

# CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

## AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES

### WHERE DO THE WYA CO-FOUNDERS COME FROM?

#### Anna Halpine

President and co-founder Anna Halpine was an intern for ultra-conservative antichoice Member of the European Parliament, [Dana Rosemary Scallon](#). Halpine previously led the Canadian antichoice group, [Campaign Life Coalition](#).

#### Diana Kilarjian

WYA co-founder, Diana Kilarjian, was an employee of the anti-family planning group [Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute](#) and was closely connected to the antichoice and anti-Semitic [Human Life International](#).

Apart from those in the public eye, it is a long time since many of those involved in the WYA could reasonably consider themselves to be “youthful,” as this fact sheet demonstrates.

“This time we took over what’s known as the Youth Caucus... We had probably sixty kids and they went in and took the meeting over.”<sup>5</sup>

Austin Ruse, on how the anti-reproductive rights movement used the WYA to try to disrupt legitimate youth participation at the Beijing+5 at the UN.

### WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE

The World Youth Alliance (WYA) was founded in 1999, during meetings of the United Nations for the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+5).

Openly frustrated at the visible successes of the Youth Coalition (an international coalition of young people, aged 15 to 29, created during the ICPD+5 to support and sustain young people’s efforts to advance their sexual and reproductive health and rights),<sup>1</sup> the World Youth Alliance was developed to assist the anti-reproductive rights lobby at the UN and elsewhere with its aim to curtail reproductive freedom for women and adolescents around the world.

Almost immediately upon its inception, anti-family planning groups like Austin Ruse’s Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute began talking up the WYA and recruiting antichoice youth to attend subsequent UN meetings.

### WHO DOES THE WYA REPRESENT?

The WYA claims to be a “global coalition of young people and youth organizations committed to promoting the dignity of the person at the international level and building solidarity among youth from developed and developing countries.” It is, however, very coy about releasing any certifiable membership figures.

At various times, spokespersons have said that it has one million members or “represents” one million youth, and a 2004 press memo claimed 1.5 million members. In Europe alone, former WYA-Europe president Gudrun Lang said that in two years some 800,000 young people have joined. However, most recently, current president Emilia Klepacka admitted a 300,000 drop in membership when she estimated current European membership at half a million.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the conservative website, LifeSiteNews called it “the largest youth group in the world,” clearly an untrue statement. A WYA-sponsored pan-European bike ride, Europe4Family, in August/September 2004 attracted fewer than 100 participants—on a continent which at that time claimed 800,000 new recruits in two years.<sup>3</sup>

The most effective gauge of membership is perhaps the WYA’s income from membership dues. US and Canadian tax laws require that membership groups report in their charitable tax filings the amount of income received from members.

While no figures are available for Europe, the WYA’s income from membership in the US in 2003 (the latest year for which figures are available) was \$0. In Canada, the WYA also registered zero income from membership dues in 2003.<sup>4</sup>

## WHO IS BEHIND THE WYA?

In a fundraising letter, the European affiliate of the World Youth Alliance (European Youth Alliance) listed some prominent European conservatives who support the work of the WYA. In addition to Christoph Cardinal Schönborn of Austria and Belgian theologian Michel Schooyans, European Patrons include Rocco Buttiglione and former member of the European Parliament, Dana Rosemary Scallon.

### Dana Rosemary Scallon

Dana Scallon (born 1950) is a former entertainer turned politician who quickly gained a reputation for her single-minded focus on antichoice issues. In 2003, the misinformation she spread about an overseas development bill brought about almost unprecedented criticism from fellow MEP, Prionsias De Rossa. In a debate on the bill in Brussels, he said, “I want to hear her apologise to this House for the scurrilous lies that she told in the Irish media about this report: claims that EUR 50 million was being taken from Irish fishermen in order to promote abortion in the world; claims that Irish taxpayers’ money was going to be used for promoting abortion in the world. They are scurrilous lies that should be retracted. We should have an apology here tonight from Mrs. Scallon for promoting these falsehoods.”<sup>6</sup>

Primarily as a result of her focus on abortion, Scallon lost, in rapid succession between 2002 and 2004, elections to the Irish parliament (gaining just 3.5% of the vote), her seat in the European Parliament (gaining a slightly more respectable 13.5% of the vote) and failed to even garner enough support to contest the 2004 Irish presidential election.

### Austin Ruse

One of the WYA’s key promoters is Austin Ruse (born 1956), president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute and somebody who has been outspoken about a willingness to disrupt the workings of the United Nations. Ruse has boasted of his “vener of support” for the UN and his willingness to break “every single rule of UN lobbying.”<sup>7</sup>

Ruse has also shown that he embraces extreme operating principles and lack of cultural sensitivity in pursuit of his goals at the UN: “When we finally convinced the Muslims that ‘forced pregnancy’ meant abortion and they rose up and they squashed it. You know, our whole game is to make the Muslims as mad as possible at the radical feminists. If that happens, we win. Nothing like a Muslim in full-throated outrage at a radical feminist from the United States.”<sup>8</sup>

### Rocco Buttiglione

Rocco Buttiglione PhD (born 1948), an ultra-conservative Catholic who has been described as one of “Pope John Paul II’s closest friends and counselors” and “the intellectual alter ego of Pope John Paul II,” has a long track record of supporting extreme positions on HIV/AIDS, women’s rights, immigrants’ rights, homosexual rights and reproductive rights.

Buttiglione gained notoriety when he failed to secure a place on the European Commission as EU Commissioner for Freedom, Security and Justice after many Members of the European Parliament were outraged at some of the positions he took and comments he made on matters regarding equal rights.

At a conference on HIV/AIDS at the Vatican in 1989, Rocco Buttiglione stated that AIDS is “divine punishment for homosexuality and drug use.”<sup>9</sup>

At his European Parliament hearing, Buttiglione stated that, “The family exists in order to allow women to have children and to have the protection of a male who takes care of them. This is the traditional vision of marriage that I defend.” Later, when asked about homosexual rights, he said, “All are free to call me a bigot and intolerant, but I very freely define homosexual behavior as an indicator of moral disorder.”<sup>10</sup> Dr. Buttiglione supports camps for asylum seekers and quotas for immigration into Europe and at the Convention that worked on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, he submitted an amendment calling for exclusion of sexual orientation as a ground for discrimination—thereby permitting the conditions to exist for discrimination against gay people.<sup>11</sup>

## RIGHT-WING SUPPORT

### Fr. Richard John Neuhaus

Fr. Richard John Neuhaus (born 1939) was reported to be director of WYA.<sup>12</sup> He is the editor of the conservative Catholic/neocon outlet, *First Things* and a leading light in the cultural war being waged by the neo-conservative movement in the US. He considered the war in Iraq to be a just war, and remains a critic of the United Nations. In the run-up to the war, he said, “In view of the UN’s frequent hostility to the Church on family policy, population, the sacredness of human life, and related matters, some Catholic leaders may come to regret their exaggerated and, I believe, ill-considered statements about the moral authority of the UN”<sup>13</sup>

Neuhaus is also one of the so-called “Holy Trinity” of American rightwing thinkers. The Trinity is made up of Neuhaus, Michael Novak from the American Enterprise Institute and George Weigel from the Ethics and Public Policy Center. Each year they run a course based on the teachings of Pope John Paul II for young Catholic intellectuals in Krakow, Poland.

### Steve Jalsevac

The World Youth Alliance’s website is registered to Steve Jalsevac, director of Canada’s Campaign Life Coalition. Jalsevac is managing editor of LifeSiteNews.com, the website that has falsely claimed WYA is “the largest youth group in the world.”<sup>14</sup> He has also been arrested outside a Canadian abortion clinic.

### Other Contacts

As a sign of the investment that the antichoice movement is putting into WYA, during World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto, Canada, Halpine organized a conference with a who’s who of antichoice speakers who hardly can be considered “youth”: Father Richard John Neuhaus; John Paul II biographer, George Weigel; US Ambassador to the Holy See, Jim Nicholson; Acton Institute president, Fr. Robert Sirico; Director of Life and Women’s Issues at the Family Research Council, Pia de Solenni; Knights of Columbus Supreme Knight Carl Anderson; National Review columnists Rod Dreher and Kathryn Lopez and Dana Rosemary Scallon.

## WYA POSITIONS

WYA’s positions are promoted through a periodic leaflet, *Esperanza!*, and distributed during UN meetings. Issues of *Esperanza!* typically reprint propaganda and misinformation from radical anti-family planning and anti-UN groups like the Population Research Institute.

### WYA on Contraception

During the five year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing +5), the WYA leaflet carried a piece on alleged links between abortion and breast cancer, citing the work of Joel Brind who has become a poster boy for the antichoice movement for his repeated assertions on this subject, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. He also falsely claimed that use of the oral contraceptive pill “can significantly increase a woman’s risk of contracting breast cancer, while decreasing her ability to combat the disease.”<sup>15</sup>

### WYA on Sexuality Education

WYA member Erik Ross, argued that sex education programs in the West are an effort “to remove the family from the education of youth.” Not only that, young people are “exposed to encyclopedic sexual knowledge, plied with sexual services, and encouraged to experiment sexually.”<sup>16</sup>

WYA Member, Mark DeYoung said: “The fact is, many indigenous peoples, not trees, are near extinction because of aggressive condom distribution, sterilization and ‘family planning’.”<sup>17</sup>

### WYA on Family

Emilia Klepacka, the recently-appointed director of WYA Europe, stood before the United Nations General Assembly and addressed the children’s issues confronting the world body: “The best chance for healthy adolescent development has been proven to be within the natural married family.”<sup>18</sup>

### WYA on Condoms and HIV/AIDS Prevention

“We know condoms fail. It is not safe, and people can die [from HIV/AIDS].”<sup>19</sup>

### WYA on Abortion

Swedish national television recently broadcasted a program on abstinence trends in the US and the antichoice lobby in Europe. Emilia Klepacka, director of WYA Europe, was forthright in opposing all abortion.

“We have many social problems in Europe, and now we need a paradigm shift.... Every abortion is a violation of the human dignity, both the woman’s and the unborn child’s. Therefore it is not to be the choice of the woman.”<sup>20</sup>  
Emilia Klepacka,  
director of WYA Europe

## CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC INFLUENCE IN EUROPE: World Youth Alliance

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### References

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- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Bryant, “Abortion Foes Get More Vocal as EU Expands; Catholic Church pushes its message,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 March 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> www.europe4family.net/europe4family/index.php, accessed 29 March 2005.
- <sup>4</sup> US tax return figures are available here: www.guidestar.org/controller/searchResults.gs?action\_gsReport=1&npoId=100167814  
Canadian tax figures are available here: http://rightweb.irc-online.org/ind/neuhaus/neuhaus.php, accessed 28 March 2005.
- <sup>5</sup> Austin Ruse, “A Pro-Family Movement at the UN?” CFFC Transcript of speech, Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, March 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> www.derossa.com/asp/showdoc.asp?AREA=36&ID=287, accessed 29 March 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> Ruse, March 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> Austin Ruse, Speech at the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, February 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> William D. Montalbano, “AIDS conference hears papal appeal for unity,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November 1989.
- <sup>10</sup> BBC News Online, “EU panel opposes justice nominee,” 11 October 2004.
- <sup>11</sup> More information on Rocco Buttiglione’s controversial positions is available in Catholics for a Free Choice, Conservative Catholic Influence in Europe: Rocco Buttiglione, October 2004. www.catholicsforchoice.org/pdf/buttiglione.pdf, accessed 29 March 2005.
- <sup>12</sup> rightweb.irc-online.org/ind/neuhaus/neuhaus.php, accessed 29 March 2005.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2004/may/04052502.html, accessed 29 March 2005.
- <sup>15</sup> *Esperanza!*, 15 March 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> *Vivant*, 7 March 2000.
- <sup>17</sup> *Catholic World News*, “Pro-Life Group Slams ‘Family Planning’ Ad Campaign,” 26 July 2000.
- <sup>18</sup> www.wf-f.org/02-3-WorldYouthAlliance.html, accessed 29 March 2005.
- <sup>19</sup> *Esperanza!*, 15 March 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> Faktum, *Sveriges Television/Swedish Broadcasting*, 10 February 2005.

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*Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) is a non-governmental organization with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. CFFC is accredited as an NGO with the European Parliament. CFFC is part of the Catholic international church reform movement, International Movement—We Are Church, and the European network, Church on the Move. CFFC shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women’s well-being and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education and advocacy, CFFC works in the United States and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis and Catholic social thinking and teaching.*