

# To strengthen and organise the defence of our democratic principles in the face of *anti-gender strategies*

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‘Anti-gender’ movements are no longer marginal. They have become major players in the public debate. Initially seen as isolated trends, they are now at the heart of a broader political agenda aimed at promoting an unequal and restrictive vision of social organisation. These movements challenge the very foundations of our democracies: equality between people and respect for fundamental freedoms. And the threat is all the more difficult to counter because it rarely takes the form of a direct confrontation; it is sometimes insidious, spearheaded by the fight against women’s emancipation.

## *An unprecedented financial firepower*

Over the past five years, more than a billion dollars has been mobilised in Europe by anti-gender movements to strengthen their presence, expand and structure networks, develop strategies of influence and thus increase their reach in the public debate. France is, in fact, the second European country most affected by this anti-gender funding, just behind Hungary. This funding comes from the private sector: from wealthy conservative families, coalitions of Russian and American billionaires, European businessmen, and tech elites. These groups also have access to millions of dollars in public funds. By aligning themselves with illiberal governments and through political patronage, they seek to redirect resources from the European Union’s financial frameworks in order to implement their strategy using taxpayers’ money.

## *The information war and the role of digital technology*

The offensive is being waged systematically in the digital sphere through the widespread use of disinformation to discredit scientific research and the voices of experts. Platforms are also being criticised for their sexist biases and the role of their algorithms in promoting masculinist content or reactionary trends (the ‘tradwives’ movement). At the same time, deliberate strategies aim to silence women and rights defenders on social media through cyberbullying or abusive reporting.

## *A global project*

Far from being a mere trend, these movements have become veritable ecosystems with a coordinated international strategy to impose their worldview, in which equality has no place.

Several countries now regard them as a threat to internal security, as the attack on women’s rights is merely a step towards challenging everything that does not conform to their moral doctrine. Women’s rights, in particular the right to control their own bodies, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people are not under attack by chance: they constitute the first front in a systematic offensive against the rule of law.

## How can we strengthen the response and organise the democratic defence?

The attack on women's rights goes hand in hand with an undermining of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, of international law, of scientific legitimacy, and of media pluralism... This is not merely a societal issue. It is a profoundly democratic one. The EESC makes it clear: these movements are not merely currents of opinion; they are deliberate strategies to destabilise democracy. We must take action by strengthening our defences and organising our response.

Their fragmentation reinforces a feeling of abandonment, which in turn fuels hostility towards others and a tendency to withdraw into oneself. The isolated individual, who no longer trusts the social system in which they live, then becomes prey to totalitarianism. It is therefore necessary to invest in education, community organisations, social justice and public services to ensure the long-term survival of the spaces where we build a shared future.

### 1 PROTECTING OUR SHARED FOUNDATIONS AND OUR DEMOCRATIC HERITAGE

Our aim is to protect the common ground that forms the basis of our society: human rights, including women's rights; the pursuit of a feminist foreign policy; the independence of the judiciary; academic freedom and research funding; and media pluralism. These are the foundations of the rule of law and our democracies, which underpin our social cohesion.

### 2 SUPPORTING SPACES WHERE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IS BUILT

In France, there are many spaces for social interaction, but they are under threat. Protecting these places where bonds are forged is all the more important because their breakdown jeopardises the country's democratic vitality and the sense of community.

### 3 WHEN ORGANISED, CIVIL SOCIETY CAN WIN BATTLES

The EESC is committed to fully fulfilling its role as a guardian and protector of our democratic principles. This is not about pitting one set of beliefs against another, but about reaffirming, with clarity and responsibility, that the defence of women's rights is integral to the very survival of democracy itself. The rise of anti-gender movements not only contributes to the normalisation of anti-democratic ideas, but also reinforces a vision of power based on domination, which neglects or even oppresses civil society organisations. When they unite and organise themselves into coalitions, following the model of feminist movements, civil society organisations act to preserve and guarantee acquired rights and to secure new ones.

#### THE RAPPORTEUR

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