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### "UNPACKING" THE EDUCATIONAL

# PACKAGES: ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSES IN SERBIA

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#### Abstract:

The focus of the analysis are the negative discourses created in 2017 in the Serbian public sphere that referred to educational packages on sex education and prevention of sexual violence against children. The aim of the paper is to analyse the way in which these discourses relate to the "anti-gender" discourse led in Europe during the past two decades, and what are their specificities in the local context. The main argument of the paper is that the episode of "educational packages" can be understood as the first significant manifestation of "anti-gender" politics in Serbia.

*Key words:* anti-gender discourses, anti-gender movements, LGBT population, sex education, family, gender theory, educational packages, homosexuality, sex, gender.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Sex education in Serbia is not part of the formal curriculum in Serbian primary, secondary or preschool education. However, at the informal level, it has been included in the high school curriculum in Vojvodina since 2012, through the optional subject "Health education on reproductive health".2 The initiative was planned to be expanded across Serbia, and at the end of 2016, "Educational packages for learning about sexual violence against children intended for preschools, primary and secondary schools in Serbia" were presented. The packages were developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia and the local non-governmental organisation Incest Trauma Centre. The idea was for teachers to integrate them into existing subjects, as well as to be used by parents, as educational material on sexuality, gender, sex, diversity, and sexual violence. At the packages launch ceremony, the authors (24 of them) received "Acknowledgments signed by the Minister of Education because they created content that meets the needs of employees in preschools, primary and secondary schools, parents/ guardians and children".3

The idyllic beginning of a (rarely) beautiful story in the Serbian education system was disrupted after only a few months, specifically in April 2017, when the question was raised as to their appropriateness for the intended ages, as well as for the tradition and family values in Serbia, and their relevance and possible harmful effect on Serbian youth in general. The Ministry has decided to discontinue the use of the packages in order to "revise"

<sup>2</sup> Beta: "Prvi put u Srbiji održan naučni simpozijum o seksualnom obrazovanju", *Blic*, 26 September 2015. Accessed on 13 March 2021. Available at: https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/prvi-put-u-srbiji-odrzan-naucni-simpozijum-o-seksualnom-obrazovanju/rf86g51

<sup>3</sup> Government of the Republic of Serbia, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit: "Otključaj budućnost deteta" – predstavljeni obrazovni paketi o temi seksualnog nasilja nad decom". Published on 24 November 2016. Accessed on 13 March 2021. Available at: http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/otkljucaj-buducnost-deteta-predstavljeni-obrazovni-paketi-za-ucenje-o-temi-seksualnog-nasilja-nad-decom/

and harmonise them with "our" social context. The Incest Trauma Centre objected to the revision of the content due to copyright protection, and the entire project stopped. Mladen Šarčević, the then Minister of Education, announced personnel changes in the Ministry, as well as the assigning of "this task" to "truly competent individuals" to incorporate sex education in the official educational curriculum.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, not only have educational packages not been revised and implemented in educational programs so far (2021), but the existing optional subject that was applied in Vojvodina was abolished in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

This paper focuses on the criticism levelled at educational packages in 2017 (particularly in April, just prior to the Ministry's decision to discontinue their use), i.e., the discourses that expressed this criticism. They mainly came from members of Serbia's academic and media scenes, as well as from a part of the civil sector, i.e., associations of parents, with the association "Who Poisons Our Children" being particularly involved. Criticism also came from the Alliance of Unions of Education Workers, for circumventing the profession in package development.<sup>6</sup> The aim is to see how these critical discourses have been formulated, and how they fit into the "anti-gender" discourse that has been prevalent in Europe for more than two decades, and which focuses on protecting traditional family and family values from the dangers of "gender theory", feminism, the LGBT movement, and other "totalitarian" ideologies (Agenda for Europe 2014; Đurković ed. 2017; see Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020; Kuhar and Paternotte ed. 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Tanjug: "Šarčević: Smene u ministarstvu zbog skandala oko seksualnog obrazovanja", Blic, Published on 5 May 2017. Accessed on 13 March 2021. Available at: https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/sarcevic-smene-u-ministarstvu-zbog-skandala-oko-seksualnog-obrazovanja/9nf8smk

Ibid, see also: Tijana Dušej Ristev: "Seksualno obrazovanje i Srbija: "Neke devojke ne znaju šta je menstruacija"", BBC in Serbian, published on 12 February 2020. Accessed on 13 March 2021. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-51384801

Jelena Zorić: "Šta je sporno u priručnicima o seksualnom nasilju nad decom?", N1, 22 April 2017, Accessed on: 13 March 2021, available at: https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a244008-sta-je-sporno-u-prirucnicima-o-seksualnom-nasilju-nad-decom/

The paper's methodological framework involves media content analysis, while the critical discourse analysis is used to interpret the obtained data. Media texts published in April 2017 serve as the sample of the analysis, at the time when this topic was brought to the public's attention and when the media controversy about educational packages was "declared". It consists of 20 published texts that were directly related to the topic of educational packages, published in the following media: Danas, N1, Novinar online, Blic, Peščanik, Politika, Kurir, Mondo, Prva TV, Srbin.info. The results of this sample analysis reveal the general image that has been generated in the public about educational packages, including the prevailing attitudes on the subject (negative, neutral, or positive), the key topics covered in the media regarding educational packages, and the main actors of the process. The analysis of anti-gender discourse focuses on three articles from members of the academic community in Serbia, who attempted to take a "scientific", objective viewpoint. These are: a text by dr. Vladimir Dimitrijević, "Ako izdamo svoju decu, izdali smo Hrista", which was published on the portal www. ceopom-istina.rs;8 a text by prof. dr. Slobodan Antonić "Na mala vrata uvode seksualno obrazovanje u vrtiće i škole", published on the portal Srbin.info9; and a column by Miša Đurković "Školski priručnik za promociju homoseksualizma", published in Politika.<sup>10</sup> In interpreting these texts, I rely on a critical discourse analysis, primarily because it is accessible to understanding discourse as active participants in the development of social reality, i.e., social processes (Wodak, De Cilia, Reisigl & Liebhart 2009, 8) - in this particular case, it will be possible to see how in fact, "anti-gender" discourse compelled a criticism of educational packages, and ultimately, their withdrawal. This methodological approach also allows

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank my colleague Marijana Stojčić, a researcher at the Centre for Public History (CPI), for providing media material and assistance with writing the text.

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević: "Ako izdamo svoju decu, izdali smo Hrista", ceopom-istina. rs, 5 May 2017. Accessed on: 13 March 2021. Available at: https://www.ceopom-istina.rs/globalizam/zavera/ako-izdamo-svoju-detsu-izdali-smo-hrista/?lang=lat

<sup>9</sup> Slobodan Antonić: "Na mala vrata uvode seksualno obrazovanje u vrtiće i škole", Srbin.info, 11 April 2017. Accessed on: 13 March 2021. Available at: https://srbin.info/pocetna/aktuelno/antonic-na-mala-vrata-uvode-seksualno-obrazovanje-u-vrtice-i-skole/

<sup>10</sup> Miša Đurković: "Školski priručnik za promociju homoseksualizma", Sabornik srpsko – ruski, 9 December 2017. Accessed on: 13 March 2021. Available at: http://sabornik.rs/index.php/autorski-pogledi/943-djurkovic-promocija-homoseksualizma

for the consideration of "discriminatory strategies of exclusion and inclusion" of different narratives and discourses in negotiating a specific social phenomenon (Wodak, De Cilia, Reisigl & Liebhart 2009, 8). In the case of educational packages, it is important to consider from which position the criticism comes (the "scientist" who wrote on the subject; the concerned parent); to whom the criticism is intended (on whose behalf the criticism is carried out: worried parents, unprotected children; the suffering people); against whom it is directed (political traitors, the European Union, non-governmental organisations, lesbian lobby); and what is actually identified as the greatest dangers of educational packages (promotion of homosexualism, sexualisation of children, destruction of tradition, etc).

Subject of the analysis are discourses that shaped the criticism of educational packages with the aim of determining which elements of anti-gender ideology are actually present in that criticism, and how they are interpreted in the local context. I begin with two basic hypotheses: that there are strong "anti-gender" discourses in Serbia, mainly from the conservative academic scene; and the second hypothesis is that there are certain specifics of this discourse in Serbia, related to the understanding of "tradition", and that the right-wing interpretation of Serbia's 1990s heritage has had a strong impact in shaping this understanding.

# 2. ON BEHALF OF THE FAMILY: INTRODUCTION TO ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSE IN EUROPE

The last two decades of the European political scene have seen the rise of radical right-wing parties (Bakić 2019) and neoconservative ideology, which includes harsh criticism (and denial) of gender politics, LGBT human rights, women's sexual and reproductive rights, and family planning policies (Kuhar and Paternotte ed. 2017; Kovats and Poim ed. 2015; Dietze and Roth ed. 2020; Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020). In this, popularly known as

Acronym for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.

"anti-gender" ideology, "gender" is interpreted as a fictional, ideological construct with multiple meanings, summarising the various disagreements and interpretations of the current political, social and economic crisis in Europe, which contradict prevailing values of multiculturalism, liberal democracy and human rights (Kovats 2017-2018, 9; Kovats and Peto ed. 2017; Dietze and Roth ed. 2020). "Gender theory" is not seen as an academic discipline, but as a totalitarian ideology that does not tolerate objective, scientific facts (on which "anti-gender" discourse insists) and which imposes antagonism between men and women, as well as the concept of sex and gender as social constructions rather than biologically, naturally defined categories of differentiation (Antonić 2011; Jongen 2017; Agenda for Europe 2014).

"Gender ideology" also has its own agenda for action, which includes the imposition of sexual and reproductive rights, i.e., legalisation of abortion, medically assisted reproduction, the use of contraception; family planning policies, weakening the institution of marriage, and advocating for the legalisation of same-sex partnerships, effectively separating sex from reproduction and destroying the institution of the family. Implicitly, this demographically destroys white, Christian Europe, which is already in demographic danger due to the influx of Muslim immigration, which does not have these demographic problems (Jongen 2017; Dietze and Roth ed. 2020, 11). Advocating for the issue of domestic violence also contributes to the degradation of the family, which violates the privacy of the family under pressure from the country, as well as traditional relations between spouses (see Agenda for Europe 2014). The centre from which "gender ideology" is imposed varies depending on the context: for the agitators of the "anti-gender" ideology in the West, the enemy is located in the political and cultural elites and supporters of a multicultural Europe; for those in Eastern Europe, the gender ideology is "Ebola from Brussels" (Korolczuk and Graff 2018) spread by local NGOs, cultural and political elites, with the intention of undermining even the little national dignity left after 1989, and turning "real Europe" into a neoliberal periphery (Ibid, Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020; Mark, Iacob, Rupprecht & Spaskovska 2019).

The bearers of this "anti-gender" discourse are various neoconservative organisations, often close to religious communities, i.e., radical rightwing parties (Datta 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte ed. 2017; Lazaridis, Campani & Benveniste, 2016). Professionally organised, with a stable source of funding, the focus of their activities is on lobbying and advocacy activities directed at government and international institutions, and on mobilising the population at the grass root level. Work methods do not include violence, and do not go beyond the use of democratic mechanisms and strategies to achieve their goals (most often it is about referendums, campaigns, public appearances, education, etc.) (Datta 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte ed. 2017; Lazaridis, Campani & Benveniste, 2016). It should also be remembered that "anti-gender" discourse is not always and everywhere expressed through an organised movement - sometimes it is simply a discourse that becomes part of official government policies (usually in the field of family policy, as in Hungary, see Kovats and Peto 2017). In certain cases, the bearers may be conservative cultural or academic elites, who are not necessarily associated with certain organisations or political parties (see Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020).

Finally, we can conclude that "anti-gender" discourse is a kind of neoconservative call to preserve not only the family and its unique position in the narrative of endangered white, Christian Europe, but also a call to preserve the world as we know it, in which every man knows he is a man, and every woman knows she is a woman; they know their place and duties in society, which are immutable, natural and biologically predetermined. The defence of this world includes the issue of sex education, which is presented as one of the key fields in the struggle to preserve the traditional family and family values.

## 2a. INTERPRETATION OF SEX EDUCATION IN "ANTI-GENDER" IDEOLOGY

Sex education as a "battlefield" implies a conflict between two different concepts: "inclusive", who is based on young people's right to choose and be informed about sexuality, and "conservative", which insists on sex education that primarily emphasises family values and interprets sexuality solely in terms of reproduction (Hodžić, Budesa, Štulhofer & Irvine 2012).

"Inclusive" sex education aims to inform young people about sexuality, so that they can make educated decisions about their sex life, practice safe and responsible sex, and cultivate a positive outlook toward sexuality that is not merely limited to the issue of reproduction, the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, or early pregnancy (Parker, Wellings & Lazarus 2009, 227). In this regard, sex education should be prepared in accordance with the standards established by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)<sup>12</sup> and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>13</sup> which specify that sex education should: "help young people in obtaining reliable information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, dispelling misconceptions (about sexuality), developing life skills such as critical thinking, negotiation, and personal growth skills, and promoting positive attitudes and values" (Parker, Wellings & Lazarus 2009, 227).

A conservative approach on sex education and its relevance for young people provides an entirely opposite interpretation, arguing that sex education should exist but only to reaffirm traditional family values (Agenda for Europe, 2014). It is argued that parents are the primary educators of their

<sup>12</sup> See more at: International Planned Parenthood Federation – IPPF, https://www.ippf.org/our-approach

Available at: https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/3186/file/Konvencija%20o%20 pravima%20deteta.pdf

children, and that the state should monitor parents' educational preferences and values, rather than the other way around (Agenda for Europe 2014, 28). This is a parental right guaranteed by numerous international human rights conventions (which are otherwise considered a form of political manipulation, but are used here as an argument, see Agenda for Europe 2014, 8). Some of the fundamental principles of sex education are presented in the "conservative" narrative in ways that are completely contrary to their context in the "inclusive" narrative. As a result, "sexual and reproductive rights" are interpreted as advocating for abortion and contraception, or "the right to have sex without reproducing". Instead, it is called for the "right to have children without interference from the state" (Ibid, 128). "Sexual and reproductive health" actually means promoting unprotected sex, and should mean "caring for sexual purity", obtaining reliable knowledge about HIV transmitted through promiscuous and homosexual sexual relations, and the duty not to treat pregnancy as a "disease" that requires prevention (Agenda for Europe 2014, 129). The struggle for "proper" sex education involves lobbying to ban the public promotion of homosexuality in schools (Agenda for Europe 2014, 130), to legalise home-schooling (Agenda for Europe, 2014, , 131), and "to review curriculum plans for sex education classes in public and private schools to reflect natural law... if this is not possible, then lobby for laws that would allow avoiding such classes" (Agenda for Europe 2014, 131).

In European countries, the question of sex education has not been addressed in a uniform or satisfactory manner (Parker, Wellings and Lazarus 2009). Most of the time, sex education is taught as part of biology classes, which actually emphasises the reproductive, biological aspect of human sexuality while overlooking the social and psychological aspects (Parker, Wellings and Lazarus 2009, 240). The influence of national ideologies is particularly strong in Eastern European countries, as evidenced by the term used for sex education, "family life education", which again emphasises the importance of family and reproduction in the discussion of sexuality (Parker, Wellings and Lazarus 2009). However, for the topic of this paper what 137 appears to be an interesting case is the introduction of sex education in Croatia, which included similar rhetoric, actors in the entire process, and ended ingloriously, as in Serbia - sex education does not exist in Croatia's official educational curriculum (Hodžić, Budesa, Štulhofer & Irvine 2012).

In Croatia, sex education was provided as an optional subject in some schools by two organisations, which actually offered two different sex education programs: MemoAIDS, which ran a peer education program on HIV prevention, and TeenSTAR, which promoted more conservative values, including abstinence. Both programs were abolished by the Ministry of Education in 2008 under the auspice that they did not improve young people's knowledge, although it was more likely that they wanted to end the conflict between organisations that advocated for "inclusive" and "conservative" approaches (Parker, Wellings and Lazarus 2009, 495). As a reaction to this decision of the Ministry, as well as to the decision from 2012 to reintroduce sex education in schools, but in cooperation with the Ministry and organisations that promoted an "inclusive" approach, some of the leading "anti-gender" organisations in Croatia are articulated and still active today, such as "Parents' Voice for Children – GROZD" (Hodžić, Budesa, Štulhofer & Irvine 2012, 508; Hodžić and Štulhofer 2017). It is insisted on the parents' right to decide on their children's education, as well as on the need to defend against a "gender ideology" that puts the traditional family into question by denying biological sex; and attitudes of the American right and neoconservatives on this issue are promoted in Croatian public space.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in 2013, GROZD filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court, demanding that sex education be abolished, not only because "gender ideology" is imposed through the contents of the module, but also due to formal legal violations during the curriculum adoption process. The appeal was upheld by the Constitutional Court, and the curriculum was suspended.

Diskriminacija.ba: "Seksualno obrazovanje u Hrvatskoj: Heteronormativne vizije seksualnosti". Published on 25 December 2015. Accessed on 13 March 2021. Available at: https://diskriminacija.ba/teme/seksualno-obrazovanje-u-hrvatskoj-heteronormativne-vizije-seksualnosti

Despite the fact that sex education is still not part of the official curriculum in Serbia and Croatia, the concept of "tradition" is largely based on victimising national narratives created during the 1990s in both countries (Vlaisavljević 2006, 2007; Mol 2016; Karačić, Govedarica and Banjeglav 2012), which play a significant role in the development of "anti-gender" discourses. While in Croatia this connection is established through the defence of the Croatian family and Catholicism as pillars of Croatian national identity (see Hodžić, Budesa, Štulhofer & Irvine 2012; Hodžić and Štulhofer 2017), in Serbia, as presented in the following analysis, the threat to "tradition" which is based on the idea of family, masculinity, strict upbringing and patriotism, is located in women's, especially lesbian, non-governmental organisations, the volatile political elite and the EU lobby.

### 3. EXPOSING LESBIAN TOTALITARIANISM: UNDERMINING OF EDUCATIONAL PACKAGES IN SERBIA

The public debate on educational packages in Serbia was intensified during April 2017, almost four months after their official presentation. As many as nine texts (of 20 in total) were published as columns or editorials; six as news, and five as reportages. This points to a conclusion that the media were essentially not interested in researching the topic in a comprehensive way, or consulting different sources and presenting various aspects of this problem.

In terms of the topics, challenging of the packages prevails, questioning the competencies of the authors, emphasising "problematic" lessons such as the one about the French kiss, anal and oral sex, which is confirmed by illustrations that mainly represent the "print screen" of problematic parts 139 of the manual. The challenging was justified by opinions that the manuals do not correspond to "our" tradition and context, and in that sense, claims could be heard that a higher percentage of emotionally stable children live in Serbia compared to the West – something to be considered a "talent" of this region. 15 Certainly, this "emotional stability" must be considered when discussing such "sensitive topics". 16 It is also indicative that no text in this period deals with the topic of incest or sexual abuse of children, which is one of the important reasons why educational packages were created in the first place. Although one could easily think that this problem does not exist in Serbia, that perhaps it is even fabricated for the needs of educational packages, it is important to note that "in the age group 10-18, every school class in Serbia has 4 children who survived some form of sexual violence, and 4 other children who know someone who experienced it." (Bogavac, Popadić and Mrše, 2016, 6). Of the total number of rape victims, one third are minors, and perpetrators are mostly adults, according to the data of the Ministry of the Interior (Bogavac, Popadić and Mrše, 2016, 40-41). According to data of the Incest Trauma Centre, female children are most often abused, mostly by their fathers or father figures (Bogavac, Popadić and Mrše, 2016, 45). Also, there is a lack of information on international standards pertaining to sex education, and there are no experts or representatives of organisations dealing with this problem from the aspect of human rights.

A very one-sided re-examination and challenging of educational packages was articulated in the attempts to discredit the authors: despite the fact that over 20 authors participated in their creation, the media reiterated that Dr. Ljiljana Bogavac, together with her colleague from ITC, Dušica Popadić, were awarded by the lesbian organisation LABRIS, and that they cooperate with them, which speaks enough about their hidden agenda of pro-

TV Prva: "Bura oko uvođenja seksualnog obrazovanja u vrtiće: Kako da dete od tri godine shvati šta je incest ili pedofilija", published on 21.04.2017. Accessed on 13.03.2020. Available at: https://www.prva.rs/zivot/dom-i-porodica/114124/bura-oko-uvodjenja-seksualnog-obrazovanja-u-vrtice-kako-da-dete-od-tri-godine-shvati-sta-je-incest-ili-pedofilija

moting the "lesbian lobby" and "pink Marxism", <sup>17</sup> or "radical individualism, extreme feminism and totalitarian LGBT and gender ideology", as stated in the press release of the political party DVERI. <sup>18</sup> At the same time, ITC representatives do not appear in the media as interlocutors and an important source of information, but the emphasis is placed on the Ministry (through press releases), the association of concerned parents "Who Poisons Our Children" and president Zoran Jovanović, and psychology experts who point to the danger of pathologising children's sexuality, if this topic is not presented in the "right" way – but it remains unclear what is the right way. <sup>19</sup>

The three articles that I will analyse specifically in the context of "anti-gender" ideology contain the most strongly articulated negative attitude towards the introduction of educational packages in schools. They approach the problem from the academic perspective (referring to scientific sources, their own papers on gender ideology etc.), but also from parents' perspective.

Dr. Vladimir Dimitrijević, the author of the text entitled "Ako izdamo svoju decu, izdali smo Hrista" ("If we betray our children, we betray Christ") has a doctorate in Serbian literature of the 20th century, closely cooperates with the Serbian Orthodox Church, and is a member of the Political Council of the Dveri Party.<sup>20</sup> Although his text did not resonate with the public like the texts of Dr. Antonić and Dr. Đurković, it is indicative because it does not only contain a reflection on the problem of educational packages, but provides a genesis of the problem of gender ideology in Serbia, i.e., the

<sup>17</sup> Vladislav Đorđević: "Uživa li vase dete u "dodirivanju"? ", Novinar online, 11.04.2017 Accessed on: 13.03.2021 Available at: http://www.novinar.de/2017/04/12/uzi-va-li-vase-dete-u-dodirivanju.html?lang=lat

Mondo: "Dveri: smeniti ministra zbog "seksualizacije dece"", 17.04.2017 Accessed on: 13.03.2021 Available at: https://mondo.rs/Info/Drustvo/a1000544/Dveri-traze-smenu-ministra-Sarcevica-zbog-programa-o-seksualnom-nasilju.html

Blic: "Priručnik koji je uzburkao Srbiju i deca od tri godine će učiti o seksu", Srbin.info 15.04.2017 Accessed on 13.03.2020 Available at: https://srbin.info/pocetna/aktuelno/prirucnik-koji-je-uzburkao-srbiju-i-deca-od-tri-godine-ce-uciti-o-seksu-a-stariji/

Available at: http://vladimirdimitrijevic.com/sr-rs/biografija-dr-vladimir-dimitrijevic.html

attacks on the Serbian tradition and family. Dr. Slobodan Antonić is recognised as the author of several studies and texts dealing with the problem of "gender ideology", i.e., debunking of radical feminism and the gay movement (Antonić 2011, 2014). His text on educational packages presents the clearest "scientific" take on the topic. The text by Dr. Misa Đurković entitled "Skolski prirucnik za promociju homoseksualizma" ("School manual for the promotion of homosexualism") published in Politika Magazine, resonated most strongly in the public. Đurković is a doctor of philosophy and research associate at the Institute for European Studies in Belgrade, and is also the editor of the publication "New German Conservatism - Jongen and Kubiček in Serbia", which published several texts that provide excellent insight in the "anti-gender" ideology and modern neo-conservatism in Europe (2017).

Several key discourses can be singled out in the three texts, intertwined to create a logical narrative that explains not only the dangers of educational packages, but also the dangers of gender ideology, backed by power centres (current government in Serbia, political establishment, Europe, non-governmental sector), acting against the people – in this case, against concerned parents and unprotected children.

The protection of Christianity can be identified as the first discourse, which is most prominent in Dimitrijević's text. The promotion of sexuality is viewed as a sin, but it is also a part of the "globalism policy" which operates to destroy Christian values. One of its most important strategies is the "occupation of school" and the education system by globalists. Đurković articulates the Christianity aspect more on a personal level, where he "as a Christian" opposes the idea that his children learn from such "hideous" school educational packages. While Dimitrijević claims that Christianity is attacked by globalism policy, Đurković speaks of a threat to Christian values imposed by the "EU ideology" which is being implemented in Serbia by "oppression".

The Christan discourse is followed by the discourse about "our tradition", which Dimitrijević primarily relates to masculinity, patriotism, and readiness to defend the homeland However, the packages promote nonviolence, thereby posing a threat on these values. However, this is not the first time that the tradition has been threatened by promoting nonviolence and denying the warrior ethos - both can be found in the work by "anti-war profiteer" Dr. Vesna Pešić and her critical papers about the contents of textbooks in the period when "Serbs fought for their freedom in the wars for the Yugoslav heritage" (Dimitrijević). Although the packages do not refer to the 1990s wars, they convey the same messages in their critical reviews of Andric's and Chekhov's stories. Similarly, Antonic finds that the educational packages emphasise violent aspects of our tradition, which actually represent a normal pattern of a traditional family functioning. On the other hand, they offer "false freedom" that teaches us how to French kiss, have safe oral and anal sex, which is just an intro to learning about: "... sadomasochistic sex, sex with animals, sex with corpses, group sex, swing and other types of "normal sexual activities" that are perfectly fine only if, according to our Ministry, they are a matter of "agreement between people who make love" (347)? Who allows this?" (Antonić).

The discourse on the **defence of the family**, as the bearer of tradition and traditional values, points out the problem of the issue of domestic violence, i.e., sexual violence which tends to automatically label "normal" family relationships and tenderness as sexual violence. A child will get confused, because he/she is not sure whether to view a kiss as violence or an expression of fondness. In order not to confuse the child, the parent will have to explain to them the "exact sexual meaning of the word "touch". Is it possible to explain it to a three-year-old child? Is that not a sexualisation of children - their forceful introduction into the world of sexuality, the world of adults, and even the world of pathology? And is this not - violence against children in the name of the fight against violence?" (Antonić). But the worst of all is that the family is presented as an unsafe and dangerous place, which disrupts children's | 143 normal attachment to the family, and NGOs like the ITC are trying to fill that gap. According to Dimitrijević, the family is threatened by the very attempt to introduce sex education in schools, which encouraged in the US (as pointed out by Dr. Samuel Blumenfeld, the "critic of American public school education" and advocate of home-schooling) "a huge increase in premarital sex rate among students accompanied by unwanted pregnancies, abortions, raising children by single parents, sexually transmitted diseases, rape..." (Dimitrijević). As a concerned parent, Đurković believes that such educational packages violate his rights to "raise and educate my children in accordance with own beliefs" guaranteed by the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. "These manuals directly violate these constitutional rights of mine. From September, the compulsory unconstitutional violence will begin against my children and my family under the auspices of the education system."

The discourse on the **promotion of homosexualism** is another family undermining strategy. It is visible in the very contents of educational packages, i.e., explicitly, but also implicitly, and it encourages children to "explore their sexuality" and the "normality" of homosexual relations. This position is further corroborated by Antonic's objective, scientific knowledge about homosexuality (he "knows what he is talking about" because he wrote a book awarded by the Sociological Society of Serbia), claiming that "societal promotion of homosexuality increases the share of homosexuals in the society." (Antonić, also see Antonić 2014).

The authors themselves, i.e., their links with LGBT organisations in Serbia, are another level of the obvious promotion of homosexuality. According to Dimitrijević, these "self-proclaimed LGBT propagandists... have the right to be whatever they want, just as we, the vast majority in Serbia, have the right not to allow LGBT "ideologists" to impose their worldview on our children."

Apart from homosexuality, there is also the discourse on distorted 144 interpretation of gender, which is typical for modern "anti-gender" dis-

courses. In the case of educational packages, it is reflected in the contents of textbooks (men wearing skirts and choosing who to fall in love with are presented as normal). However, Dimitrijević and Đurković place these problematic contents in a broader "anti-gender" context of understanding gender and sex, with Dimitrijević referring to a scientific source, i.e., Antonić's book "Iskušenja radikalnog feminizma" (Temptations of Radical Feminism") (2011), in which the author presents his view of gender theory as an ideology that imposes antagonism between men and women who are reduced to monolithic categories that fight each other over political and financial power. Women are led by radical feminists in this struggle, and the main idea behind it is the very gender theory, which imposes the interpretation of gender and sex as social constructs, and not biological categories with factual, scientifically proven differences: "Six-year-olds of both sexes in both Kenya and Canada – if allowed - play ten times longer with the same sex than with the opposite, precisely because it is natural for them. Also, boys more often get the toy they want by pushing, competing and snatching, and girls through verbal persuasion and manipulation" (Dimitrijević). Educational packages are only a part of a broader agenda of feminists and lesbian lobbies, which promote the "gender / sex distinction" with, according to Đurković, the ultimate goal of "encouraging children to choose their gender, to constantly self-reflect and explore" (Đurković) or, according to Dimitrijević, the goal of creating an "androgynous humankind".

The last, sixth discourse, which can be identified in these texts, is the one that refers to the background of educational packages – it tries to explain their origin. According to Dimitrijević, they come from forces that impose neoliberal capitalism, market deregulation, all under the guise of a "brave new world" that offers false freedoms through "sexual debauchery of masses", where sexual debauchery and insistence on nonviolence play crucial role in destruction of a nation's youth. In Serbia, this process did not begin with educational packages, but with the establishment of numerous women's NGOs that advocated contraception, abortion, and the sentencing and pun- 145 ishment of Serbian war crimes during the 1990s. However, after Milošević's removal, their power grew and they turned to lobbying for the legalisation of same-sex marriage, organising trainings on LGBT rights for the police, and influencing the education system. The educational packages constitute another attempt of the "too wise" EU LGBT "ideologists" of political homosexualism, as "out" authors of the compulsory school manuals, declaring the family as the greatest danger for a child under the guise of combating "sexual violence" (Dimitrijević). Đurković also agrees that the EU ideology and its poltroons are in the background, adding to this also the "law on mandatory vaccination, the law on domestic violence" and the continuation of the "oppression and violence" that the Serbian family will no longer put up with.

# 4. CONCLUSION: ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSES AND EDUCATIONAL PACKAGES

The authors' insistence on "debunking" educational packages as promotion of certain ideologies, based on scientific, objective knowledge and common sense, is in fact the most prominent manifestation of "anti-gender" ideology in these discourses. As in these three texts, the protection of the family from various plagues has a central place in the general "anti-gender" narrative. In this case, the family is protected from the imposition of the idea of domestic violence sexual violence against children, which disintegrates normal, traditional family relationships, and the idea of the family as an intimate, private space. In that sense, it is symptomatic that the authors refer to one of the basic premises of the conservative understanding of sex education, expressed also in anti-gender discourses, that parents have the right to control their children's education, which in turn must respect their (Christian) values.

The family must also be protected from the promotion of homosexuality, which imposes an unnatural, deviant understanding of sexuality that is contrary to nature and insists on equal rights for homosexual and heterosexual persons, even with regard to marital and family rights (Agenda for Europe 2014). What is interesting in the criticism of educational packages is that the authors do not call for or propagate violence as a method of defence, which until recently was not the case with the Serbian right-wing (see Radoman 2013). Therefore, it could be said that anti-gender discourses on homosexuality in Serbia are in line with the general anti-gender position on homosexuality, according to which it must be kept out of the public and political spheres, and is even acceptable as a "lifestyle" as long as it is not imposed through "equality policies" (see Wielowiejski 2020). The problem with educational packages is that they promote homosexuality as normal, equal, and thus actually promote ideology, not objective knowledge. It is important to mention that Antonić (2014) does not advocate the idea of "the gay lobby conspiracy" and even considers it acceptable to decriminalise homosexuality, to give homosexuals certain rights and to accept the model of "tolerance", which would include tolerance of homosexual relationships, decriminalisation, prohibition of violence and discrimination (Antonić 2014, 205). The line is drawn for marriage, which remains reserved for heterosexual couples, because only such marriage protects the traditional family as the ideal and only possible environment for raising children (Antonić 2014, 95). Gender theory is actually a much greater danger to the family than homosexuality (Agenda for Europe 2014, 16; Wielowiejski 2020). By denying biological differences, the core criterion for the division of roles in the family is being denied, thanks to which the family functions as a perfect system (Parsons, in Tomanović 2019, 312–313). With respect to educational packages in Serbia, the imposition of gender theory is actually the essence of the background of the whole story, it is not as visible, but can be read between the lines. It is imposed, above all, by an external enemy embodied in the image of the European Union, global centres of power (which is a common discourse on gender theory especially in Central and Eastern European countries, see Korolczuk ert 147 and Graff 2018), with the help of local NGOs as the main promoters of this plague.

Finally, the protection of the family in the local, Serbian "anti-gender" narrative, and in general, is inevitably linked to the protection of Christian, white Europe – a tradition – which is threatened by Muslim immigration. At that point, the "anti-gender" narrative is most strongly merged with radical right-wing ideology and nationalist, authoritarian and xenophobic values, which are at the core of radical right-wing politics and are articulated today through Islamophobia and so-called "differentialist racism" (Bakić 2019, 44). Differences in culture are seen as natural, and therefore insurmountable, and their mixing in any form inevitably leads to chaos (Bakić 2019, 45; Jongen 2017, 21). Multiculturalism is one of the key problems of modern Europe, and only the right-wing has the courage to oppose this "false" policy that is to the detriment of white, Christian Europe, its values and nation states (Đurković ed. 2017). The traditional, hetero normative family, with a clearly defined racial, religious and national origin, has a key role in that struggle, because it ensures the demographic survival of Europe (Đurković ed. 2017).<sup>21</sup> However, in the context of Serbia, this discourse on the protection of tradition also has a strong foothold in the legacy of the 1990s, and the patriarchal values of masculinity, patriotism, defence of the homeland, which were promoted during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (see Popov ed. 1996). This warrior ethos has survived to this day, and is threatened not only by the imposition of the value of nonviolence, but also by the imposition of the ideology of homosexuality, gender theories that weaken and dilute it. It is important to point out that any counter-strategy would have to take into account the legacy of the 1990s, to re-examine and challenge it, bearing in mind that it represents one of the backbones of the right-wing and "anti-gender" narrative in Serbia.

For the key ideas of the European radical right, which presents itself as politics of "neo-conservatism" (Đurković ed. 2017:7), see also the Paris Statement A Europe We Can Believe In. Available at: https://thetrueeurope.eu/a-europe-we-can-believe-in/

The specificity of the "anti-gender" discourse in Serbia is that it does not have its own clearly marked leader, in the form of movement or organisation, as is the case in Croatia. The association "Who Poisons our Children" is far from an active, professional organisation like GROZD -there is no information on their website about activities after 2017, any contact details, membership data, etc. Furthermore, the "anti-gender" discourse in Serbia is not backed by a strong political party that could push for a larger "anti-gender" mobilisation in Serbia - Dveri, as the party with most distinctive "anti-gender" activities, is not a Parliament party and has a limited political power (see Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020). Another possible explanation for the absence of distinct "anti-gender" organisations is that the state itself (i.e. the current government) has no interest in creating such organisations, as it tends to impose itself as a central actor in creating conservative and family policies, such as is the case in Hungary (see Kovats and Peto 2017; Gal and Kligman 2000).

In addition, the lack of greater visibility and activity of the civil sector in the discussions on the educational packages is concerning. The media invisibility of the representatives of the Incest Trauma Centre (which may be the result of their strategic decision) left an empty space filled with speculation, insistence on "tradition", malicious insistence on deviance, denial of sexual violence against children and domestic violence. Another important questions is what happened to other civil society organisations (the number and experience of which in Serbia is not negligible), and whether their lack of reaction in the case of educational packages actually indicates a lack of cooperation, inability to put pressure on institutions not withdraw the packages, or a lack of interest for the problem? In this context, it is important to refer to one of the possible interpretations of "anti-gender" policies as "counter-policies" to the women's and LGBT movement, shaping them as a "response and counterattack to the conquered spaces of freedom of "minority" groups" (Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020, 33). For a counter-movement to emerge, there needs to be a movement that: calls into question existing 149 power relations; threatens existing social privileges; attains certain political successes; has support among political parties (Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020, 36). However, the case of educational packages (but also other cases around which "anti-gender" movements have mobilised in Europe) indicates that it is necessary to ask whether women and LGBT movements have managed to meet these requirements to provoke counter-policies, i.e., whether they have any immanent weaknesses that make them ineffective in opposing anti-gender policies. Kovats (2017–2018) lists some of these weaknesses, which can be observed in Serbia, and which can be essentially described as a process of "NGO-isation" of the civil sector (Stubbs 2007; Lazić 2005) – their professionalization, dependence on donor agendas and finances, loss of support of citizens, i.e., the local community, excessive insistence on cooperation with institutions which results in a focus on "policies" instead of politics.

The educational packages epilogue story is not in sight in Serbia. After they were withdrawn in 2017, there were no attempts to introduce sex education into the Serbian educational curriculum. However, the educational packages were mentioned again at the beginning of 2021, when several well-known Serbian actresses reported a former acting teacher for sexual violence, which, as they stated, had been happening for years, while they were underage students of his renowned acting school.<sup>22</sup> The school was widely known for its strict rules, which required respect for tradition, dress codes (boys in trousers, girls in skirts), and reciting Our Father prayer at the beginning of each class. The school functioned as a small family, in which the teacher had the authority of the father – that is how the abused girls viewed him.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the father figure raped and abused them for years. The teacher is currently in custody, the school has been disbanded, and the young women have (unbelievably) received great support from the public and their pro-

23

Ibid.

Ivana Mastilović Jasnić: "Milena Radulović: Kad smo imale 13-14 godina, Mika Aleksić bi nas propitivao da li imamo seks i da li nam prija", *Blic*, 18.01.2021. Accessed on: 13.03.2021. Availalbe at: https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/milena-radulovic-mi-ka-aleksic-optuzbe-silovanje-seksualno-zlostavljanje/xvdpznf

fession for their courageous actions. At about the same time, quietly, unobtrusively, a petition was launched to return the educational packages of the Incest Trauma Centre to the educational curriculum.<sup>24</sup> If they had not been withdrawn four years ago, maybe these young women, and many other children who find themselves in a situation of abuse, would know how to react in time, so that later they would not have to answer the question "what took you so long"?

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### "PAKOVANJE" OBRAZOVNIH PAKETA: ANTI-RODNI DISKURSI U SRBIJI

#### Rezime:

Predmet analize su negativni diskursi koji su se 2017. godine kreirali u javnom prostoru Srbije, a povodom uvođenja obrazovnih paketa o seksualnom obrazovanju i prevenciji seksualnog nasilja nad decom u obrazovni sistem. Cilj rada je da ispita na koji način su ovi diskursi uvezani sa opštim "antirodnim" diskursima aktuelnim u Evropi poslednje dve decenije i koje su njihove specifičnosti u lokalnom kontekstu, polazeći od pretpostavke da je zapravo afera "obrazovnih paketa" predstavljala prvu manifestaciju "antirodnih" politika u Srbiji.

**Ključne reči:** antirodni diskursi, antirodni pokreti, LGBT populacija, seksualno obrazovanje, porodica, rodna teorija, obrazovni paketi, homoseksualnost, spol, rod.

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