Foundation Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture

EPF Intelligence Briefing
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General Information

Context:

A polish organisation called the Foundation Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture¹, or Ordo Iuris (OI) has been active in recent months in communicating with public officials in EU Institutions and the Council of Europe expressing its views on a range of mainly social issues. This Intelligence Brief is meant to provide basic background information on Ordo Iuris to help European decision-makers contextualise the organisations’ interventions.

Religious Extremism:

First, while presenting itself as a Warsaw-based legal institute, Ordo Iuris is in fact a civil society foundation constituted under Polish law in 2013. Further, Ordo Iuris is an extremist religious organisation and its leaders have created a web of reactionary organisations in Poland and beyond.²

Ordo Iuris lawyers have been behind all the recent socially regressive initiatives in Poland, including:

- Drafting the text of the 2016 bill to ban abortion³;
- Arguments for leaving the Istanbul Convention on violence against women⁴;
- A bill that criminalised comprehensive sexuality education⁵;
- A bill that restrict in-vitro fertilisation⁶;
- A charter that created Poland’s now infamous ‘LGBT-free zones’⁷.

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¹ https://en.ordoiuris.pl
⁵ Opinia w sprawie projektu zmiany art. 200B Kodeksu karnego ustawą przedłożoną przez komitet “Stop pedofilii”, Ordo Iuris, accessed 04/03/2021.
⁶ Bill proposal, o zmianie niektórych ustaw w związku z ochroną zdrowia i życia dzieci poczętych metodą in vitro, Polish Parliament (Sejm) official website, accessed 04/03/2021.
⁷ Samorządowa Karta Praw Rodzin, Ordo Iuris, accessed 04/03/2021.
Financial Opacity:

While Ordo Iuris has declared to public authorities generating **PLN 6.34 million** (EUR 1.39 million)\(^8\) in 2019, making it one of the largest NGOs in Poland, it equally does not disclose information about its source of its income. However, investigative journalists have recently established that Ordo Iuris, at least during its **first years**, was supported mainly by donations coming from an ultraconservative network called Tradition, Family and Property (see below).\(^9\)

Ordo Iuris in Poland and beyond

In Poland, Ordo Iuris is a powerful organisation and has infiltrated the inner workings of the Polish state\(^10\). This explains why so many reactionary initiatives have gathered so much strength in Poland in recent years. The organization looks for opportunities to translate its ultra-conservative views into the biding law in Poland and Europe\(^11\). For example, to achieve its aims:

- Ordo Iuris alumni occupy important positions in government **ministries, academia, the judiciary** and other public institutions including **advising the Polish President**; \(^{12}\)
- Recently the tentacles of Ordo Iuris reached the European institutions with its vice-director - Tymoteusz Zych becoming a member of the European Economic and Social Committee; \(^{13}\)
- The founder of Ordo Iuris’, Aleksander Stępkowski, formerly a Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, now sits on the Polish Supreme Court and was selected as a candidate by Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for the European Court of Human Rights.\(^{14}\)

Ordo Iuris in the transnational network

Ordo Iuris is the newest invention of the **international network called Tradition Family and Property (TFP)**\(^15\).

There is extensive academic literature on TFP which explains the movement’s origins in Brazil, its organisation as simultaneously a strict religious and a politically engaged social movement as well as its ideology as articulated in the many writings of its founder since the 1960s. Although the organization itself has its **beginning in South America**, today its centre of gravity is Central and Eastern Europe.

In terms of ideology, TFP opposes socially progressive evolutions in Catholic teachings – for example, some of the reforms of Vatican II – and advocates for the Church to remain true to its traditions in terms of social teachings and religious rites. For this reason, it has had highly conflictive relations with the formal Catholic hierarchy since the 1980s\(^16\).

TFP’s leadership structures and fundraising model are opaque and the network maintains tight-knit relations with a range of far-right political actors, extremist organisations and paramilitary outfits. It is for this reason that French public authorities have included TFP on its list of ‘cult-like’ movements to be monitored and Canadian authorities have labelled TFP as a dangerous paramilitary religious organisation. TFP organisations are like a chameleon coming in many different forms, however key traits of TFP affiliates include shared leadership; iconography and branding; youth outreach; fundraising

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\(^8\) Ordo Iuris financial declaration for 2019, Ordo Iuris, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\(^9\) The golden boys of fatima, Konrad Szczygier, VSQUARE, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\(^10\) *This ultra-conservative institute has infiltrated the Polish state, on a relentless quest to ban abortion*, Lidia Kurasińska, Open Democracy, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\(^12\) Ibid.
\(^13\) European Economic and Social Committee, Tymoteusz Zych profile, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\(^14\) European Court of Human Rights. The government selects candidates for judges. On the list, the wife of a PiS politician and former president of Ordo Iuris, Polish news, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\(^16\) Ibid.
techniques; transnational links outside the TFP family; a specific focus for religious veneration; and links with far-right movements\textsuperscript{17}.

The modern TFP has its headquarters in Cracow since the late 90s\textsuperscript{18} and following a successful implementation of its direct mail fundraising model\textsuperscript{19} it has expanded to neighbouring countries\textsuperscript{20}. Polish TFP spent millions of euros to set up foreign affiliates in Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, and the Netherlands\textsuperscript{21} – and each one successfully emulating the Polish fundraising model and socially reactionary normative ambitions.

Currently, these new TFP organisations have started testing the waters in their own countries with the same ultra-conservative agendas. In Croatia, it was the Istanbul Convention, in Estonia, it was a referendum on LGBT rights and in Lithuania abortion\textsuperscript{22}.

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\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ordo Iuris and friends: the games around the abortion ban in Poland, VSQUARE, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\textsuperscript{19} Salve Maria, or millions made in Poland, VSQUARE, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\textsuperscript{20} The golden lion roars from Cracow, VSQUARE, accessed: 04/03/2021.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Four reasons why Poland's war on abortion should scare you, Neil Datta, Open Democracy, accessed: 04/03/2021.