

REBELLIOUS

Parental Movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Russia

PARENTS

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Conservative Parents' Mobilization in Ukraine

Olena Strelnyk

Introduction

Since 2005, the Ukrainian state has been sounding an alarm over the country's low birthrate. Therefore, parents are considered to be a resource recruited to solve the country's demographic problem (Kabinet ministriv Ukrainy 2006). In this self-induced panic concerning demography and statehood, childhood has become politicized as well. For instance, the Ukrainian far-right party *Swoboda* (Freedom) promotes the prohibition of foreigners adopting Ukrainian orphans because "children are the treasure of the national gene pool" (quoted by Kotlyar 2013). Similarly, on the eve of the expected signing of the association with the EU on November 29, 2013,¹ both opponents and supporters of Ukrainian-European integration endlessly debated "the protection of children's futures." These political and social processes created very favorable conditions for the conservative parental mobilization that is centered on keeping what they consider to be national traditions as a basis of social wellbeing.

Parenthood emerged as a central topic in public discussions in independent Ukraine in the early 1990s because it links individuals, families, and their respective responsibilities to the new context of national state building. It appears that with time the debate on parenthood in the country has been infused with the element of "moral panic" (Cohen 2002) by frequently

stating that the family is in crisis because of the decline of family values. Parental neglect and child abuse, orphans, and unattended children became the most talked about topics in the Ukrainian media; they became frequent subjects of state and regional social work and family policy programs and, lately, academic research. The period of 1990–2000 was also marked by the emergence of parents' organizations and their activism in many post-Soviet states. Researchers argue that parenthood became the new sphere of social solidarity (Chernova 2013) and part of the emergent civic society (Shpakovskaja 2013); for example, conservative movements, including parental movements, actively participated in the protest actions in Ukraine (Tsentr Doslidzhennya Suspil'stva 2013, 7).

This trend is connected to a more general sociocultural and political shift concerning the families and children in post-Soviet Ukraine. Even though the communist period was hardly monolithic concerning family policy and parenthood, during most of the Soviet Union's existence, children were declared a state and a public value, and the government took a major interest in their upbringing, especially on the ideological front. Beginning in early childhood, individuals in the Soviet Union were indoctrinated to follow the rules of society by obligatory participation in youth organizations such as the Little Octobrists, Young Pioneers, and Komsomol. The lives of children in the Soviet Union were shaped by state institutions to a larger extent than in many other societies. The Soviet authorities intended to provide children not only with education, but also "moral upbringing" (*vospitanie*) and leisure activities (Knight 2009, 791–798). In this social and political context, parents became rather passive in relation to childcare and educational institutions, and most importantly, vis-à-vis the state. As Knight pointed out, "Just as education and leisure provision were considered significant, not for developing the child as an individual, but rather for shaping adults who would contribute to the collective of Soviet society, so too the role of parents was considered to be primarily of social importance." In fact, the state considered this role as participation in raising communists and maintaining social order (795).

Around the time of the collapse of the USSR, the relation between the state, society, and family fundamentally changed. One of the first signs of this change was the 1988 emergence of *Komitet soldatskikh materej* (The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers), whose activity brought attention to human rights violations in Soviet (and later in Russian) military forces (Zdravomyslova 1999, 2000; Danilova 2004). How was parents' activism developed in newly

independent Ukraine? What characterized the political background, cultural environment, and resources of the Ukrainian conservative parents' activism? This chapter focuses on an analysis of one of the most well-known parental movement organizations in the country, *Roditel'skiy komitet Ukrainy* (The Parents' Committee of Ukraine, PCU) and its activities between 2011 and 2014.

The conservative parents' movement in Ukraine developed with the use of significant material, human, financial, and organizational resources, both domestically and internationally. I argue that the PCU emerged and managed to actively and effectively participate in the increased number of protest actions in 2012–2013 mostly because of favorable social and political conditions. Newly dominant socially conservative rhetoric aided the consolidation of cooperation between the state, different religious forces (including Orthodox and Greek Catholic Church), and conservative parent activists (the PCU in particular). Contradictions between the geopolitical orientations of Ukraine toward the European Union (EU) and the Eurasian Customs Union (which includes Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) mattered as well. Preparations for the expected signing of the association agreement with the EU on November 29, 2013, created the favorable political opportunities for the alliance between the PCU and the state, which points to the controversial and inconsequential character of Ukrainian gender equality politics.

Theoretical Background and Sources of Data

The parents' movement in Ukraine is a typical example of conservative movements that focus on the past and orient their activities toward the revival of what they consider national traditions (Sztompka 1996, 345). I apply the concept of demographic nationalism (Yuval-Davis 1997) to analyze the roots of parental mobilization, and I use resource mobilization theory to explain how this type of social movement managed to gather and mobilize resources from both inside and outside their movement, gaining considerable attention and a following in contemporary Ukraine (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983).

According to resource mobilization theory, social movements succeed through the effective mobilization of various types of resources and the development of political opportunities. Social movements may mobilize both material and nonmaterial resources. Material resources may include money, organizations, manpower, technology, and means of communication

(including mass media). Nonmaterial resources can include legitimacy, loyalty, networks, personal connections, public attention, authority, moral commitment, and solidarity (Fuchs 2006, 106).

The cornerstone of nonmaterial symbolic resources the conservative parental movement mobilized is the very sensitive topic of childhood and children. This topic was framed as a basis of the movement's cultural and political legitimization. The main argument the conservative parents' movement promulgates is that children are very vulnerable socially and they need protection from homosexuality, pedophilia, "gender ideology," sexual education in schools, and some state policies; for example, juvenile justice laws (*yuvenal'na yustyt'siya*) (Otkrytoe zayavlenie 2011; see also Højdestrand in this volume).

International law defines juvenile justice as a body of laws that regulate the relationship between a state and juvenile offenders. Specifically, it means creation of special juvenile courts that protect children from the harsh punishments meted out in the criminal justice system; it spares them from being stigmatized as criminals and being imprisoned with adult criminals (Sherstneva 2014, 202). However, in the rhetoric of conservative forces in Ukraine, similar to Russia (Højdestrand in this volume; Sherstneva 2014), juvenile justice is considered the system promoted by the morally degraded West and a tool of total state control over families. In particular, conservative movements view juvenile justice laws as a promotion of a wide authority of state social agencies that leads to controlling the parents, depriving them of parental rights, and destroying the relationships between parents and their children (Chto takoe yuvenal'naja justicija 2 n.d.).

This chapter presents a case study of the Ukrainian social movement organization, *Roditel'skiy komitet Ukrainy* (The Parents' Committee of Ukraine, PCU), and its activities from 2011 to 2014. Although there is no information available on the date of the founding of the PCU, it has been active since 2010, and as of today it has branches in twelve (out of twenty-four) regions in Ukraine. The first large-scale event organized by the PCU was the Parents' Forum, which took place in Kiev in 2011. Since then, PCU has organized a number of meetings, conferences, and public protests all over the country. The activists officially claimed on their internet site that the organization's main purpose is "the consolidation of the parents' community for common actions aimed at overcoming the moral crisis in parents', youth's, children's and teenagers' environments, and strengthening historically traditional

spiritual values in the public conscience.”² The PCU’s declared goal is to raise parents’ self-consciousness and public engagement in organizing educational work with children, organizing events directed toward popularization of conservative family values, and organizing psychological and legal advice to parents, teachers, etc. The PCU opposes gender equality policy, sex education in schools, juvenile justice laws, homosexuality, abortions, family planning, and biotechnologies; for example, assisted reproductive technologies, as well as mandatory vaccination. Its representatives strongly criticize what they see as a threat to national values from Western family and gender policy; thus, the PCU appeals for the elimination of international organizations that promote gender equality programs and (what the PCU calls) “population control.” In particular, the PCU views the EU’s gender policy as dangerous because it allegedly equals the legalization of homosexual marriages, the adoption of children by homosexuals, and “propagation” of homosexuality to children (Maslennikova 2014).

The PCU has a well-developed website that links to all popular social networks, such as Facebook, VKontakte, and Odnoklassniki. As of December 2016, the number of subscribers on the PCU’s site in Odnoklassniki was 833 and VKontakte was 2129. The content found on these networks is the same as PCU’s website, and neither the PCU website nor the network pages serve as a space for discussions. Between January 2014 and January 2015, there were only twenty comments on the PCU website in the form of questions and/or supportive statements. The PCU also produced about one hundred videos that are freely available from Rodkom-TV, which is a channel on YouTube.

At the same time, the PCU is very active in publishing. It published and/or supported publishing a great number of copies of the organization’s newspaper and books such as *Gender Education: How Your Children Will Be Made Homosexuals* (Gendernoe vospitanie n.d.), *Gender with its Warts: Through Gender Dictation to the Dictation of Homosexuality* (Gender bez prikras 2010–2011), *Juvenile Justice: How to Protect Oneself* (Roditel’skii komitet Ukrainy 2013), and *Analysis of Concepts and Programs of Sex Education in the Educational System of Ukraine* (Vseukrainskaya obshchestvennaya organizatsiya 2013).³ The organization also distributed flyers and CDs about the harms of a gender equality policy, and it produced a significant number of teaching aids for educators. Moreover, the PCU organized three large Parents’ Forums in Kiev in 2011, 2012, and 2013. According to the PCU’s own account, there were 500 participants in the first forum and more than 1,000 in the second and

third. The activists declare on the organization's website that among participants were representatives of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, Ministry of Justice, deputies, teachers, scientists, lawyers, psychologists, and journalists, but in fact "they all were just parents who share concerns about their children."⁴

Two important reasons led to selecting this social movement organization as the research subject. First, the PCU is the most influential and visible conservative organization in Ukraine that presents itself as the parents' representative. Second, according to the network analysis produced by Ukrainian pro-equality activists, the PCU occupies a central position among the conservative organizations in Ukraine (Aktyvistky hendernoho rukhu 2013, 10–13).

The resources I used to substantiate the observations presented in this chapter principally come from PCU's website and materials produced by the organization. I also relied on secondary materials such as newspaper accounts of the PCU's actions, interviews with activists published in the media, and data from Ukrainian public opinion surveys illustrating the cultural values and legitimacy that the PCU claims to represent to indicate the likelihood of social support for the conservative parents' movement. Before I analyze the PCU's activities and resources it uses, I outline some important aspects of the Ukrainian context.

The Sociopolitical Context of Parents' Conservative Mobilization

In social movement studies, the sociocultural context of a movement's development has been a central element explaining the reasons for the emergence and success of activism (Williams 2004, 95). In particular, scholars of social movements have been paying careful attention to "the political-cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kind of ideas become visible, resonate with public opinion and are held to be 'legitimate' by the audience" (Kriesi 2004, 72). In a similar vein, it is useful to examine the political and cultural background that led to the political and public support of the conservative parents' movement in Ukraine.

Since the mid-1960s, a "second demographic transition" emerged in a number of industrialized countries. This process implies that marriages take place at a later age and parenting is postponed, with divorce rates increasing along with the number of cohabitations, increasing rate of "out of wedlock"

births, and voluntary childlessness, etc. (van de Kaa 2003, 9–10). The trends associated with the second demographic transition have applied to Ukraine for the past twenty years. The age of marriage and giving birth to the first (and often the only) child has gradually risen in Ukraine, and public opinion toward cohabitation had become more permissive even before the 1990s. The number of cohabiting couples has also been increasing, similar to the number of children born outside of marriage. Moreover, the first decade of Ukrainian independence was marked by rapidly declining birthrates (Instytut demohrafiyi 2008a, 125). From 1990 to 2001 the number of newborns decreased by almost 43 percent (Instytut demohrafiyi 2008a, 60). The demographic decline was as dramatic as in Russia, which went through a similar political and socioeconomic transformation after the collapse of the USSR (ibid). In 1989, Ukrainian families had an average of 1.59 children (1.52 in cities and 1.77 in rural areas). In 2001, this rate was 1.44 on average (1.34 in cities and 1.65 in rural areas) (Instytut demohrafiyi 2008b, 19). Since 2002 the birthrate has been gradually rising, which is considered by demographers as a “post-crisis compensation,” and the realization of previously suspended child-bearing intentions, as well as a short-term effect of changes in family policy. However, despite recent changes the birthrate in Ukraine is still one of the lowest in Europe, even though it is still higher than in Hungary, Greece, Spain, and Slovakia (United Nations 2013).

In contemporary Ukraine these trends—especially falling birthrates—have been met with an intense neotraditionalistic rhetoric and an alarmist discourse on low birthrate as a threat to national survival (Zhurzhenko 2008, 128–137). Yuval-Davis’s term, “demographic nationalism,” aptly captures this intense connection between national and demographic discourses. In the contemporary state-supported and media-enhanced political debate, fertility is still considered the basis of biological and symbolic reproduction of the nation. The birthrate decline and what is described as “depopulation” are regarded as the most important problems that determine the future of a nation (Yuval-Davis 1997). Such rhetoric of demographic nationalism is the part of the conservative discourse that the PCU presents on its website:

The demographic crisis can be compared with anemia, which is a sharp decrease in blood cells that carry oxygen to all the organs and systems of the body. These vital cells of the state body are healthy families. We can say without any exaggeration: “Health of a family determines the health of the nation.” (Maslennikova 2014)

In the rhetoric of demographic nationalism, women are cast as members of specific national collectivities, not as individuals, and certainly not as workers (as they had been during the Soviet period). The outcome of this intense political discourse is that it pressures some or possibly all women of reproductive age to have more children or, in the case of ethnic/religious minorities or otherwise marginalized women, to have fewer children (Yuval-Davis 1997, 22). In this discourse, a special symbolic role belongs to mothers and motherhood because their images symbolize the spiritual consolidation of the society around what is cast as the “eternal” values of a given national culture: traditions and language, its continuity of generations, and the survival and the future of the nation (Zhurzhenko 2008, 132). The Ukrainian historian Oksana Kis’ stresses that “practically every nation in the period of national consolidation or national revival appeals to woman’s and maternal symbols, and the idea of patriotism is embodied in the form of Woman-Mother,” (2003, 156).

In the Ukrainian historical and cultural context, the cult of motherhood is fixed on the image of *Berehynya*, which is literally translated as “the one who protects, takes care of.” In fact, the image of *Berehynya* is based primarily on the cult of motherhood, but not on the idea of women as persons with full and equal rights. The high symbolic status of the mother is intended to compensate for the painful reality of women’s lack of rights and, at the same time, to re-impose a patriarchal model of motherhood as a woman’s only destination (Kis’ 2003).

The image of *Berehynya*, which has become a nearly sacred stronghold of the Ukrainian national idea, is based on at least two postulates. Firstly, it emerges from the idea of cult of the child as the unconditional value in premodern Ukrainian society. Secondly, it stresses the role of a mother as the most important role of a woman in Ukrainian national traditions (Kis’ 2003). Thus, often with substantial state support, conservative parties and movements have declared abortion as fundamentally alien to the Ukrainian people’s centuries-old traditions, “which were based on the religious outlook, a profound respect for human life and respect for the woman as a mother and a carrier of life” (Rezolyutsiya sympoziumu 2010). At the same time, Ukrainian governments attempt to achieve a balance: while stating that they aim to “keep national traditions,” they also work for the modernization of the country with the framework of European integration. As of June 2015, from the current Ukrainian government’s point of view, the country has made

considerable progress regarding gender equality, fulfilling the conditions stipulated in the EU-Ukraine Association Agenda (*Informatsiya Pro implementatsiyu* 2014, 15–16).

State-sponsored efforts toward enhancing gender equality in contemporary Ukraine are framed as one of the main elements of the democratization process. Among the “proofs” of its commitment to gender equality, the government references its recent ratifications of a number of international conventions on gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), European Convention on Human Rights (1997), European Social Charter (revised in 2006), and Millennium Development Goals (2000). Ukraine also ratified a number of antidiscriminatory declarations and acts of the International Labor Organization, and was first in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region to pass a law against domestic violence in 2001. As of 2016, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan are the only states from the CIS where the law on providing equal rights and opportunities for women and men was passed.⁵

However, even in the much acclaimed case of gender equality, there is a number of contradictions that reduce the effectiveness of these laws and the government's claims to democratic transformation. These contradictions include the conservative and antigender equality bills that were proposed between 2011 and 2013, since some discriminatory laws were passed. One of these laws, for instance, limits women's rights to enroll in the universities that train personnel for law enforcement agencies, effectively prohibiting women from joining and advancing in law enforcement. Similarly, in other areas of public life and public policy, recent Ukrainian governments produced an eclectic mix of laws and policies that express contradictory tendencies, including bowing to conservative discourse and following the rhetoric of gender equality. For example, in regional programs that ostensibly promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men, there are passages that appear to promote traditional gender roles, such as the contest for searching for the “*Berehynya* of our city” (*Rozporyadzhennya mis'koho holovy* 2013).

Official data and the results of studies on gender equality in Ukraine demonstrate the lack of effectiveness of government policy on equal opportunities and the instability of institutional mechanisms for providing gender equality. The contradictions between the legal principles on gender equality and the actual social processes in Ukraine are striking. Gender disparities,

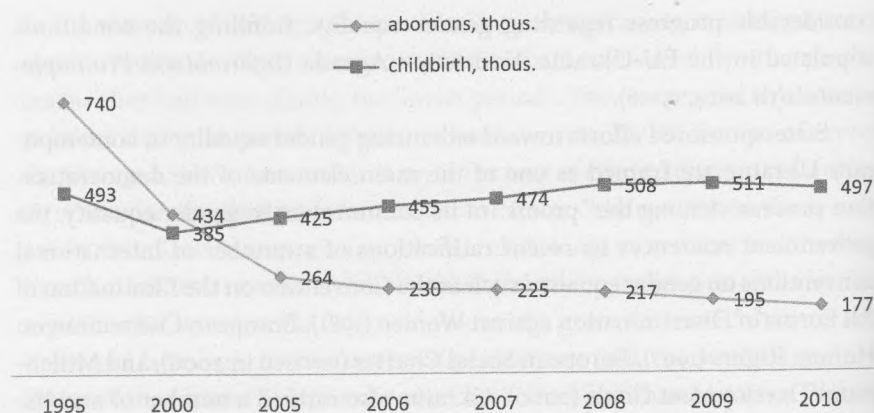


Fig. 2.1 Childbirth and abortions in Ukraine, 1995–2010 (Zhinky 2011, 44)

inequality, and open discrimination are rarely subject to public debate and thus are still far from being eliminated in many areas of public life. Attitudes toward gender ideals, and practices of gender relations are significantly asymmetric (Prohramma rozvytku 2007). For instance, the access of women to decision-making sphere is still limited. As of the beginning of 2016, only two women, Liliya Hrynevych and Ulyana Suprun, entered the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in the roles of Minister of Education and Science, and Minister of Healthcare respectively. I argue that the inconsistencies in the Ukrainian governments' position and the deep contradictions between the laws promoting gender equality and social reality create openings in political opportunity structure that allow and encourage political pressures from the conservative parental movement in Ukraine.

Interestingly, Ukrainian demographic processes contradict the state-sponsored and conservative family discourses: while moral panic around abortion rises, the number of abortions drops. The rate declined almost by five times from 740 thousand per year in 1995 to 177 thousand in 2010 (see fig. 2.1).

"Moral panic" around demography, and especially abortion, as well as efforts toward strengthening the public image of women as first and foremost mothers, are accompanied by rather superficial efforts toward introducing more gender-equal regulations. These contradictions provide important symbolic resources and create political openings that conservative parental groups use.

Neotraditionalist Turn: Changes in Social Policy

Specific changes in social policy—some of which were only proposed, while others were implemented—demonstrate that the governments, as well as the Ukrainian Orthodox and United churches, far right parties, and parental activists pushing for those changes idealize a specific type of family. For example, the Family Code of Ukraine and the State National Program for Family Support for the Period until 2016 consider the family consisting of a married heterosexual couple with two (or more) children as a universal and ideal family model (Simeynyy kodeks Ukrayiny 2002; Kabinet ministriv Ukrayiny 2013). This model implies an outright stigmatization of what the government, right-wing forces, and conservative sociologists view as a “deviant” family, such as single parents and childless families, as well as specific practices such as abortion.

In reality, the state's family policy equals pronatalist policy, which focuses on demographic growth. In 2005, then President Victor Yushchenko established a new type of social benefit in the form of material assistance for family after the child's birth. This step was an important part of his pre-election, and then presidential program called “Ten Steps towards People” (Prohrama Prezydentura 2005). President Yushchenko was one of the leaders of the “Orange Revolution” in 2004 supported by right-wing political party *Nasha Ukrayina* (Our Ukraine). Researchers analyzing Yushchenko's political image argue that it evolved from the “Revolutionary and Truth-Seeker” during the Orange Revolution to “Father of the Nation” after his inauguration. At mass events, Yushchenko appeared regularly accompanied by his family, emphasizing his fatherhood and having many children. Thus, the association between Yushchenko's family status and his patriarchal role in Ukrainian society was established (Dorohovskij 2006).

The trend toward introducing financial incentives for families continued until mid-2014. In 2013, the amount of the cash benefit grew to €3,000 (about \$300 USD) after the birth of the first child, €6,000 after the second child, and €12,000 in the event of a third and subsequent children. These amounts are enormous considering that the average salary in Ukraine was €300 in 2013. In 2014, due to the economic crisis and the armed conflict in east of Ukraine, the amount of payment was reduced to approximately €2,000 (accounting for inflation at the time).⁶ The state-mandated material assistance for a child's birth may have contributed to the increase in the birth rate, which, according

to the data of the State Statistics Service, went from 9.0 newborns per 1,000 of the population in 2005 to 11.1 in 2013. However, Ukrainian demographers strongly criticized the cash benefit as an ineffective policy because its effect is projected to be temporary (Instytut demohrafiyi 2008b, 200; Dumanska 2013), while the media and experts noted the fertility increase among whom they call the “problem” population, particularly rural families (Den’gi na det-jah 2011; Mel’nichuk 2014).

Neotraditionalist ideas also appeared in other proposed bills in Ukraine. There are four bills that merit attention because they focus on family policy, and at least in one case Ukrainian parental conservative activists were involved in its development. First, the bill on revision of the income tax rate was supposed to be calculated based on the number of children a taxpayer had (the bill also established exceptions for disabled persons). The maximum rate of taxation was to be 17 percent for childless citizens who had reached 30 years of age. This income tax bill was proposed in 2012 by Yaroslav Sukhyy (with support of President Yanukovich’s party *Partiya rehioniv* [The Party of Regions] and Kateryna Lukyanova representing the right-wing political alliance *Nasha Ukrayina* [Our Ukraine] and *Narodna Samooborona* [People’s Self-Defense]) (Proekt Zakonu 2012a). Ukrainian media, experts and public opinion reacted to the bill very critically, calling it a “tax on childlessness” (Vladina 2012) and it was never introduced.

Second, the bill on the revision of article 123 of the Family Code of Ukraine was proposed in 2011 by Kateryna Lukyanova as well. Her recommendation was that a term “married couple” could only refer to a male and a female couple who would be permitted to use assisted reproductive technologies including surrogacy, which is legal in Ukraine. The aim of this bill was to eliminate the possibility that a surrogate Ukrainian mother would allow a foreign homosexual couple to adopt a child (Proekt Zakonu 2011). The bill was voted on by *Verkhovna Rada* (Ukraine’s Parliament) and passed, coming into force in 2012.

Third, there were bills to prohibit abortion except when the pregnancy threatened the mother’s life. According to the current law, Ukrainian women can have an abortion if the pregnancy does not exceed twelve weeks. The first bill proposing limitations in access to abortion was proposed by Andriy Shkil, a nationalist member of the *Batkivshchyna* (Fatherland) party in 2012. The second bill was initiated by Ruslan Zelyk and Ruslan Martsinkiv, representatives of the far-right party *Svoboda* (Freedom) in 2013 (Proekt Zakonu 2013), but so far no restrictions have been passed or implemented.

Last, the PCU proposed a bill very similar to the one implemented in Russia (see Højdestrand in this volume), to establish what they called “safe informational (media) space for children” labeling it “the prohibition of homosexuality propaganda.” The bill suggested imposing criminal charges for those distributing information on homosexuality to minors, while avoiding defining what “homosexuality propaganda” means exactly (Proekt Zakonu 2012b).⁷ Almost all Ukrainian churches, the Ukrainian Council of Churches, and many religious organizations expressed their support of the bill. After its registration in Verkhovna Rada, representatives of the organization Love against Homosexuality handed over 72,000 signatures in support of the criminalization of “homosexual propaganda” to the bill’s authors. The PCU participated in the collection of these signatures (Bolee 70 tysjach 2011).

In the case of what is labeled as “homosexuality propaganda,” the conservative campaign turned out to be successful. The bill against “homosexuality propaganda” was passed in the first reading (289 to 61 votes) in October 2012. In response, the group of deputies from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a declaration that called on the Ukrainian Parliament to withdraw this law because of its discriminatory nature. Leading international organizations, such as the Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Equal Rights Trust made the same appeal and, as a result, further debate on the bill was deferred.

However, in July 2013, Vadim Kolesnichenko, the representative of a pro-Saukovich and pro-Russian party, *Partiya rehioniv* (The Party of Regions), proposed the bill again. Revisiting this topic at a time when the details of Ukraine’s association with the European Union were discussed in the *Rada* (Parliament) was highly significant because this bill was an attempt to wreck the association with the EU (Feder 2013). In 2013 and 2014, the deputies did not discuss the law, but they did not reject it either; although in May 2013, the Parliamentary Committee on freedom of speech proposed to reject the bill (Sheremet 2015). Only in January 2015 did the Verkhovna Rada stop consideration of the bill.

Casting homosexuality as a serious social problem that needs to be urgently confronted to protect children produced a welcome political opportunity to merge and consolidate different political forces. Olena Shevchenko, a director of the LGBT organization *Insayt* (Insight), sadly joked in an interview in 2013 to J. Feder, correspondent of *BuzzFeed* (USA), that legislators might disagree about being either on the side of the EU or Russia, but opposition to

LGBT rights was “the only thing that can consolidate our parliament” (Feder 2013). Political parties and conservative movements have used homosexuality as a tool for political mobilization. For instance, the social movement organization *Ukrainskij vybor* (The Ukrainian Choice), which was founded to protest the intentions of Ukraine’s European integration, referred to the “threat of homosexuality” as the reason why Ukraine should avoid association with the EU. The Ukrainian Choice sponsored numerous large billboards all over the country in 2013 that stated, “The Association with the EU means same sex marriages.”

The PCU and the conservative activist parents have been notable for their vocal protests against integration with the EU using the same argument. They have used the emergence of neotraditionalist discourses and policies as an opening in the political opportunity structure, while they aimed at strengthening this trend at the same time. In 2013 the co-chairman of the PCU, Aleksandr Skvortsov said, “We protest the signing of the EU association agreement because it will inevitably lead to the homosexualization of Ukraine” (Okolo 30 chelovek 2013). Talking with a reporter of *BuzzFeed* in his Kiev office in 2013, Skvortsov said that Ukraine’s EU association agreement “establishes a dictatorship of homosexuality in relation to the whole society.” Skvortsov claimed that the PCU was not officially encouraging the government and Rada to abandon all agreements with the EU, it just wanted to amend such an agreement to free Ukraine from the requirement of fulfilling EU rules that relate to “public morality” (quoted by Feder 2013).

The criticism of the international community due to the increasing number of discrimination cases, hate crimes, and violence against homosexuals usually targets Russia, but the public attitudes toward homosexuality in Ukraine provide an equally fertile soil for social mobilization of homophobic groups. The “homosexuality problem” is contributing to the consolidation of different political forces, not only conservative ones, especially when deliberating about children. Available research shows that the Ukrainian society in general shares homophobic views (see Martsenyuk 2012), and the level of homophobia rose from 2002 to 2011. In 2002, according to a survey conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres Ukraine, by request of the LGBT organization *Nash Svit* (Our World), 49 percent of respondents negatively answered the following question: “Should homosexual people have the right to raise children?” In 2011, the same response to the identical question was

69 percent, based on the survey of 1,200 respondents with a representative sampling by sex, age, region, and type of settlement (Uroven' gomofobii v Ukraine 2011).

The conservative movement uses what they label the "homosexuality problem" as a tool to gain further influence. This movement declared that it is of the utmost importance to "protect" children from homosexuality, since, as they claim, homosexuality is connected with, or equals, pedophilia. For instance, on the conservative network website "Stop gender" (<https://stopgender.wordpress.com/>), the following interactive question is posed: "Is it necessary to prohibit homosexuality propaganda that reaches the underaged?" The website proudly stated that 93 percent of its visitors had answered "yes" to this internet "survey."⁸

During 2013 conservative organizations in Ukraine focused on preparing for the signing of Ukraine's EU association agreement. The PCU indicated that "homosexualization" was the main obstacle to the EU association, and it stated that it was a threat to national values. As part of the PCU's protest repertoire, it organized two roundtables in 2013 in Verkhovna Rada. The topic of the first such gathering was "Does European choice of Ukraine necessitate the acceptance of same-sex relations?" and the second one was titled "The necessity of preserving family values in Ukraine." In October 2013, the PCU organized mass protests in what they saw as defense of traditional family values, particularly against the EU Association Agreement. In November 2013, the PCU was one of the main actors to organize protests in defense of traditional family values with the following slogan: "Traditional family—JA, Homosexualisation—NEIN" near the German Embassy. Not surprisingly, during the 2013–2014 protests the PCU supported the anti-*Maidan* and anti-EU actions.

However, the PCU's ardent anti-EU rhetoric can reduce public support for its conservative agenda in the future, because sociological research indicates more positive attitudes toward the EU association after the *Maidan* revolt between November 2013 and February 2014. In the twenty years since such research is available, the number of EU supporters has not exceeded the number of supporters who are in favor of closer collaboration with the previous Soviet states; for example, in 2013, 45 percent of respondents supported the idea of entry into the Eurasian Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and 42 percent were in favor of joining the EU (Vorona 2013, 7–8). The situation changed after the *Maidan* protest. During the February to March 2014 period, 51 percent of Ukrainians expressed their support of the

EU association, and 33 percent were ready to vote for entry into the Customs Union (Tsentr sotsialnykh 2014).

Material Resources of the Ukrainian Conservative Parents' Activism

Mobilization around “the prohibition of homosexuality propaganda” shows that the PCU, together with other conservative groups, aims to influence not only public opinion, but political decisions as well. The question is how to explain the emergence of a movement in a country where the general scarcity of resources available to grassroots social initiatives has been further deepened by the contemporary political and economic crisis. To this end, I will employ one of the most well-established theories of social movement literature, which focuses on rational actors and operates under the assumption that availability of resources enhances the likelihood of collective action. In this section I apply a typology of resources that the PCU uses employing five main categories: social-organizational, human, material, moral, and cultural resources (Edwards and McCarthy 2004).

I will begin with discussing social-organizational resources, defined as infrastructure, social networks, and organizations (Edwards and McCarthy 2004, 127). The PCU is an integral part of the network of organizations representing conservative agenda, which includes religious and proreligious groups and political parties such as *Pravoslavnyj roditel'skij komitet* (Orthodox Parents' Committee), *Hristianskoe dvizhenie za zhizn'* (Christian Movement for a Life), *Ljubov' protiv gomoseksualizma* (Love against Homosexuality), *Stop Gender*, *Molodost' neravnodushna* (Youth is not Indifferent), the pro-Russian and anti-EU social movement organization *Ukrainskij vybor* (The Ukrainian Choice), and the far-right party *Svoboda* (Freedom). Ukrainian gender equality activists who conducted a network analysis of conservative movement organizations defined two types of relationships between them. One type of relationship consisted of networks of solidarity or “formal partnerships,” while the other type is characterized by cognitive networks, which implies awareness of identical or similar activities of different social agents.

According to the report presented by the gender equality activists, the PCU occupies a central position in the network of conservative groups through its significant amount of input and output connections, making it a strong link in the web of formal partnerships. Also in the cognitive network, although Ukrainian Choice has the largest centrality index, the PCU

occupies a strong central position as well because its members work closely with both Ukrainian Choice and Freedom. Such close cooperation among these three groups may seem controversial because of their differing political orientations (Aktyvistky hendernoho rukhu 2013, 12–13), but these networks together may qualify as a “social movement industry” as defined by McCarthy and Zald (1977, 1219).

The PCU cooperates with conservative, family-oriented organizations and networks not only in the country, but also abroad. It is a part of The World Congress of Families (WCF), which “is an international network of pro-family organizations, scholars, leaders and people of goodwill from more than sixty countries, that seek to restore the natural family as the fundamental social unit and the ‘seedbed’ of civil society (as found in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).”⁹ Founded in 1997 by Allan Carlson as part of the project of The Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society in Rockford, Illinois, in recent years the WCF has become very active in the region, and according to news reports it is supported by Russian state-sponsored organizations such as the Sanctity of Motherhood. Due to close cooperation between the WCF and the PCU, the recent International Parents’ Forum, which took place in June 2014, was held in Yalta, Crimea. According to information on the WCF Internet site, it featured the representatives of “pro-family organizations and civil society from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Moldova” with the PCU as one of the main local organizers.¹⁰

Second, the PCU utilizes important human resources, which include activists’ labor, experience, skills, and expertise. Successful social movements develop a wide expert base that reaches beyond the national arena to the international arena. Due to its extensive international networks, the PCU often invited experts from France, Serbia, Russia, Finland, and the United States as speakers for its press conferences and forums. The majority of events that the PCU and related conservative groups organized were conducted with support from academics and scholarly representatives who use their academic position to legitimize their own proreligious ideas. For instance, Antonina Yevtodyuk, the head of the Ukrainian public association *Khrystyyanskyy rukh Za zhyttya* (Christian Movement for Life) is an associate professor at Lviv National Technical University. Similarly, one of the leaders of the PCU is an associate professor at a Ukrainian university. Thus, the PCU has well-established human resources both domestically and internationally.

Third, complementing the social-organizational and human resources, material resources including monetary resources, property, office space, equipment, and supplies are of importance. The PCU is officially registered as a charitable organization that sustains itself from donations and voluntary contributions, but it is difficult to discern to what extent people support the organization financially. Judging from the scope of its activities, the PCU has well-established material resources both domestically and internationally, but the sources of the organization's revenues are unclear. According to Ukrainian LGBT activist Yuriy Frank, the PCU's sponsors are American conservatives and Protestant fundamentalists (Traicija kak bezuslovnoe blago 2013, 8). Since there are no official records of the PCU finances, this information is impossible to verify, but this argument is particularly curious in the context of the rhetoric of Ukrainian conservative organizations, because they are the ones who blame the LGBT movement for "destroying traditional values using the money of the West" (Frank 2013, 21).

The fourth type of resources are nonmaterial resources, which may include conferred legitimacy, solidarity, and celebrity's support as expressed in the media and by public awards. The PCU has substantial resources in this regard. The most recent Parents' Forum in 2013 was organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, Yuriy Miroshnychenko, who was President Yanukovich's representative in the Parliament, and some of the Ukrainian deputies and members of Parliament's Committees for family and education. As a result of what the PCU calls a moral crusade, it seems that the PCU succeeded in getting substantive support from various political forces in Ukraine and possibly also from abroad. This shows that the PCU differs from grassroots organizations in Russia, analyzed by Tova Höjdestrand in this volume, who seek autonomy from state representatives and politics. At the same time, such strong connections to the Yanukovich regime negatively affect the PCU given the current political situation in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Cultural Environment as a Resource for The Conservative Parents' Mobilization

Material resources, however, are not the only ones that activists can use. By moving inductively through the cultural resources that social movements use in particular settings, the "boundaries of the legitimate" and the cultural

resonance of symbolic repertoires emerge as important. The cultural environment is the array of values that are widely and deeply held as well as solidly institutionalized, and a movement has to work with the socially acceptable norms and values in order to affect change (Williams 2004, 98–99). Williams emphasizes two analytic requirements for a systematic analysis of the cultural environment: “boundedness” and “resonance.” Boundedness refers to a range of symbolic elements from which a movement can draw or which may become a source of constraint on possible movement actions and ideas. Boundedness helps set analytic boundaries on what is culturally relevant at a particular time and place. “Resonance” in turn means that “some cultural elements will be more important and held more dearly. Even within the boundaries of the legitimate, cultural effectiveness will vary. The variation will occur across groups within the general population, across issue areas or arenas of social life, and over time, depending on events. In social movement terms, some cultural resources—such as frames, or symbols, or ideologies—will resonate and others will not” (ibid, 101).

In the case of the PCU, I concentrate on traditional values or those values that are framed as such (for example, religiousness) and the level of trust in the state as the main issues that could resonate with the conservative movements’ ideas. A cultural environment is a dynamic rather than a static concept, and Ukraine went through considerable social and political changes, including the modifications in political discourses and public attitudes in its most recent past. While what the movement calls “traditional values” and the rate of religiousness are rather stable, peoples’ attitudes toward European integration and the level of trust in the state institutions changed considerably in 2014 and 2015, and these social changes will probably create the new environment for conservative mobilization.

As already indicated, the key slogan of Ukrainian conservative rhetoric has been “back to tradition.” The concept of “traditional values” has been used as an ideological marker that is not critically perceived, for example, the numerous contradictions between the “Perfect Mother” cult (*Berehynya*) as a national Ukrainian tradition and the reality of mothering practices in pre-modern Ukrainian society are not addressed. The notion of “traditional values” in the PCU’s rhetoric assumes the idealization of the family in pre-modern Ukraine, and the fetishizing of Christian values, traditional (patriarchal) gender roles, as well as the high morality and spirituality of Ukrainians. At the same time, the solidification of independent Ukrainian

national identity is not an explicit part of the PCU's activities because they have a strong affiliation to Russian and Orthodox political groups and culture. For instance, the PCU mainly uses the Russian language on its websites and publications, it actively involves experts from Russia for participation in its actions, and texts by Russian conservative organizations and activists are placed on the PCU website.¹¹ The PCU is active mainly in the Russian-speaking central, eastern, and southern regions of Ukraine and enlists the Orthodox Church's (which is under the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate) support as well.

In sociological discourse, the term "traditional values" means the orientation toward family, health, work, and material well-being, which are considered as opposite to individualistic and emancipatory values of freedom, personal independence, and self-realization. Applying this interpretation, sociological research confirms the resurgence of traditional values in Ukraine (Ruchka and Naumova 2013, 292–293). In 2013, 57 percent of Ukrainians expressed their support for "people who firmly uphold stable, life-affirming customs, traditions and rules" (ibid, 294).

Modernization produces social changes and development that enhance the importance of individual freedom and self-realization. Modernization and its accompanying value changes are characterized by a shift from traditional to secular-rational values, and the modification of the values of survival to self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). However, modernization and the values of self-expression do not simply appear as a consequence of time passing. Ukrainians' value orientations did not change significantly from 1991 to 2009. The persistently most highly ranked "basic values" are family, health, work, and material well-being (Savelyev 2013). In the context of neotraditionalist discourse, conservative parents' movements are successful because they use political means to create a false alternative between tradition and modernization and play on the fears of modernization (Tradicija kak bezuslovnoe blago 2013).

The influence of religion, which could be seen as an important cultural background of parents' conservatism and part of boundedness for our analysis here, remains quite controversial in post-Soviet Ukraine. Religion in Ukraine has previously undergone a process of laicization similar to other European countries, with Ukrainians becoming more secular and individual-centered. Still, in 2008, Ukraine ranked seventh in terms of people's religious identification among 23 countries (Parashchevin 2009, 13). Over 70 percent of Ukrainians gave a positive answer to the following question: "Are you

affiliated with a particular religion or belief?" In comparison, only 47.1 percent of Russians gave an identical answer. The vast majority of Ukrainians (91%) describe themselves as Christian believers. Of this group, 39 percent belong to the three major Orthodox Churches (Moscow Patriarchate, Kiev Patriarchate, and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church), 44 percent indicated that they had no affiliation with a particular church, and 8 percent were affiliated with Greek Catholics (ibid, 21).

The impact of religious affiliation is highly significant in some regions, such as western Ukraine, where many of the self-proclaimed religious people (31%) belong to the Greek Catholic Church (ibid, 22). Unlike the eastern part of Ukraine, the western part is characterized by historically higher levels of religiosity in terms of both people's religious affiliations and practices (Parashchevin 2009). Sociological surveys show Greek Orthodox Catholics as more unwavering in their faith in God, with a higher likelihood of believing in all components of Christian doctrine, a greater trust in the church, and more willingness to rely on religious leaders' intervention in political life in comparison to Orthodox believers. It should be noted that the western part of Ukraine has also a significantly lower crime rate (Informatsiyno-analitychnyi tsentr 2013b), lower number of abortions (Informatsiyno-analitychnyi tsentr 2013a), lower incidence of HIV/AIDS (*VIL-infektsiya v Ukraini* 2014, 6), and is characterized by a higher birth rate (Panchenko and Krikunenko 2015), which may be interpreted as reflecting the continuing influence of religion and traditions.

In addition to religion, the other significant cultural resource and option of "resonance" for the Ukrainian parental movement's conservatism regards the low level of trust in the state. The activities of the PCU are directed toward protecting children from the state and its institutes; for example, from juvenile justice, sex education in school, and mandatory vaccination. This explains wide resonance to the PCU's activities. In 2013, 67 percent of Ukrainians said they distrusted the president, 77 percent said that they did not trust the Ukrainian Parliament, 72 percent distrusted the state government, and 66 percent did not trust the local government (Tarasenko and Sakada 2013, 75). Eighty percent of Ukrainians distrust the courts and the law enforcement agencies. From 2006 to 2013, only the level of trust in non-governmental organizations and charity funds increased slightly (Stepanenko 2013, 124). Distrust in the state and its various institutions provides an important background to the activities of the Ukrainian parents' conservative movement. According to

the conservative interpretation, juvenile justice is a state's intervention aimed at gaining full control over families. In this view, the juvenile justice agencies can inspect any family under the guise of childcare and label any behaviors as socially dangerous to impose state's control over family.

The two social institutions that Ukrainians trust most are the media and a church. In 2015, sociological surveys indicated that 58.8 percent of Ukrainian people trusted religious authorities (Ukrayintsi naybil'she doviryayut' 2016). With a country undergoing profound social changes over the past twenty years, the church is trusted more than other institutions because it offers not only material resources such as networking options, but also cultural coherence, of importance also to conservative parents' mobilization.

Conclusion: The New Configuration of Political Space of the Parents' Conservative Activism in Ukraine

Parenthood in contemporary Ukraine is turning into a form of social citizenship. Since the emergence of the independent Ukrainian state in 1991, the state-level and broad political demand for parenthood as a civic, demographic, national, and patriotic duty has become a reality. Parents—in practice mostly mothers—are recruited to solve what authorities see as demographic problems, for the transmission of national cultural values and traditions and for the tasks of nation-state building. Along with parenthood, childhood has also become politicized. The notion of “children's vulnerability” emerged as the most fertile soil for a moral panic, it became a focus of public and political consolidation, and served as an argument even in geopolitical discussions concerning the entry of Ukraine into the European Union.

The conservative parents' activism in Ukraine has well-established material, cultural, human, financial, and organizational resources both domestically and internationally. These resources have served the movement to impede social changes concerning the European integration of Ukraine. On the one hand, the conservative parents' initiatives are a form of parental (active) citizenship. On the other hand, these activities have led to “moral panics” concerning the “threat to children” from the European Union and the “morally degraded” West instead of serious public discussions about childcare as an important public value.

The activities of conservative forces in Ukraine, including parents' activism from 2010 to 2013, were supported by (1) the governments' attempt to

balance “keeping national traditions” and the modernization of the country with the eventual aim of integrating with the EU, (2) contradictions between geopolitical orientations toward the EU and the Eurasian Customs Union, and (3) the controversial and inconsequential character of Ukrainian gender equality policy.

After the *Maidan* Revolution (November 2013–February 2014), the configuration of political opportunities for conservative mobilization in Ukraine changed. Despite public concern about the possible legitimization of extremist forces in the new Ukrainian parliament after the revolution, neither the far-right party *Svoboda*, which had been elected to Parliament during the previous session, nor *Pravy sektor* (The Right Sector) managed to enter Rada in 2014 by party lists. These parties' representatives have only six directly elected district (*okruh*) members out of 423 deputies in the Rada. In the official discourse this development means a loss of political legitimacy for the far-right forces as a stronghold of Ukrainian conservatism.¹² Throughout 2014 and until early 2015, neither Ukrainian nor pro-Russian conservatives undertook any notable political action and they did not sponsor any bills on family and parenthood. In January 2015, the bill on “prohibition of homosexuality propaganda” was finally removed from the political agenda.¹³ With the background of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the discourse on European integration strengthened in the Central and Western regions of Ukraine, which reduced the political opportunities of the anti-EU and pro-Russian PCU. The *Maidan* revolution and the armed conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine have led to a new round of civic society activities including parental initiatives, such as *Materi Maydanu* (Mothers of Maidan) and the movement of Soldiers' Mothers. Hopefully, future research will show the new areas, directions, and trends of such initiatives as well as provide an answer to the question whether new actors will engage with conservative forces, such as the PCU, and what their potential will be for social change in contemporary Ukraine.

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Notes

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1. Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich planned to sign the association with the EU but did not do it. He said that Ukraine did not refuse to sign an association agreement but offered the format of trilateral negotiations with Ukraine, EU, and Russia. This caused the protests in Ukraine known as “EuroMaidan” (or *Maidan*).

2. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://rodkom.org/цели-и-задачи-мы-объединились-чтобы>.

3. It is hard to identify the real publishers of these brochures because they include no information about the date of publication and other requirements for any print production. For instance, “Gender with its warts: Through gender dictation to the dictation of homosexuality” was published by “All-Ukrainian Parents’ Movement.” All of these brochures are available at the PCU website. At least two of them (“Juvenile Justice. How to Protect Oneself” and “Analysis of Concepts and Programs of Sex Education in the Educational System of Ukraine”) were published directly by the PCU.

4. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://rodkom.org/цели-и-задачи-мы-объединились-чтобы>.

5. The Ukrainian law passed in 2005. It is remarkable that the title of the law does not include the term “gender equality” but “providing the equal rights and opportunities for women and men.” I suppose that these changes were also induced from below and Ukrainian women’s non-government organizations were at the helm of pressuring the government to accomplish these legal changes.

6. The first installment of this payment (10,320 UAH) is paid immediately after the birth of the child and the rest is paid in equal parts of 860 UAH a month for 36 months.

7. This bill was proposed in 2012 by Yevhen Tsarkov (Communist Party), Kateryna Lukyanova and Liliya Hryhorovych (right-wing political alliance *Nasha Ukrayina* and *Narodna Samooborona*), Pavlo Unhuryan (*Batktivshchyna*), Yuliya Kovalevska, and Taras Chornovil (a pro-Yanukovich party *Partiya rehioniv*).

8. This website is not officially connected to the PCU, but there are links to it in brochures promoted on the website of PCU. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://stopgender.wordpress.com/>

9. Detailed information on the WCF is available on network’s internet site: <http://worldcongress.ru/english/static-en/152-world-congress-of-families.html>

10. <http://worldcongress.ru/english/142-international-parents-forum-takes-place-in-yalta.html>.

11. See, for instance, (accessed July 1, 2015) <http://rodkom.org/2014/6067.html#more-6067>.

12. During the *Maidan* protests, the overall style of the average citizens’ thinking and political sympathies took a sharp turn to the right-wing ideas (Mayerchik 2014). As of 2015, a right-wing discourse is the dominant one in state and media discourses in western and central Ukraine. Thus, in June 2015 the Ukrainian Ministry of Education passed the “Conception of National and Patriotic Education of Children and Youth,” the content of which could be regarded as militaristic and nationalistic (Serhiyenko 2015). The new political, security, and

cultural context, as well as the new configuration of political space, will probably create the new background for conservative mobilization in Ukraine.

13. Today, political and everyday attitudes toward homosexuality are often hostile. Despite current Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's voiced support for LGBT rights, as shown in public statement that he does not see any reason to prohibit organization of the Gay Pride in 2015 because to demonstrate is a constitutional right of every citizen of Ukraine, Gay Pride in Kyiv was attacked by far-right nationalist groups (see Interfax Religion, June 5, 2015, accessed July 31, 2015, <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12071>).

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