



Agenda Europe versus The Madrid Declaration

The Clash of Ultra-conservatism and Liberalism in Gynecological Clinics

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Introduction

A spectre is haunting Europe: the spectre of ultra-conservatism. In 2013, the most conservative, traditionalist Christian groups united into a single body called Agenda Europe, a pan-European, ultra-conservative Christian network that organizes an annual non-public summit in different European capitals. Its manifesto, "Restoring the Natural Order," details a worldview that aims to rewind sexual and reproductive freedoms in all European countries, and specifically for certain categories of people including women, adolescents, and the LGBTQIA community. In answer, the European Society of Contraception and Reproductive Health released a position paper known as "The Madrid Declaration" in 2019.

The Manifesto

"Restoring the Natural Order" (referred to from here on as The Manifesto) serves as a guideline for rolling back the progress achieved in LGBTQIA and women's rights regarding free choice, including restrictions on abortion, prenatal diagnostics and infertility diagnostics and treatments. Agenda Europe is opposed not only to abortion but to all forms of (artificial) contraception, including sterilization. Further, The Manifesto's goal is to pursue the cancellation of comprehensive sexuality education in schools and making divorce proceedings more complicated. The Manifesto is in Europe proactively implemented – it had been a source of at least 18 political initiatives both at national and European level.

The Declaration

In contrast, "The Madrid Declaration" highlights the fact that sexual and reproductive health are integral human rights. It defends evidence-based medicine and the importance of making contraception available throughout Europe. Underlining the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, it calls for wide access to legal and safe abortion and sterilization, prenatal diagnostics, infertility diagnostics and treatments, and proactive prevention and therapy of sexually transmitted infections. Last but not least, the Declaration draws attention to the unique needs of particular marginalized and stigmatized populations (LGBTQIA, migrants, people with disabilities, older people, and sex workers).

The Clash

Criminalizing abortion, adultery, same-sex relationships, sex work, etc. means punishing deeply personal decisions that results in a negative effect on sexual and reproductive health. The efforts of Agenda Europe also undermine open society and liberal democracy based on tolerance, human rights and secular laws. Threats to democracy often target the rights of women and minorities first. Metaphorically speaking, the clash of ultra-conservative and liberal forces over the future of Europe is currently raging in gynecological clinics (but not only there). For this reason, gynecologists and health care providers generally should be familiar with the existence of this network. Christians for whom compassion is the cornerstone of their faith should be concerned that fringe parts of their communities work hard to impose their personal beliefs on others while claiming to speak on behalf of all Christians.

Conclusion

Sexual and reproductive health is cost-effective and both populations and states benefit from it. However, sexual and reproductive rights are not easy to gain but easy to lose. While much has been accomplished in the realm of sexual and reproductive freedoms throughout Europe, much is now at stake. As health care providers, we need to take a stand and fight for the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of the full scope of sexual and reproductive health. We need to take a stand for the sake of the physical and mental health of both our patients in particular and Europe's populations in general. Our positions contributions will help to define what world we help to create and maintain, whether a world of freedom, tolerance, and respect towards each other's different personal worldviews and needs – in other words, a world without fear to express our differences – OR its precise opposite.