

## Book Review

# Gender-Based Violence and the Law: Global Perspectives and Eastern European Practices

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Agne Limante, Arturas Tereskinas and Ruta Vaiciuniene's edited volume delivers a timely and relevant discussion about the ongoing pandemic of gender-based violence and gender inequality. The book's focus on Central and Eastern European countries, particularly Lithuania, provides a unique perspective on the current challenges and progress in this part of the world. This relevance to current issues ensures that readers feel engaged and connected to the book's content.

The edited volume consists of three parts. Part I, 'Theoretical, political, and legal framework for responding to gender-based violence', is structured in four chapters. Chapter 1 analyses the objectification and sexualisation of women and reveals the 'mutually reinforcing relationship between gender-based violence and objectification of women' (Amankaviciute & Zalnieriute, 2024, p.4). Accordingly, women's representation as sexual objects becomes their categorisation, and it leads to stereotypes which reflect power dynamics. The second chapter delves into these power dynamics and unequal relations aimed at masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is distinguished as the cultural ideal with its stereotyped norms. Among these norms, aggression and autonomy become the main elements which alienate other forms of masculinities and 'normalise' gender power and hegemony.

After analysing societal structures of gender violence in the first two chapters, Chapter 3 examines international legal documents about gender-based violence. Despite the global consensus about the unacceptability of gender-based violence (Limante, 2024), all international regulations about this matter are soft law. Under this climate, even the European Union still lingers with a prospective Directive, only the Council of Europe (CoE) distinguishes with its progressive steps (Limante, 2024). Even before the Council adopts the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, The Istanbul Convention, The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), as the Council's judicial authority, relentlessly urges member states to fulfil their positive obligation, especially the obligation to protect women's lives. Following Chapter 3's reminder about ECtHR's exemplary jurisprudence on gender-based and domestic violence, Chapter 4 focuses on the Istanbul Convention and the questions raised by its opponents in Central and Eastern Europe about its constitutionality. From the beginning, the Istanbul Convention has become a source of controversy, especially for religious and ultra-conservative groups. The chapter reveals how the misunderstandings and negative propaganda about the Convention led to a 'full-fledged culture war' over its regulations. Despite an in-depth analysis of CoE's exemplary regulations on gender-based violence, the discussions in these two chapters miss the chance to question the non-existence of a widespread binding regulation on gender-based violence and women's rights. The necessity for further analysis is evident, considering even the EU, a sui generis organisation promoting itself as a normative

power, lacks instruments to establish normative standards in the case of gender-based violence. The lack of effective legal action reveals that women's rights as human rights are still a highly politicised issue globally, from east to west and south to north, even in the 21st century (Zhang, 2025).

Part II focuses on domestic violence in the private sphere. The discussions in Part II range from the regulations in criminal law to rehabilitating perpetrators to supporting victims, especially those in vulnerable groups. Within this framework, Chapter 5 focuses on the 'Approaches to the criminalisation of domestic violence in Central and Eastern Europe'. Though the Istanbul Convention, as the reference point, does not require establishing specific offences for each form of violence against women (Apolevic & Kuzborska-Pacha, 2024), criminalising domestic violence under the concept of dedicated offence rather than aggravated offence provides a more comprehensive regulation to address the cases of forced marriage, stalking and psychological violence (Apolevic and Kuzborska-Pacha, 2024), which is a highly ignored version of domestic violence in almost every criminal law around the world. States' responsibility does not end with the punishment of perpetrators; strengthening survivors and the enactment of preventative regulations should be a crucial part of the process. In most of the domestic violence cases, survivors are reluctant to file a complaint, acknowledging the cultural codes legitimising intimate partner violence, and this pattern is not unique to any society or country. Following the framework of the Istanbul Convention, Chapter 6 touches on this global misperception and proposes conceptualising violence against women and intimate partner violence as a violation of human rights rather than a social issue. In addition to top-to-bottom legal changes, preventing and combating domestic violence requires individualised rehabilitation plans for perpetrators (Chapter 7), economic empowerment of women independent from familial settings (Chapter 8), and eliminating institutional violence as a starting point for combating intimate partner violence for vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities (Chapter 9). All these vital steps stipulate departing from populist, conservative policies and victim-blaming discourses in an era in which such tendencies are on the rise.

Following Part II's focus on the private sphere, Part III of the book provides a comprehensive view of gender-based violence in public spaces. It delves into sexual harassment in the workplace in Lithuania, questioning unequal power relations, dominance, and intersecting inequalities. The book reveals a global pattern from a local focal point; victim-blaming public attitude results in victims, predominantly women, staying silent. Chapter 10 further delves into more specified workplace misconduct, one of the most 'closeted' ones – academia. The authors make a timely contribution to a mostly unspoken aspect of abuse, especially considering that misconduct and sexual harassment are pretty widespread in higher education. However, survivors, almost unanimously women, choose to stay silent, mostly considering their position in academia and society. Consistent underestimation of their achievements at various intersections leads women in academia to mostly choose silence as a protective measure. In parallel, the perpetrators, typically men, instrumentalise their leading positions to evade accountability. To break the circle of silence, academia needs its own 'Me Too' moment and probably set an example for other survivors, such as those of cyberstalking, who choose to stay silent as well.

Though focusing on Central and Eastern Europe in general and Lithuania in particular, Agne Limante, Arturas Tereskinas and Ruta Vaiciuniene's edited volume addresses a global phenomenon which shows almost identical features in every other country (Zandi-Navgran et al., 2026). One can find the characteristics and 'frustration' of failed hegemony (Chapter 2) in incel groups becoming widespread, especially among young men, in almost every society. Combined with cyberstalking (Chapter 12) and cyberbullying, 'socialisation within the norms of hegemonic masculinity' (Tereskinas, 2024; Kolakkadan, 2024) becomes so apparent and triggers the risk of gender-based violence. With this being said, the edited volume would benefit from an extended introduction and/or comparative contributions that acknowledge the global pandemic of anti-gender movements.

Gender inequality, hierarchies and power relations become the gears of a vicious cycle of gender-based violence and unequal societal settings that is reproduced by hegemonic policies. Materialised in the uniformity of objections to the Istanbul Convention, regulations that aim to prevent gender-based violence and promote gender equality are evaluated as a part of hidden 'gender ideology', a reactionary discourse to the demands of feminist and LGBTI+ movements and related international human rights developments (Çeler, 2025, citing from Morán Faúndes, 2019) by populist and authoritarian governments, not only in Lithuania or Bulgaria, but in Hungary and Turkey as well. Anti-gender movements are an indispensable part of democratic backsliding (Lombardo et al., 2021; Ünal, 2024; Elad-Strenger et al., 2024). Acknowledging the problem and the root causes, the question is how to mobilise against it. Until the establishment of binding universal human rights rules that recognise women's rights as human rights, the women's movement is destined to be a relentless everyday battle.

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