticised the move and launched a counter-campaign. Its lawyers drafted the '[Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family](#)', which claimed its goal was to secure the "healthy and safe education of children and respect for parental rights". By mid-2020, the charter had been signed by almost 100 municipalities and regions of Poland, while a similar number declared themselves "[LGBT-free](#)".

The institute publicly denounced accusations that it had been spreading homophobia. It [claimed](#): "In Poland there are no 'LGBT-free zones'. [...] the term was coined as provocation by LGBT activists and proliferated by some media. The Local Government Charter of Family Rights, presented by them as an example of alleged discrimination, contains no references to individuals identifying as LGBT."

Ordo Iuris also alleged that the charter does not target homosexual individuals, but "represents an appeal against the LGBT ideology [...] which [...] undermines the rights of parents, freedom of speech, independence of schools and entrepreneurial freedom". It even tried to sue activists who had claimed such declarations were homophobic.

The 'LGBT-free zone' campaign provoked outrage among many Poles, and several provincial administrations [contested the legality](#) of the declarations. The European Parliament and the European Commission both issued resolutions [condemning](#) such practices, and several foreign cities, including in Denmark, France and Sweden, suspended their twinning with Polish cities. By early 2022, some local authorities had withdrawn their declaration – including one of the first signatories, the city of Kraśnik.

The campaign was also not very effective. The family charter and 'LGBT-free' declarations were adopted only in regions and municipalities held by Poland's ultra-conservative Law and Justice party. In fact, if anything, the initiative increased awareness of the infringement of LGBTQ rights in Poland and encouraged mobilisation against homophobia.

Deeds not declarations

The decision to establish the Logos Institute may be seen as an effort to rebrand the anti-gender movement (or at least part of it) and move closer to the political centre. It can also be seen as a reaction to the growing divisions within the ruling right-wing coalition, in case the Law and Justice party loses power in next year's general election.

Logos's launch event included a 'Report on the State of the Republic', which focused on healthcare, environmental issues and urban development rather than the perceived dangers of gender. The group's goal is clear: to be seen as an expert voice in policy debates, rather than as a fundamentalist group connected to the global anti-gender movement.

It's too soon to know if this plan will succeed, but for now anyone looking for information about Logos has to first scroll through several pages of links reporting on the extramarital affair of Zych and Pawłowska, and commenting on the hypocrisy of people who claim to protect 'traditional families'.

Perhaps the best way to oppose anti-gender activists is to insist on judging deeds rather than declarations, and actions rather than words.

Elzbieta Korolczuk

[*Click here*](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Open Democracy

https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/scandal-and-upheaval-hits-anti-gender-movement-in-poland
[/](#)