

International institutions and normative change: The legalisation of abortion in Ireland



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List of Abbreviations

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HSE	Health Service Executive
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	International Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLAC	Pro-Life Amendment Campaign
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States

Abstract

This thesis seeks to answer how the promotion of norms by international institutions can contribute to normative change. Based on influential theories of norm acceptance, plus the notion of ‘norm antipreneurs’, a theoretical model is applied to explain the breakthrough of norm acceptance concerning the legalisation of abortion in Ireland. The course and consequences of three pivotal cases in the abortion debate are discussed; the 1992 X-case, the 2012 Savita-case, and the 2018-referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment. It is argued that norm entrepreneurs succeeded in pushing towards normative change, because of the (1) ongoing promotion of the norm and continuing pressure by transnational advocacy networks and domestic opposition; (2) the need for a change of abortion policies due to the heavily public-debated X-case and Savita-case; and (3) support of political parties. The drive towards a more liberal abortion regime was fuelled by recommendations from independent advice commissions, national and international media attention, the extensive use of social media, and the all-encompassing reach of protest and campaign materials in the public sphere.

1. Introduction

On the 25th of May 2018, a referendum was held in Ireland to ask the opinion of the Irish electorate as to whether they would approve the passing of a bill on the legalisation of abortion (BBC News, 2018). With a majority of 66.4%, the outcome of the referendum was ‘Yes’; and a constitutional amendment was made (Field, 2018). Abortion became legal up to 12 weeks, and later if the pregnancy threatens the life or health of the woman, in cases of emergency, or fatal foetal abnormalities; determined by at least two medical practitioners (Oireachtas, 2018).

With the recent wave of legalisation of same-sex marriage in countries as Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), the passing of the bill seems to fit the picture of greater acceptance towards gender-related human rights, such as LGBTQ and women’s rights (Lee & Mutz, 2018). However, across the Western world, abortion still seems a highly contested subject. Whilst most European laws legalise abortion under conditions of risks to the woman’s physical and mental health, social and economic reasons, or on request; some

countries only permit it under limited circumstances, including Poland, or even prohibit it in general, such as Malta (United Nations [UN], 2019). Ireland seems an outlier in a similar environment, as almost all of its neighbouring countries have legalised abortion (UN, 2019). In regard to abortion, why is there still such a divergence concerning reproductive women's rights? 'Women's rights' seem to be accepted by liberal democracies, so why is the norm not incorporated in all European domestic legislation?

Research has shown that high levels of religiosity, together with Catholicism as the country's main religion, strongly associate with restrictive abortion policies (Minkenberg, 2002). As religion is a prominent factor in most European countries that have not legalised abortion, it seems puzzling why Ireland, as a Catholic country, was successful indeed. The main explanatory variables for restrictive abortion regimes, religiosity and Catholicism, remained relatively stable in Ireland; so how did the shift in policy towards reproductive norms occur (Minkenberg, 2002)?

There are also possible other explanations for the legalisation of abortion in Ireland. People's resources increase alongside economic prosperity, suggesting strong links with higher social demands from the government (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). Could this factor have played a role in Ireland? Currently, Ireland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is among the highest in Europe (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019). Ireland experienced its economic boom, also known as the 'Celtic Tiger' in the mid-1990s / early 2000s (Rod, 2014). If one expects more social demands resulting from a better economy, it seems puzzling that it took Ireland two decades to realise the final state of legalisation. Countries as the Netherlands and Belgium, who have comparable GDP per capita numbers, managed to do so much earlier on, as abortion was legalised in respectively 1984 and 1990 (IMF, 2019; Abortion in Ireland, 2019). Whilst theories on religion and economic prosperity do not succeed in explaining the legalisation, the question arises which theory is then best applicable?

Theories on normative change (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Risse & Sikkink, 1999) argue that international institutions can play an important role in the promotion and diffusion of norms at both international and domestic levels. This has led to the formulation of the following research question: *How can the promotion of norms by international institutions contribute to norm acceptance?* To operationalise and analyse this question, it is narrowed down. By using the puzzling character of the Irish case, this thesis seeks to answer the question: *Why did reproductive norms in Ireland fail to be accepted and implemented into domestic legislation at first, and why did it succeed to do so eventually?*

With this research project I hope to contribute to the existing literature on international institutions' influence on norm socialisation. By applying a theoretical framework to the Irish case, based on influential theories on norm acceptance, I hope to gain more insights in the processes that enable normative change. As the research question helps to understand the factors leading to norm acceptance, it might be relevant for countries that are dealing with the same issue Ireland did.

In this research I focus on the particular role of international institutions on norm acceptance. As this is just one of the many aspects and facets of the puzzle, my conclusions may only shed partial light on the norm-acceptance process.

The set-up of this thesis is as follows. First, some broad theories on international institutions and norms are discussed. Then, I take a deeper look into several models and frameworks on normative change. Based on these existing models I develop my own theoretical model, which I apply to three cases in the Irish abortion debate. I then seek to explain why normative change did not happen before and how reproductive rights managed to get implemented domestically eventually. I argue that transnational advocacy networks played an important role in finalising legal abortion. In the conclusion, I mention some implications and limitations of my research and provide recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Institutions

International institutions are central to today's multilateral system (Ruggie, 1992). They continue to expand; each concerned with a different issue, scope, or mandate. In advance, an important distinction has to be made between 'international organisation' (IO) and 'international institution', which are often equated with each other. An IO has a few defining characteristics: at least three member-states who delegate some of their decision-making power; a permanent bureaucracy; and member states meeting at least once a year (Mingst, 2019). Institutions are much broader than IOs. They can also embody international regimes, norms, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Duffield, 2007). This thesis focuses on institutions, because they cover more different types and have a broader scope and reach.

There is no clear consensus on the precise definition or expected role of international institutions. This perspective highly depends on the analytical lens through which the phenomenon is perceived. For instance, realism assumes that the international system is characterised by "structural implications of international anarchy, leading to strong tendencies towards conflict", and that "the distribution of power between states defines the key dynamics of the international system" (Heywood, 2014: 85). Because states are seen as the main actors, acting aligned with their own interests, international institutions portray a subordinate role. Mearsheimer (1994), for example, argues that international institutions are designed based on the demands and self-interest of dominant states, granting institutions with little autonomous power in practice.

Liberalists also acknowledge the anarchic character of the international system. Unlike realists, however, they argue that this system can be based on harmony and balance, instead of conflict. Heywood (2014: 85) argues that "the tendency towards peace, cooperation, and integration results from factors as economic interdependence, brought about by free trade,

spread of democracy and construction of international organisations”. For liberalists, institutions function as ‘mediators’, facilitating cooperation between states on issues of common interests (Heywood, 2014: 70). In line with realists, liberal institutionalists believe that IOs receive little autonomous power from states (Koremenos, Lipson & Snidal, 2001).

Critical theorists have challenged these grand theories, criticising the “norms, values, and assumptions on which the global status quo is based” (Heywood, 2014: 85). One of the dominant critical theories is social constructivism. Its main belief is that there is “no objective social or political reality independent of our understanding to it”, and that people ‘construct’ the social world and act according to these constructions (Heywood, 2014: 75).

Constructivism criticises realism and liberalism for neglecting the independent character of institutions. Constructivists suggest they are autonomous actors that shape and are shaped by the social world around them (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999). In his study, Duffield (2007) tries to come up with a definition of international institutions that acknowledges the shortcomings of previous definitions formulated by realists and liberalists. He argues that constructivists focus on the role of “ideas, norms, knowledge, culture, and argument in politics, stressing in particular the role of collectively held or ‘intersubjective’ ideas and understandings on social life” (Duffield, 2007: 6). He then defines *international institutions* as: “relatively stable sets of related constitutive, regulative, and procedural norms and rules that pertain to the international system, the actors in the system (including states as well as non-state entities) and their activities” (Duffield, 2007: 8). This definition is used for the maintaining part of this thesis, particularly due to its broad scope and vision on institutions, the autonomous institutional character, and its inclusion of norms.

2.2 Norms

Norms have been widely researched since the emergence of the regime project and constructivism in the 1980s (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Many scholars (Risse & Sikkink, 1999; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Duffield, 2007) have studied the ways norms are promoted, how they change, and how they are internalised domestically. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 891) have developed a definition for *norm* that has been widely used by scholars since: “a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity”. A norm propagates some normative guideline in relation to behaviour. Norms can order and constrain the behaviour of existing actors or constitute social actors and determine their capabilities (Duffield, 2007). In this way, norms function as a guide to structure the behaviour of the social world.

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) have developed the Life Cycle model to explain how norms evolve and how they get accepted following a certain ‘life cycle’ pattern. They argue that *norm entrepreneurs* are vital for putting an emergent norm on the international agenda. Norm entrepreneurs actively contribute to building norms by “having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behaviour in their community, and by calling attention to certain issues using language that names, interprets, and dramatizes them” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998: 896). Norm entrepreneurs work through organisational platforms to help establish the norm at the international level. These organisations provide knowledge and information to influence the behaviour of important actors (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Therefore, norm entrepreneurs are perceived as relevant players for promoting international norms.

An expansion of their work is Risse’s and Sikkink’s (1999) research on the conditions under which international human rights norms are internalised in domestic practices. They developed a theory to understand how international norms can lead to changes in domestic behaviour. In order to do so, they developed models to illustrate the process of norms

socialisation and to explain processes of human rights change (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). These models are discussed in more detail in the theoretical framework.

2.3 Norm promotion

According to Risse and Sikkink (1999), transnational advocacy networks are the most important norm entrepreneurs in promoting human rights norms. They define *transnational advocacy networks* as “those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 18). They argue that transnational human rights networks play a pivotal part in promoting a certain norm by “putting repressive regimes on the international agenda; starting processes of shaming and moral consciousness-raising; and empowering initially weak domestic opposition” (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 5). One of the main mechanisms to pressure actors is the method of framing. Framing processes give meaning to certain issues or events, guide action, and organise experience (Joachim, 2003: 250). Framing helps putting a norm on the agenda by “defining problems, developing solutions or policies, and by politicization” (Joachim, 2003: 248).

On the topic of norm promotion, Abbott and Snidal (2000) look into the influence of private actors, focusing on the promotion of legal international agreements. They claim that interaction between pressure groups shapes international outcomes and national preferences (Abbott & Snidal, 2000). These actors create the main body of new international agreements - *but* can in fact also resist new agreements in order to maintain the normative status quo (Abbott & Snidal, 2000).

This latter remark brings us to an important critique by Bloomfield (2016), who argues that the models of Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) and Risse & Sikkink (1999) focus too much on liberal norms and values, and on successful cases of norm acceptance. He claims too much

emphasis is put on the role of norm entrepreneurs, whilst neglecting the fact that norm entrepreneurs are also capable of resisting normative change (Bloomfield, 2016). With this in regard, he introduces the term *norm antipreneurs*, who instead of promoting an emerging norm, try to defend the normative status quo (Bloomfield, 2016: 311). They can do so by undermining the efforts of norm entrepreneurs, or by undermining the norm itself (Bloomfield, 2016: 323). One of their main mechanisms is ‘counter-framing’ (Joachim, 2003). The notion of norm antipreneurs is relevant, as it sheds a light on the kind of resistance norm entrepreneurs might experience when trying to promote an emergent norm.

The concepts ‘antipreneur’ and ‘entrepreneur’ often seem to carry normative value. For further concept-definition; it is assumed that at some point in time there is a general consensus on a norm. If this norm starts changing, progressing, and becoming deviant from its original meaning; the consensus might shift towards the acceptance of the changing norm. Regardless of the actual content of the norm, the actors wanting to stimulate the change, are considered norm entrepreneurs. The actors wanting to maintain the normative status quo and retain the norm’s original meaning, are norm antipreneurs. The concept norm antipreneur should be regarded without normative connotation. In practice however, antipreneurs are often portrayed by conservative actors, wary of progression and liberalisation.

An example is the portrayal of the Roman Catholic Church and linked religious organisations as norm antipreneurs concerning reproductive rights. Relating to the previous discussed literature, the Catholic Church is an international institution, independent from states; and Christian activist groups are similar to transnational advocacy networks. However, unlike most international institutions, the Roman Catholic Church has a seat in the General Assembly of the UN as a Permanent Observer (Heger Boyle, Golden & Liao, 2017). This means it participates in all meetings and conferences of the UN, but has no official vote. In their study, Heger Boyle, Golden & Liao (2017: 406), argue that “the Church has played a consistent and

relatively effective role in blocking the liberalisation of international law and policy on gender issues”. This resistance towards liberalisation shows that in order to assess the success of promoting and diffusing international norms, it is highly important to, besides the role of norm entrepreneurs, also consider the role of antipreneurs.

3. Theoretical framework

Building on the general theories on international institutions and norms, the theoretical framework looks into some specific models that explain the processes concerning norm acceptance and normative change. The dependent variable in this research project is ‘norm acceptance’. This acceptance occurs if the norm is in any way adopted in domestic policies or legislation, and there is little contestation on its meaning. The independent variables ‘norm antipreneurs’ and ‘norm entrepreneurs’ (consisting mostly of international institutions, in particular transnational advocacy networks) engage in ‘norm promotion’; either to maintain the normative status quo, or to pursue normative change. For these variables I will follow the definitions discussed in the literature review.

The models of Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) and Risse & Sikkink (1999) focus on how norm entrepreneurs enable normative change. Missing in their framework, however, is the important role of norm antipreneurs, who try to resist efforts towards normative change. In order to fill this gap I have expanded their work (Table 1) by combining the theories; trying to explain how normative change can be restricted by norm antipreneurs and how this can be overcome.

3.1 Life Cycle Model

Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) developed the ‘Life Cycle’ model to explain how norms evolve following a patterned ‘life cycle’. They claim that a critical mass of actors can create a ‘tipping

point' for the emergent norm after which it becomes accepted (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The model consists of three stages: norm emergence, norm acceptance, and norm internalisation. The tipping point occurs between stage one and two. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the first stage, norm entrepreneurs play a decisive role in promoting the emergent norm. Before the norm moves forward to stage two, it needs support of state actors and has to be institutionalised by some extent. By means of pressure from the outside, the norm gets accepted at the domestic level in the second stage. In the third stage, the norm is so widely accepted that it is internalised and no longer subject to debate (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This model is influential, mostly due to its notion of a tipping point, which will be further explained in the next section.

3.2 Spiral Model

An expansion of the Life Cycle model is the 'Spiral Model', developed in Risse's and Sikkink's (1999) study on norm socialisation. Their main argument is that "the diffusion of international norms in the human rights area crucially depends on the establishment and sustainability of networks among domestic and transnational actors who manage to link up with international regimes, to alert Western public opinion and Western governments" (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 5). Transnational advocacy networks are thus essential players in promoting norms. Linking this to the previous model, one can argue that transnational advocacy networks are vital for creating a critical mass of actors which enables norm acceptance.

The 'Spiral Model' consists of five phases in which transnational advocacy networks contribute to finalising norm socialisation. Phase one includes the 'repression and activation of the network' (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 22). In this phase, the domestic societal opposition is not strong enough to challenge the government. If Bloomfield's (2016) perspective is added to this model, one can assume that the normative consensus leans more towards the ideologies of norm

antipreneurs than norm entrepreneurs in this phase. Risse and Sikkink (1999) argue that the norm-violating state can be put on the international agenda if the transnational advocacy network manages to provide sufficient information on the situation.

In phase two, 'denial', the norm-violating state is put on the international human rights agenda. The target state often reacts in denial, refusing to accept the norm or to change its national practices (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). In this case, one can assume that norm antipreneurs are still dominant, but are experiencing more outside-pressure. They argue that the transition between phase two and three is the hardest, mainly depending on the strength of the advocacy network and pressure the target state is experiencing internationally (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). By combining arguments by Finnemore & Sikkink (1998), Risse & Sikkink (1999) and Bloomfield (2016), one can assume that if norm entrepreneurs want to continue promoting the emergent norm, they need to frame the issue in a certain way to gain support and legitimacy over the norm antipreneurs. This framing could support creating a critical mass of actors that drives towards the acceptance of the norm.

In phase three, international pressure eventually leads to 'tactical concessions' at the domestic level (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 25). Norm entrepreneurs are seemingly slowly overtaking the normative status quo. The first three phases of the Spiral Model have strong similarities with stage one of the Life Cycle model, in which institutions are decisive for putting an emergent norm on the international agenda (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

In phase four, 'prescriptive status', governments seem to accept the validity of the norm, for instance by ratifying international human rights treaties or institutionalising the norm in domestic legislation (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 29). This moment between phase three and four can be compared to the 'tipping point' of the Life Cycle model. During this phase, norm entrepreneurs seemingly have overcome the dominant ideology, and the critical mass has accepted the emergent norm.

In the last phase, ‘rule-consistent behavior’, the final state of socialisation can be achieved if advocacy networks continue their pressure and the norm is fully incorporated in the domestic system (Risse & Sikkink, 1999: 31). This can be compared to the last stage of the Life Cycle model, in which the norm becomes internalised domestically (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the earlier phases of the Spiral Model, international institutions are most crucial in putting the norm on the international agenda, pressuring the target state, and supporting the domestic opposition; whereas at the later stages, domestic networks become more relevant (Risse & Sikkink, 1999).

3.3 Theoretical model

Based on the theories (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Risse & Sikkink, 1999; Bloomfield, 2016) mentioned above, I have developed my own theoretical model (Table 1). Four different phases and several indicators are formulated concerning relevant actors in norm promotion; required action for norm acceptance; and possible outcomes. This model functions as a guideline for conducting the research for the different cases in the empirical analysis. I seek to explain how norm entrepreneurs can enable normative change by overcoming the dominant ideology of norm antipreneurs. With this contribution, I hope to provide a better understanding on the establishment, occurrence, and development of processes of normative change.

Table 1. Norm acceptance

	Important actors	Required action for norm acceptance	Outcomes
<i>Phase 1</i>	International institutions	Norm entrepreneurs need to mobilise internationally through organizational platforms to gain support for the norm and to undermine status quo of norm antipreneurs.	Norm is put on the international agenda.
<i>Phase 2</i>	International institutions and domestic opposition	Strong transnational advocacy networks need to frame issue in such a way it gains legitimacy over norm antipreneurs. Critical mass of important actors needs to be mobilised to create 'tipping point'.	Outside pressures lead to concessions at the domestic level. Domestic opposition is winning domain from norm antipreneurs.
<i>Phase 3</i>	Domestic pressure groups and international institutions	Outside and inside pressures demanding normative change and incorporation of norm in domestic politics.	National government institutionalised the norm in one way or another. Norm entrepreneurs are more dominant than norm antipreneurs.
<i>Phase 4</i>	Domestic pressure groups and international institutions	Continuing pressure to make sure norm is fully accepted in practice.	Norm is fully internalised and no longer subjected to debate.

Author's own model, based on: 'Life Cycle Model' by Finnemore & Sikkink (1998); 'Spiral Model' by Risse & Sikkink (1999); and Bloomfield's notion of 'norm antipreneurs' (2016).

4. Methodology

This research is qualitative by nature; applying the method of process tracing to a cross-case study. This method is often used for within-case analysis to examine relationships and causal mechanisms between dependent and independent variables. It can contribute "both to describing political and social phenomena and evaluating causal claims" (Collier, 2011: 823). It also "enables strong causal inferences to be made about how causal processes work in real-world cases" (Beach, 2017). However, because it is often focused on small N-studies, it is hard to generalise the findings. In order to generalise, process tracing studies need to be coupled with comparative case studies. Although this limitation needs to be taken into account, a major advantage of the method is its in-depth approach, resulting into rich amounts of insights of a

particular phenomenon. Also, large N-studies often work towards explaining a causal link, even though this link is not always present. Small N-studies might provide better interpretations of possible relationships between variables.

4.1 Case selection

The selection of abortion in Ireland as a case is based on some puzzling factors. It does not seem to represent the expectations of economic prosperity, as this suggests legalisation would have been established earlier on, in line with the country's economic boom (Risse & Sikkik, 1999). Also, as high levels of religiosity and Catholicism seem coupled with restrictive abortion regimes, it is interesting that Ireland succeeded in realising more liberal abortion policies (Minkenberg, 2002). Abortion remains contested worldwide, with many women affected by its restrictions. Gaining more insights in the way human rights norms are incorporated in domestic legislation is thus of relevance.

Furthermore, regarding this specific research, the Irish case is selected because it seems to have experienced normative change after the 2018 referendum on legalising abortion. However, before this period, it can be argued there were other windows of opportunity in which legalisation could have been realised. By applying my theoretical framework to the literature, documents, and actions regarding the legalisation process, I look into the development of three pivotal moments in the Irish abortion debate and try to understand why legalisation was not accomplished in the first few instances and why it did eventually.

The three cases that will be studied are the 1992 *X-case*; the 2012 *Savita Halappanavar-case*; and the 2018 *referendum* that realised the legalisation of abortion. The aftermath of the X-case resulted in multiple referendums on abortion, including the right to travel for abortion (Mullally, 2005). The abortion issue became the main focus of international debate again after Savita Halappanavar died of complications of miscarriage, after being denied an abortion.

These cases and their consequences are discussed by using a limited process tracing method. The consequences for the perception of the norm, the role of international institutions as norm entrepreneurs, framing methods, reactions of norm antipreneurs, domestic institutional changes, and possible norm acceptance or socialisation are examined.

4.2 Operationalisation

For each case, the model is followed to examine the process of possible norm acceptance. For phase one, I zoom in on the efforts of organised norm entrepreneurs on putting the norm on the agenda by promoting it internationally, for instance at UN conferences. For phase two, I research how the issue is framed and how this can possibly lead to domestic concessions. Indicators of the latter are referendums on the issue or minor adjustments in policy or legislation. Concerning framing, I examine if the right to abortion is framed through a religious lens or a human rights lens. For phase three, I look if the continuing pressure by advocacy groups leads to institutionalisation of the norm in domestic legislation or policies. I review this pressure by following the activity of these advocacy networks, and the perception of the debate by news outlets, policy makers, and public opinion. Concerning norm adoption, I focus on referendums, policies, and major adjustments in legislation. Finally, for phase four, I examine if the norm is internalised researching the prominence of the current debate on abortion, the contestation of the norm, and the functioning of the new law in practice.

4.3 Data collection

The primary data used for this research project is derived from international and domestic legislation and policies, such as referendums and international conferences; speeches by relevant actors; and opinion polls. The secondary data consists of journal articles, newspapers, and books. The majority of journal articles focusing on general theories originates from

International Relations-journals. The more case-specific literature mostly stems from European scholars, particularly Irish academics.

Concerning the time frame, I look at relevant events and debates shortly before and after the cases. For the first case this is approximately between 1991-1993, the second 2011-2013, and the third 2016-2019. More broadly, I limit my analysis to the period 1980-2019. This period includes everything between the 1983 constitutional amendment which illegalised abortion, and the 2018 referendum which undid the constitutional amendment. Furthermore, the 1980s portray a period in which transnational advocacy networks on women's rights became active in international forums and conferences.

5. Empirical analysis

For the analysis, I examine the development of norm acceptance by applying the theoretical model to three influential cases in the Irish abortion debate. I specifically look into the role of the Roman Catholic Church and religious organisations as norm antipreneurs. Transnational advocacy networks on human rights and women's rights pressure groups can function as important norm entrepreneurs. The Irish Government can portray both roles.

As mentioned before, to explain the process of legalised abortion, I limited my research, focusing mainly on the role of international and domestic institutions. I am aware of other factors that can contribute to explaining this process, but those are not the primary focus of this thesis.

5.1 The normative status quo

For many years, the Irish normative status quo concerning abortion received little contestation and people agreed: abortion is and *should* be illegal (Reilly, 2007). The position of Irish women was defined in the 1937 Constitution, drafted after British independence (Smyth, 1998).

Written under the influence of the Irish Catholic Church and Vatican, the role of women was prescribed as “responsible for reproduction of the population and transmission of national identity through practice of mothering” (Smyth, 1998: 64). The Irish wanted to define Ireland as ‘not-England’, and sought an opposite identity. One of these markers of identity became the Roman Catholic religion (Mullally, 2005). As Ireland desired unity among its population, markers of conservatism, Catholicism, and nationalism became dominant. This heavily shaped the role of women’s citizenship (Mullally, 2005). As discussed before, research has shown that high levels of religiosity, together with Catholicism as the country’s main religion, strongly associate with restrictive abortion policies (Minkenberg, 2002).

This restrictiveness contrasted processes of progression which occurred across Ireland’s Western counterparts. In 1967, abortion became legal in Great Britain under the Abortion Act, and shortly after the American Supreme Court legalised abortion in the 1973 *Roe vs Wade*-decision (Field, 2018). Many other European countries liberalised their abortion legislation in the 1980s. Conservative groupings in Ireland worried this progression could lead to a spill-over effect (Field, 2018). In 1981, anti-choice activists established the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) (Field, 2018). This organisation advocated for a referendum on the issue, which eventually resulted in the drafting of the Eighth Amendment (Article 40.3.3) of the Irish Constitution in 1983:

“The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.” (Luibhéid, 2006).

Article 40.3.3 equated the lives of the unborn and the mother, officially making abortion illegal. This provision also entailed the prosecution of institutions providing information and referrals on abortion (Smyth, 1998). Based on this article, it seems that during this time the Irish

normative status quo was centred around the common understanding that abortion is an illegality.

5.2 The X-Case

For almost a decade, the issue on abortion remained stable. This changed however, in 1992, when abortion reached the political debate in a way it had not done before. A thirteen-year-old girl, referred to as 'X', was raped by a family friend in 1991 (Smyth, 1998). When the authorities found out she was seeking to get an abortion in the UK, the Attorney General declared an injunction to prevent her from traveling abroad (Field, 2018). By doing so, the state controlled the girl's body, forbidding her to leave the country. This decision was later revoked by the Supreme Court when it was determined the girl was suicidal (Smyth, 1998). To protect the girl's life, abortion became admissible. The X-case and its consequences affected a shift in opinion *and* policy concerning abortion (Smyth, 1998).

Prior to the X-case, women's rights organisations emerged at the international stage, promoting women's rights as human rights. This emergence was stimulated by the UN Decade for Women, which durated from 1975-1985 (Reilly, 2007). As Reilly (2007: 114) argued, this "sparked the proliferation of women's organisations and networks internationally and set the stage for the emergence of a global campaign for women's human rights in the 1990s". Reproduction was one of the issues these organisations addressed. On the case of abortion, a strong divergence prevailed. Whilst some countries, as the Netherlands, had already legalised abortion, many others were far from reaching such a solution. Even though feminist opinions grew stronger in Ireland, women's rights networks did not succeed in being established as dominant norm entrepreneurs (Reilly, 2007).

Concerning *phase one*, international institutions were trying to promote the issue of reproductive rights internationally. The relevant actors promoting the norm were new to the

scene, so the norm managed to receive international attention, but was not fully incorporated on the international agenda. After the X-case, the issue became a prominent topic of international media attention and debate (Smyth, 1998).

For *phase two*, norm entrepreneurs need to frame the issue to gain legitimacy over the norm antipreneurs; and by trying to assemble a critical mass of important actors to push towards a ‘tipping point’. Ireland became the focus of international debate after the X-case. Its abortion regime was portrayed as ‘barbaric’, ‘backwards’, and ‘priest-ridden’, which was backed by pro-choice and women’s organisations (Luibhéid, 2006). This contrasted Ireland’s previous identity and narrative as being a guardian for protecting the life of the unborn and the mother (McDonnell & Murphy, 2019). Another frame that was used by norm entrepreneurs was less focusing on portraying the X-case as an abortion-issue, but more as an issue of ‘child rape’ (Smyth, 1998). This focus made abortion itself rather subordinate, making way for renegotiating the harsh legislation that prohibited similar cases to obtain legal abortions.

International frameworks, alongside domestic opposition, succeeded to maintain media attention by organising protests during the course of the X-case. Dublin was the stage of multiple marches, conducted by both pro-life and pro-choice demonstrators (O’Carroll, 2012). Whilst norm entrepreneurs were vocal, the dominant norm antipreneur did not proceed to be the center of attention. The Irish Catholic Church had various public responses to the X-case. It used scriptural references and argued that the “moral principle of opposition to abortion was not open to question, and did not depend on a particular religious conviction” (Dillon, 1996: 29). Even though Irish bishops stressed that the debate should not be perceived as ‘insensitive’ to women who had had abortions, “no motive could justify abortion” (Dillon, 1996: 32). Something striking to the Church’s stance was its neglect of using symbols of national identity. For many years, protecting the life of the unborn was seen as a core element of Irish identity;

but was not central to the debate now. A possible explanation is the linkage to nationalist politics and violence that occurred in the Northern Ireland-conflict (Dillon, 1996).

Simultaneously to the X-case, European countries were debating on the Maastricht Treaty, deciding on a possible membership in the European Union (EU) (Field, 2018). Alongside France and Denmark, Ireland was one of the few countries to require a referendum to join the international treaty (Field, 2018). Interestingly, Ireland had only one provision to the Treaty: a protocol that contained Ireland's constitutional protection to forbid abortion, something that EU-membership could not change (Mullaly, 2005). Because the government was concerned the X-case protests would influence the referendum-outcome to a possible 'No-vote', they proposed a concession: a separate referendum on possible adjustments to the Eighth Amendment (Luibhéid, 2018).

In *phase three*, continuing outside and inside pressure results in the institutionalisation of the norm. Outside pressure consisted of a 'mass feminist resistance movement', international media, and concerns about the Maastricht Treaty, whilst inside pressure mainly consisted out of protests and activism by domestic opposition (Smyth, 1998). The possible consequences the X-case would have for Ireland's economic development, the international perception of Ireland, and feminist mobilisations, were main drivers for drafting the concessionary referendums (Luibhéid, 2006).

Eventually, two of the constitutional amendments passed; meaning that the state no longer could prevent women from traveling to obtain an abortion abroad; and that the state could not prevent the provision of information on abortion. A third one, that would reverse previous concessions, did not pass (Mullally, 2005).

The X-case resulted in some progressions on the legal freedoms for women, but abortion was still far from becoming legal. Concessions were made, but the norm 'legal abortion' was not institutionalised. As McDonnell and Murphy (2019) argue, the Irish people

were appalled by the X-case, but were in general still anti-abortion. Also, the results of the referendums were not turned into actual legislation, which made the requirements for legal abortion still very vague (Mullally, 2005). For this reason the X-case does not fully complete *phase 3* or reach *phase 4*. The general consensus remained as abortion being an illegality, making it difficult for norm entrepreneurs to push towards normative change.

5.3 The Savita Halappanavar-case

After the X-case, some important events took place that helped shape the course and outcomes of the 2012 Savita-case. *Phase 1* implies the norm to be put on the international agenda. As mentioned before, the 1990s were central to the emergence of women's rights on the international agenda. Essential for this were two UN Population conferences. The 1994 Cairo Conference was the first to include the notion of 'reproductive rights' within its agenda. The Vatican, as a Permanent Observer of the UN, also attended the conference, trying to delay and disrupt debates on the topic (Joachim, 2003). This happened again during the 1995 Beijing Conference, where the Vatican cooperated within an unlikely alliance of Islamic-states (Fleishman, 2000). They managed to dismiss suggestive language concerning abortion, removing it from the conference's agenda (Joachim, 2003). 'Women's rights' as an issue were broadly discussed during these conferences, and manifested themselves into the political landscape. However, debate around abortion remained relatively silent, something to decide for each country itself (Joachim, 2003).

Some years later almost marked a set-back for the legal accomplishments achieved after the X-case referendums. Pro-life organisations wanted to exclude 'the risk of death by suicide' as a legal and medical reason to grant abortion, and proposed a referendum in 2002. Even though they lobbied for a 'Yes'-vote, the majority of the population voted 'No' (Field, 2018). It seemed like the Irish did not want to undo the progressions achieved by the X-case

referendums; and voting ‘No’ had no direct consequences for the legality of abortion (McDonnell & Murphy, 2019).

The Pro-Life camp received more pushback in the early 2000s, when the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) reviewed the compliance of the Irish Government (Mullally, 2005). The review stressed that women’s rights in Ireland “were being compromised by continuing influence of the Catholic Church in official state policy” (Mullally, 2005: 79). As Ireland ratified many international human rights treaties, it is expected to follow the provisions, also the ones concerning women’s rights. As a result, domestic women’s rights organisations centred their campaign around the CEDAW’s advice. They also wrote a Shadow Report, framing reproductive rights as human rights (Reilly, 2007).

A last event that helped shape the course of the Savita-case was a 2010-ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on the 2005 A/B/C vs Ireland-cases. The Court ruled that for woman ‘C’, Ireland violated the right of providing sufficient information on her options to obtain a legal abortion (Berer, 2013). As a consequence, the Irish Government ordered an independent ‘Expert Group on Abortion’ to write a report on Ireland’s implementation of the Court’s decisions (O’Connell, 2012). The Expert Group gave different recommendations, including “non-statutory guidelines, regulations, and legislation” (O’Connell, 2012).

In all these earlier cases, women’s rights were central to the debate. *Phase 1*, in which the norm is to be put on the agenda by international institutions, is established prior to the Savita-case, in contrast to the X-case. The topic of abortion definitely reached the political agenda during these years, but concerns about its legality were still quite dormant. The debate changed however in 2012, after the death of Savita Halappanavar. She died in a Galway hospital after being denied an abortion due to the presence of a foetal heartbeat, even though

there were strong signs of miscarriage and serious threats to her own health (McDonnell & Murphy, 2019).

In *phase two*, framing techniques and pressure by norm entrepreneurs lead to concessions at the domestic level. Savita's death was quickly picked up by numerous national and global news outlets (New York Times, 2012; The Journal Ireland, 2012; The Guardian, 2012). Central to criticism became the argument of the Galway medical personnel telling Mr. Halappanavar that abortion was inadmissible because "[Ireland] is a Catholic country" (Berer, 2013: 11). The issue now reached further than just stipulating guidelines for terminating a non-viable pregnancy, it also included its interpretation by "individual health professionals of Catholic health policy and the law on abortion in Ireland" (Berer, 2013: 10). According to Berer (2013) around 40% of all Irish hospitals are owned and run by Catholic institutions. The Savita-case portrayed Ireland's failing in implementing the directive of the ECHR.

Savita's death led to an up rise of mass public protests, from both the Pro-Life and Pro-Choice camps (Croffey, 2012). The Pro-Choice camp used different narratives to frame the issue, formulated by McDonnell & Murphy (2019) as 'Public Tragedy', 'Political Opportunity', and 'Abortion Legacy'. The first frame stressed that the Savita-case could happen to any woman, due to uncertainties on defining when a pregnancy would threaten the health and life of the woman (McDonnell & Murphy, 2019). The second urged the need to move to 'the middle ground'. McDonnell and Murphy (2019: 12) argued that "the middle ground was a central framing device in how the media presented a solution to the impasse of abortion politics along party-political lines". The third, mostly used by international media, argued that Ireland's Catholic nature defined its policies and prevented the protection of international human rights (McDonnell & Murphy, 2019).

The dominant norm entrepreneur, the Church, issued a statement in which it acknowledged the "tragedy that stunned the country" (Schmitz, 2012). Although it used careful

wording about the importance of the life of the woman, it also argued that “abortion is the direct and intentional destruction of an unborn baby and is gravely immoral in all circumstances” (Schmitz, 2012).

The Irish Government, as a concession after the pressure and criticism, ordered the Health Service Executive (HSE) to begin a ‘highly public investigation’ on the Savita-case and Irish abortion laws in general. This resulted in several recommendations on legislative and constitutional changes (Arulkumaran, 2017). The report concluded that the Irish state was held accountable for Ms. Savita’s death. The personal emphasis on the Savita-case led to a general feeling that Ireland, with its current abortion laws, was failing and restricting women. With the ongoing protests and spotlight by international media, the Irish government realised it had to make some further concessions (Arulkumaran, 2017).

Phase three entails some form of norm institutionalisation. One of the main demands of the Pro-Choice camp was that the Fine-Gael/Labour-coalition took immediate action, preventing women in the future having to endure the same as Savita (Field, 2018). This, together with the earlier advice of the Export Group on Abortion, and the investigation of the HSE, resulted in the passing of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act in 2013, which was “the first piece of legislation to give effect to the Supreme Court’s decision on the X-case”; as the outcomes of the 1992 referendums had not been incorporated into domestic legislation (Field, 2018: 613; Mullally, 2005). This Act composed the conditions which allowed women to obtain legal abortions, focusing on serious threats to the woman’s health and life (Erdman, 2014).

The Savita-case generated a major amount of international and domestic attention, and progressions concerning legislation were made. However, norm entrepreneurs did not succeed in ‘fully’ institutionalising legal abortion, as abortion remained illegal under most

circumstances. For this reason, *phase 4* is not reached. The Savita-case did however, help set out the path to the 2018 referendum.

5.4 The 2018 referendum

Because the Savita-case became subject to a lot of public pressure, the discussion on abortion was central to the upcoming 2016 General Election (Field, 2018). Concerning *phase one*, the norm had already been put on the international agenda, starting in the early 1990s by efforts of women's advocacy networks in organisational platforms such as the UN Population Forums, and by efforts of pressure groups after the X and Savita-cases.

Again, for *phase 2* it is essential for norm entrepreneurs to win domain over the dominant norm antipreneurs, by framing techniques and continuing pressure. This is seen in the vast activism done by international and domestic Pro-Choice groups during the period 2012-2018. Receiving competition from the opposite camp, abortion became central to the Irish political debate. None of the other legislative breakthroughs Ireland experienced over the last decennia, including the divorce-laws and the same-sex marriage laws, have dealt with so much resistance and contestation as abortion did (Hannon, 2018).

It became clear that political parties needed to incorporate the abortion-issue in their campaigns when the protests grew louder. In 2015, Amnesty International organised a protest outside the Irish parliament with women holding suitcases, illustrating the necessity for women to travel abroad to get an abortion (NicGhabhann, 2018). In 2016, the Pro-Choice organisation 'Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A.' launched their 'knicker-bombing protest' at a Fine-Gael party-event. They also initiated an online campaign to leave out knickers in public with pro-choice slogans; and they put up a 'giant pair of knickers' on the entrance of the Irish parliamentary building (NicGhabhann, 2018). Politicians engaged in the protests as well. Parliamentarian

Bríd Smith brought a package of illegal abortion pills with her in parliament, illustrating the limited access women in Ireland had to end pregnancies (NicGhabhann, 2018).

After the General Election, protests continued, urging for legislative changes. A core difference from these protests to earlier ones, is their reach. Social media was frequently used, as were symbols from public culture. An example is the protest by women from Sligo, dressed in typical character outfits from the television show *Handmaid's Tale*, in which women's reproductive rights are heavily controlled by the state (NicGhabhann, 2018).

International advocacy networks, such as 'Coalition to Repeal the 8th', also organised protests outside Ireland. The suitcase protests, originally launched by Amnesty International, were held in London and Brussels (NicGhabhann, 2018). This shows the transnational aspect of the networks and the concerns for the issue. More domestic campaigning was done by the National Women's Council of Ireland, the Abortion Rights Campaign, and the umbrella organisation Together for Yes (Field, 2018).

As a counter-reaction, the norm antipreneurs launched the Love Both Campaign, organised by the Pro-Life Campaign; Save the Eighth; and the Iona Institute, a "conservative think-tank linked to the Church as a mediator" (Field, 2018: 620). The campaign framed abortion as murder, using the hashtag '#repealkills' on social media. They also framed that legalising abortion would lead to a greater number of babies with disabilities being aborted, using images of children with the Syndrome of Down in their campaigns (NicGhabhann, 2018).

Striking was that most norm antipreneurs almost completely left out the religious frame (Hannon, 2018). Both norm antipreneurs and entrepreneurs used a more human rights-focused lens, either directed at the rights of the unborn child or the woman. The Irish Catholic Church took a relative background-position in general, partly because of the ongoing scandals that had come to light, including child abuse and forced adoptions (Hannon, 2018). A spokesman of the Save the Eighth-Campaign explained that religion was not a key narrative in their campaigns,

because the issue of legal abortion was most lively under the younger generation, who are in general less religious (Hannon, 2018). Focusing on religion would thus have a possible negative effect. This background position of the Church marked the pathway for norm entrepreneurs to win domain over the norm antipreneurs and steer towards norm acceptance.

The ongoing protests and support of numerous political parties¹ led the Irish government to make some concessions; including the idea of a referendum. The main Irish coalition party however, Fine Gael, preferred the idea of a Citizen's Assembly to provide an advice on the issue (Field, 2018). As a result of this advice in 2016, a Joint Parliamentary Committee was established to consider the recommendations, publishing its own report in December 2017. The general conclusion of both advices was that the Eighth Amendment *had* to change (Field, 2018).

This conclusion leads to *phase three*, in which earlier concessions and ongoing pressure lead to norm institutionalisation. As a result of the advices, the Irish prime-minister Leo Varadkar declared that a referendum would be held on the issue (Field, 2018).

In the run-up to the referendum, domestic opposition kept on growing stronger. A key element was the everyday encounters people had with the campaign materials. Public bathrooms were covered in stickers and posters, murals were scattered across the country; the campaigns were visible all over Ireland (NicGhabhann, 2018). Simultaneously, the issue was covered by multiple domestic and international media. Whilst the Catholic Church remained on the background, and Pro-Choice and Pro-Life camps kept on campaigning, the polls hinted at a win for Pro-Choice (Field, 2018).

Finally, on the 25th of May 2018 the referendum passed with 66.4% voting 'Yes'. The turn-out was 64.13%, largely consisting of younger voters (Field, 2018). The result of the

¹ Political parties that supported the change of the Eighth Amendment were: Fine Gael (Coalition Party), Labour Party, Green Party, Social Democrats, and Solidarity-People Before Profit.

referendum meant that, in the first time of Irish history, abortion would become legal under certain conditions. The new Amendment reads: “*Provision may be made by law for the regulation of termination of pregnancy*” (Oireachtas Publications, 2018). The government also drafted a new bill: the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, starting from January 1st 2019; replacing the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 (Oireachtas, 2018). In practice, this means that abortion is legal up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, and later admissible under conditions including: a risk to life or health for the woman, risk to life or health in emergency, and a likely death of the foetus; determined by at least two medical practitioners (Oireachtas, 2018).

In contrast with the previously discussed cases, *phase 4* is reached, after which the norm becomes fully institutionalised. Some might argue that the norm is not ‘fully’ internalised, as other Western democracies for instance permit abortion up to 24 weeks (UN, 2019). Concerning the case of abortion in Ireland, however, one can argue that in regard to the country’s history, a definite breakthrough has occurred. Ireland shifted from one of the most restrictive abortion regimes among liberal democracies, to a country that has institutionalised and legalised abortion. For this reason, it seems that the general consensus concerning the norm shifted from ‘abortion as an illegality’, to ‘abortion as a legality’. The status quo norm antipreneurs wished to uphold is overcome by norm entrepreneurs, realising normative change.

As the referendum was only held recently, not much data is yet available on the number of legal abortions conducted in Ireland. In early 2019, *the New York Times* reported that over 200 health facilities in the country would provide legal terminations of pregnancy, and this number would grow (Specia, 2019). Currently, there are some concerns that not all Irish counties provide this service, forcing women living in rural areas to travel far distances (Specia, 2019). Pro-choice activists have urged the government to push all counties towards an expansion of their abortion-related health facilities (Specia, 2019).

6. Conclusion

What made the 2018 referendum stand out from the other cases? How did the norm entrepreneurs overcome the norm antipreneurs and push towards the legalisation of abortion? The aim of this research was to answer the question how international institutions can contribute to normative change, by specifically looking at the legalisation process of abortion in Ireland. In the beginning of this thesis I argued that international institutions, in particular transnational advocacy networks, were decisive for the accomplishment of legal abortion. By highlighting one facet of the puzzle, I have tried to explain the final breakthrough towards legalisation, discussing the course and consequences of three influential cases in the Irish abortion debate.

From the collected evidence, it seems that the role of advocacy networks in keeping the debate alive has been essential for creating a consensus among the relevant actors. Advocacy networks, consisting of different domestic and international organisations on women's rights, heavily contributed to the acceptance and internalisation of the norm. They organised protests throughout the entire course of the abortion debate; using strategic frames to highlight Ireland's backwardness and failure in protecting women's rights. These frames, together with the personal emphasis on the X-case and Savita-case were quickly picked up by international media. In line with the theoretical model, international institutions were most important in the earlier phases, mobilising internationally through organisational platforms, such as the UN Population Forums, to put the norm on the political agenda. In the later phases, domestic opposition became crucial for realising norm acceptance. The domestic opposition in Ireland is mostly portrayed by the professional advocacy network of women's rights organisations.

I acknowledge that institutions alone have not realised legal abortion. Something that seemed essential is the support from political parties. The government established different

advise commissions, resulting in several legislative recommendations. Political support steered for a push towards constitutional adjustments.

Transnational advocacy networks on women's rights, growing stronger over the years, together with the dissatisfaction of the population towards the Irish abortion laws, a need for change of policies resulting from the heavily public-debated X-and Savita-case, and support of political parties; created a tipping-point that stimulated the liberalisation of Ireland's restrictive abortion regime. This liberalisation was fuelled by national and international media attention, recommendations from independent advice commissions, extensive use of social media, and the all-encompassing reach of protest - and campaign materials in the public sphere.

With this research I hope to have contributed to the academic literature on norm acceptance, in particular by providing a more in-depth look on the Irish case. By adding Bloomfield's notion of norm antipreneurs to the theoretical frameworks of Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) and Risse & Sikkink (1999), I have tried to fill the gap in the literature on factors that enable *and* prohibit norm institutionalisation. By doing so, I hope to have broadened the knowledge and insights concerning norm acceptance. Furthermore, because not much research has been done on the influence of both norm entrepreneurs and antipreneurs, this research is an extension of existing literature. Besides its contribution to the academic debate, this project also contributes to further theory-building, possibly offering a framework that may be applied to other cases in subsequent research. As abortion stays a contested subject, and women remain affected by restrictive abortion regimes, it is relevant to learn more from the ways reproductive human rights can be institutionalised into domestic legislation.

As every writer writes from a certain academic, social and geographical background, this research will be to some extent selective, interpretative, and biased. I have tried to surpass this by using scholarly work from academics from different fields, by taking an observer role towards the abortion debate in Ireland, and by limiting my use of normative language.

Another restriction is that my research remains relatively concise, due to limited time and resources. If this research would be applied to other cases, I suggest to incorporate different forms of methodology, including interviews and more extensive use of primary data. Furthermore, this research mainly tries to answer how international institutions have influenced the legalisation process of abortion in Ireland, which is just one explanation. Due to this, my conclusions are formed from a particular angle. For future research I therefore recommend to take other causal factors into account, and to set out the process in greater detail, for instance by researching the role of political parties. I advise to look into alternative explanations, including the economic prosperity theory. Lastly, I recommend to couple the Ireland-case to comparative European cases, such as Poland and Malta. Gaining more insights might engage a greater political dialogue, stimulating the international community to push for more liberal abortion policies.

In concluding remarks, the subject of abortion remains a topic of debate. In May 2019, the states of Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana subsequently declared anti-abortion laws, undoing previous normative change (BBC News, 2019). This issue has recently been dominating the news. It would be interesting to apply the theoretical model to these cases, looking into the actions and responses of both norm entrepreneurs and antipreneurs.

Another contemporary example is that the international anti-abortion lobby seems to become more professional, expanding its transnational branches. *De Volkskrant* claims that a growing number of international networks of conservative, Christian, Catholic and right-populist groupings have found each other in questioning progressions towards LGBTQ and women's rights (Bolwijn & De Ruiter, 2019). The authors argue that the economic and political crisis in Europe has made way for these radical groups and ideas. With the emergence of more right-wing and populist parties across Europe, they suggest that conservative ideas might dominate the political debate again (Bolwijn & De Ruiter, 2019). At this moment, there seems

to be an European normative consensus that ‘abortion is a legality’, as Malta is the only European country in which abortion is still illegal. For future research, it would be interesting to examine how norm entrepreneurs can continue promoting reproductive rights and upholding this consensus; especially in times of rising conservatism and populism.

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