

When norms clash

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Propositions for the manuscript When Norms Clash: How Polish Liberal Civil Society Contested Government Standards for the Rule of Law and Human Rights from 2015-2022

1. The European Union (EU) is said to be experiencing a 'crisis of values' in which its fundamental norms, like the rule of law and human rights are internally contested.
2. These acts of contestation are especially apparent in countries like Poland, which saw a significant decline in the rule of law, reproductive rights, and LGBT+ rights under the Law and Justice (PiS) party from 2015-2022.
3. As a result of insufficient EU intervention and pressure from PiS, liberal civil society organisations (CSOs) in Poland employed a host of complex strategies to contest government standards for the rule of law, reproductive rights, and LGBT+ rights.
4. To legitimise their contestation of government standards, these CSOs rooted their arguments in the binding treaties and agreements that Poland had signed up to, positioning their concerns as matters of the rule of law and human rights.
5. The ability of CSOs to invoke various laws and treaties in normative arguments reflects the recent history of Polish CSOs' efforts to claim new rights after EU accession.
6. Studies of the history of civil society in Poland or Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) must regularly venture past the communist period to understand how the impact of EU accession (even years or decades later) greatly influenced CSOs in CEE and their access to new structures for rights claiming.
7. This interdisciplinary work, rooted in the growing field of Contemporary History, makes visible the ways in which various groups, like PiS and civil society work to shape narratives about their present to establish their own vision of the past.
8. The recommendations in this work make clear that if the EU is sincere about its concerns regarding norm violations in Poland, it must seriously engage CSOs there in meaningful collaboration, provide them with adequate funding for their efforts, and consult civic actors in transparent and results-oriented interventions.
9. Petting cows and long walks go a long way towards remedying the stress of a PhD.