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Protecting democracy from the radical conservative transatlantic movement

Abstract

This paper explores the challenges for the European Union and North American liberal democratic systems of a radical conservative transatlantic movement, as we move to important elections in 2024. This movement gathers strands of illiberal, authoritarian, and regressive forces, that operate on both side of the Atlantic, learning with each other how to explore weak points in western democracies. Recommendations are then presented how liberals and democrats, with other allies, can counteract these actions.



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Introduction

On May 19 2022, in Budapest, one of the capitals of the European Union project, the Prime Minister of Hungary warned the conservatives in Europe and the United States that ‘We must take up the fight, and in this fight we can only succeed if we are together and organized. We must take back the institutions in Washington and Brussels. We must find friends and allies in one another. We must coordinate the movement of our troops, because we face a great challenge. The decisive year will be 2024: you will have presidential and congressional elections, and we will have elections to the European Parliament. These two locations will define the two fronts in the battle being fought for Western civilization’¹. When Viktor Orbán said these words he was addressing an audience² constituted of representatives of a *new brand* of conservative transatlantic movement, where authoritarian and reactionary tendencies, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and an alignment with Putin’s Russia, are now commonplace political tools and objectives.

Earlier in the same year, a mission of about 30 members of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party from the European Parliament went to a gathering of this same brand of conservatives, this time in Orlando, Florida. Giorgia Meloni, current Italian Prime Minister, was joined in that trip by like-minded politicians from Spain, Poland, Italy, and Czech Republic. Equally, in the delegation, there were members from think tanks and political staff³. Meloni, in a speech delivered at the conference, took the opportunity to highlight the similarities between the American Republican Party and other political organisations in Europe, demagoguing about a ‘global elite’ working against the interests of conservatives in Italy and the United States: ‘(...) We know, that our adversaries [are] operating globally, applying the same tactics and the same ideology to destroy our identities and what makes us who we really are’⁴.

In recent years, an entire ecosystem of this *new brand* of conservative thinkers and politicians, dabbling in radical ideas, emerged in the European Union (EU) and the United States (US). This is not to be confused with neoconservatism, with its ideal of spreading democracy around the world, with interventionism in international affairs when needed, and a rejection of communism and political radicalism. This *new brand* presents themselves as the ‘promoters of true Western values’

¹ V. Orbán (2022), ‘Viktor Orbán’s Speech at the CPAC on 19 May 2022’, *Visegrad Post*, 24 May, <https://visegradpost.com/en/2022/05/24/viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-cpac-on-19-may-2022/>

² K. Than (2022), ‘Orban tells CPAC conservatives in Europe, U.S. must align “troops” for 2024 votes’, *Reuters*, 19 May, <https://www.reuters.com/world/orban-tells-cpac-conservatives-europe-us-must-align-troops-2024-votes-2022-05-19/>

³ European Conservatives and Reformists Party (2022), ‘A mission of European Conservatives to CPAC, where the old continent meets the new one’, *Euractiv*, 16 May, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/opinion/a-mission-of-european-conservatives-to-cpac-where-the-old-continent-meets-the-new-one/>

⁴ L. Dolan (2022), ‘Giorgia Meloni and the Far Right’s Transatlantic Turn’, *Public Seminar*, 3 October, <https://publicseminar.org/essays/giorgia-meloni-the-far-rights-transatlantic-turn/>

while decrying ‘attacks’ by European and American liberals on ‘Christian culture’⁵. These perceived offenses range from openness to migration, and freedom of women to control their bodies, to the possibility of loving whoever you choose, and desire to create a progressive and multicultural society⁶. These gatherings, being in the US or in Europe, represent an opportunity for regressive political forces to exchange ideas and experiences, as well as to reinforce emerging themes in a *new kind* of conservative politics, being nationalistic populism, take-over of government institutions and media, the diminution of human rights, the persecution of minorities, and the creation of illiberal democracies. The European Commission Vice President, Věra Jourová, a member of the liberal and democratic family, said that the fears of malicious influences in European politics by this new brand of conservatives (in the specific case of the former advisor to President Trump, Steve Bannon) were overhyped, and the fear of ‘trigger something’, meaning a negative effect in European politics that would translate to more power to far-right parties, ‘did not happen’⁷. Can we be so sure that this will not indeed happen? Principally, considering that groups in both sides of the Atlantic are working in close proximity and with accumulated experience, as we advance to 2024.

The following sections will offer a diagnosis to this problem, understanding which are the motivations from both Europeans and Americans, and what they expect to achieve. Moreover, policy recommendations will be suggested, to better prepare European society and political actors to fight this challenge, as we move to the 2024 election for the European Parliament.

Definitions

Being an heterogenous group of political forces, there are different terms used to describe the ideologies that permeates this new movement. They can be labelled as *extremist right wing*, rejecting the basis of a democratic system, popular sovereignty and majority rule, or *radical right wing*, that accept the percepts above, but deny fundamental tenets of liberal democracy such as minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers⁸. Some examples in Europe of political parties in the *extremist spectrum* include the Golden Dawn in Greece, the Northern League in Italy, and the Dutch Peoples Union, that have direct connections to fascist

⁵ A. Marantz (2022), ‘Does Hungary Offer a Glimpse of Our Authoritarian Future?’, *The New Yorker*, 27 June, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/04/does-hungary-offer-a-glimpse-of-our-authoritarian-future>

⁶ See footnote above.

⁷ Z. Sheftalovich (2023), ‘EU to Steve Bannon: You don’t scare us ... anymore’, *Politico Europe*, 17 February, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-eu-vera-jourova-steve-bannon-you-dont-scare-us-any-more/>

⁸ M. Cas (2019), *The far right today* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

ideologies. As for radical wing, the best examples are well known in Europe, as it is the National Rally in France, Alternative for Germany, Forum for Democracy in the Netherlands, Freedom Party of Austria, and Jobbik in Hungary.

A popular term in the literature is *New Right*, or *Alt-Right*, that spouse a belief that modern liberalism has led to the decay of traditional values and morals, and that it may not be possible to reestablish this *moral centre* via democratic means⁹. Other expressions are used to reflect a more specific environment. The Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement¹⁰, that now goes beyond the original purpose to be centred in one person, is developing into an ideology. The American First movement, a legacy of the American First Committee¹¹, was also renewed by the isolationism and antisemitic tropes from Trump and his followers¹². In Europe, and particularly in Hungary, there is also the definition of governance by *majority rule*, solidifying power by limiting the democratic processes to minorities. For this paper, we will use the term *radical conservative movement*. These transatlantic groups will try to maintain the patina of being called conservative, for purposes of populist policies and media portraits, but they are a *new breed*, comfortable in dealing with illiberal, authoritarian, intolerant and even vicious ideas like removing books, trying to ban sexual minorities from the public space, impeding adversarial political ideas to be expressed, and demonising all that do not conform with their dogmatic believes.

This *radical conservative movement* departs from the traditional conservative ideology that has been an important political force across the globe and, in the case for this policy paper, in Europe and the United States. A classical description of conservatism, it's the emphasis of this ideology on historically build concepts rather than abstract progressive ideas, and in favour of practices and institutions that represent continuity and stability. This preference rests on an 'organic conception of society—that is, on the belief that society is not merely a loose collection of individuals, but a living organism comprising closely connected, interdependent members'¹³. The differences between these two strands of conservatism, the traditional and the radical one, are empirically observable.

⁹ S. Denney (2022), 'How American conservatism is beginning to resemble Hungary', *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 8 August, <https://us.boell.org/en/2022/08/08/how-american-conservatism-beginning-resemble-hungary>

¹⁰ A. Volle (2023), 'Maga Movement', *Britannica*, 21 July, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/MAGA-movement>

¹¹ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (2023), 'America First Committee', *Britannica*, 31 July, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/America-First-Committee>

¹² K. Calamur (2021), 'A Short History of 'America First'', *The Atlantic*, 17 January, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/trump-america-first/514037/>

¹³ T. Ball, R. Dagger, K. Minogue, P. Viereck (2023), 'Conservatism: political philosophy', *Britannica*, 2 October, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conservatism>

The European perspective

For decades after World War II, European conservative politics was mainly influenced by the status quo reached after peace. Then, conservative movements thought of the US, in the framework of the cold war, as the guarantor of peace in Europe. As Eastern Europe was under the influence of the Soviet Union, mainstream conservative parties could only exist in Western Europe, heavily influenced by the duality of the capitalist US and communist Soviet Union.

After the system changes in Eastern Europe, conservative and right-wing parties in the western part of the continent were given a historic chance to dominate European politics. The number of democracies in the world raised¹⁴, and there was a common faith that liberal democratic policies had won, and the world would be dominated by a more democratic and centrist order. This change prompted Wilfried Martens, President of the then European Union of Christian Democrats, to organise the merge of the European People's Party and several other right wing, centrist European political groups, forming the European People's Party (EPP) we know today. Martens opened the conservative's door to the centre, in a time when the centre seemed to dominate politics.

In the middle of the 2010s this changed, and it brought other changes with it. The number of democracies in the world stopped growing¹⁵, and a global pessimism emerged about the political centre, heavily influenced by the economic crises, wars in the Middle East, and the fact that democratic politicians started to take for granted the benefits of liberal democracies. The turning point in European politics was the migration crisis of 2015, immediately followed by the 2016 referendum on Brexit, and the election of Donald Trump.

Authoritarian-leaning countries, like Hungary, which were already at work on dismantling election systems, the rule-of-law and the checks and balances at home, started to heavily lean into the populist policies of the late 2010s. This accelerated an ongoing process, in which these authoritarian, radical conservative parties, either in government or in opposition, started to drift away from the centre and the classical, mainstream conservative alliances. At the same time, newer and smaller radical conservative parties started gaining ground and popularity.

The culmination of this break came when the most established party among the radical conservative ones, Hungary's Fidesz, left the EPP¹⁶. Orbán had been heavily incorporated into the existing classical conservative alliances in Europe since he had turned his back to liberalism in the late 90s. However, that wasn't

¹⁴ Visit: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/countries-democracies-autocracies-row>

¹⁵ See footnote above.

¹⁶ A. Ivan, C. Körömi (2021), 'Kilép a Fidesz az Európai Néppártból', *Telex*, 18 March, <https://telex.hu/kulfold/2021/03/18/kilep-a-fidesz-az-europai-neppartbol>

voluntary on Orbán's part. The EPP, with the German Christian Democrats at the centre of it, did not agree with the Hungarian government openly ousting the Central European University in Budapest¹⁷.

With established conservative parties turning more right-wing, and newer extreme conservative parties gaining ground, they turned to radical conservative best practices, many of which originating from the United States.

With established conservative parties turning more radically conservative, while moving away from centre-right alliances, and with newer radical conservative parties gaining ground, there was an appetite for political issues that didn't historically belong to the political centre. They then turned to radical conservative best practices, many of which originating from the US. One of them was materialized in 2015, when Viktor Orbán published his six points for solving the migration crisis just before a meeting of the European Union Council¹⁸. These points presented the Hungarian government as

a contrarian player to the mainstream right on migration issues. Since then, political edge issues have shaped the alliance of radical conservative parties in Europe, heavily influenced by the culture and political wars they see in the US. This alliance stands on three pillars: institutions aiming to influence policy, personal relationships, and meeting of like-minded political radicals.

Institutions

There are two main type of institutions that connect radical conservative movements in Europe: the pan-European political families, and the seemingly non-governmental institutions that aim to influence public policy debates. The main pan-European political family that connect radical conservative parties in Europe is the Identity and Democracy Group (ID) in the European Parliament. Members include, among others, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Alternative for Germany, League from Italy, and France's National Rally (RN). This political family, however, was not able to be a true umbrella for radical conservative parties in Europe. Orbán made several attempts¹⁹ to unite the political families to the right

¹⁷ Hvg.hu (2018), 'A CDU megüzente: ezt a két feltételt kell a Fidesznek teljesítenie, különben repül', *hvg.hu*, 28 May, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180527_A_CDU_meguzente_ezt_a_ket_feltetelt_kell_a_Fidesznek_teljesitenie_kulonben_repul

¹⁸ J. Sandor (2015), 'Orbán szerint az egész világban kellene szétosztani a menekülteket', *Index*, 23 September, https://index.hu/belfold/2015/09/23/orban_szerint_az_egesz_vilagban_kellene_szetosztani_a_menekulteket/

¹⁹ Z. Kerner (2023), 'Tényleg meglehet Orbánék új európai családja?', *24.Hu*, 24 July, <https://24.hu/kulfold/2023/07/24/ecr-konzervativok-partcsalad-unio-fidesz-ep-szovetseg/>

of EPP, but to no avail. These parties have a lot of similarities in policy, but they have more important differences, first and foremost, the issue of Russia. Orbán's Fidesz have recently been mostly friendly to the Russian government, also with similar voices in the FPÖ. Le Pen's NR had close ties to Russia in the past²⁰, and League party leader Matteo Salvini previously openly sympathized with Russian president Vladimir Putin²¹. This has an echo on the radical conservative movement in the US, that recently also developed an admiration for Putin's authoritarian and strongman policies and posture.

On the other hand, parties that are in the European Parliament European Conservatives and Reformist Group (ECR), and that have kinship with American radical conservatives, are less friendly to Russia. One of the staunchest supporters of Ukraine have been the Polish Law and Justice (PiS), the party with the highest number of MEPs in the ECR. Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy, the second biggest delegation in the group, also became staunchly pro-Ukraine after coming into power.

Migration is a connecting issue between the European and the American radical conservative movement. Most representative of this is the desire of hard borders, proposed by Viktor Orbán and Donald Trump.

Personal relationships and common policies

Radical conservative parties in Europe are quite flexible in overlooking their policy differences and finding common ground on issues they support. Family policy, demographics and migration are common issues throughout the radical movement. These alliances can be so pragmatic, that they can even work publicly together in issues where they represent opposing sides, as happened with Meloni, Kaczynski (President of PiS) and Orbán. Both espouse hard anti-migration politicians, but

Italy supports the relocation of migrants in Europe, while Hungary and Poland oppose it²². Migration is a connecting issue between the European and the

²⁰ C. Guillou (2023), 'Le Pen's party repays cumbersome "Russian loan"', *Le Monde*, 23 September, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/09/22/le-pen-s-party-repays-cumbersome-russian-loan_6138411_7.html

²¹ D. Tilles (2022), 'Polish mayor hands Salvini Putin T-shirt to protest visit to Ukraine border', *Notes from Poland*, 8 March, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/03/08/polish-mayor-hands-salvini-putin-t-shirt-to-protest-visit-to-ukraine-border/>

²² Council of the European Union (2023), 'Migration policy: Council reaches agreement on key asylum and migration laws', Council of the EU Press Releases, 8 June, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/08/migration-policy-council-reaches-agreement-on-key-asylum-and-migration-laws/>

American radical conservative movement. Most representative of this is the desire of hard borders, one being the border fence in Hungary, and the other the border wall in the south of the US, erected by Viktor Orbán and Donald Trump.

Meloni, during her opening speech at the V. Demographic Summit in Budapest, praised 'her friend'²³, Katalin Novák, the President of Hungary, who was the Vice-President of Fidesz, Orbán's ruling party before the Prime Minister nominated her to the presidency. Despite the differences in policy, personal relationships in the radical conservative movement are still able to bring together political alliances on specific issues like, in this case, policies regarding the nature of family, something that is of interest of the American evangelical movement, as it will be demonstrated ahead.

One of the most influential American political operatives with an important action in Europe, and specifically in Hungary, is Tucker Carlson, probably the most popular television host in the radical conservative movement and the American right²⁴. Carlson visited Hungary in 2023, the second time in three years. In his interview with Viktor Orbán²⁵, the Hungarian Prime Minister outlined his three most important policies when it comes to American interests. First among them was that Ukraine could lose the war against Russia. These words were not a surprise coming from Orbán, who has been openly pro-Russia in the past, but it was news to a lot of sympathisers in the US radical conservative movement, where this idea is gaining ground, challenging the consensus of US support for Ukraine. The second was that Hungary is pro-family because demographics will be the main challenge of the next decades. This policy openly plays on the idea of *the great replacement*, a nationalist conspiracy theory. This idea has also been gaining ground in America, as in 2017, when people could see far-right protesters in Charlottesville chanting 'Jews will not replace us' as they marched with torches²⁶. The third policy outlined was that US voters should re-elect Donald Trump. Viktor Orbán was the first sitting leader in Europe who supported Trump in his campaign in 2016. After Joe Biden defeated Trump in 2020, there was a brief time when even the Hungarians believed that Trump might not run again, or he will be defeated. The Hungarian government tried to establish relationships

²³ T. Mázsár (2023), 'Ma ugyanezt látjuk Ukrajnában, és ezt nem tudjuk elfogadni' – Meloni 1956-ról és az oroszokról is beszélt a Demográfiai Csúcson', *24.Hu*, 14 September, <https://24.hu/kozelet/2023/09/14/giorgia-meloni-1956-oroszország-ukrajna-haboru-demografiai-csucs/>

²⁴ A. Applebaum (2023), 'The American Face of Authoritarian Propaganda', *The Atlantic*, 21 September, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/09/tucker-carlson-putin-orban-propaganda/675380/>

²⁵ Carlson interview with prime minister Orbán in Budapest can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAAHY-Ftc-8>

²⁶ A. Gabbatt (2017), 'Jews will not replace us': Vice film lays bare horror of neo-Nazis in America', *The Guardian*, 16 August, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/16/charlottesville-neo-nazis-vice-news-hbo>

with Ron DeSantis²⁷, the then leading candidate, but eventually, Orbán opted for supporting Trump.

One of the main corresponding issues in both the European and the American radical conservative movement is George Soros, the Hungarian-born US billionaire, who supports the idea of an open society. Soros was an early supporter of Orbán and Fidesz, but the Hungarian government turned against him in 2017 and started to campaign on the idea that Soros was a supporter of all opposition to Hungary. The campaign against Soros is also an obvious dog whistling for antisemitism²⁸ in a region with a harsh antisemitic past. But the idea caught on in the US, mainly with Donald Trump, and then replicated to lower levels of the radical conservative movement, from media, to governors, Representatives on the House, and Senators in the Senate²⁹. In Europe, since 2017, when similar campaigns against Soros started, several other radical conservative parties started to push this topic. The PiS in Poland and the FPÖ in Austria, among them. The tactic was so successful, that even Orbán's allies from the supposed left, like Robert Fico in Slovakia, started using it to gain popularity.

Meetings and collaborations

There have been several attempts from institutions to counter the influence of the supposed liberal elite in western Europe and the US. For that, they present a more radical conservative agenda. The Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, held a franchise event in Budapest, gathering American political supporters like Paul Gosar, Mark Meadows, and Rick Santorum³⁰. The line-up of CPAC Hungary was a who's who of the radical conservative movement in the US, but also in Europe, with the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, the President of the Austrian FPÖ, Herbert Kickl and the former leaders in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, Andrej Babis and Janez Jansa. This has been an open attempt to forge relationships between radicals in America and in Europe based on political agendas. The previously mentioned Demographic Summits of Budapest is one of those attempts, that already featured the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, Babis and Jansa, and members of the influential American evangelical movement as the former US Vice-President, Mike Pence.

However, there are institutions that try to counter the western liberal influence

²⁷ F. Garamvolgyi (2023), 'Viktor Orbán's support for Trump seems to wane as ally meets with DeSantis', *The Guardian*, 12 April, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/12/viktor-orban-ron-desantis-trump-hungary>

²⁸ Z. Kerner (2017), 'Antiszemiták-e a Soros-plakátok?', *24.Hu*, 12 July, <https://24.hu/belfold/2017/07/12/antiszemitak-e-a-soros-plakatok/>

²⁹ M. Rudin (2019), 'Why is billionaire George Soros a bogeyman for the hard right?', *BBC*, 7 September, <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-49584157>

³⁰ Visit: <https://www.cpachungary.com/en/>

in a more subtle way. The most important among them is the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) in Budapest, that was set to be the radical conservative response to Soros' Central European University. Founded in 1996 as a private educational institution, it expanded in the 2010s to Romania. In 2020, MCC got a big boost, when the foundational form it currently operates in was established with the support of state-owned companies³¹. MCC operates in 15 locations in Hungary and recently opened one in Brussels, led by Frank Furedi. There have been reports of MCC opening a location in London³². It invites speakers and researchers, distributing grants, but the education is heavily influenced by radical conservative views³³.

On a smaller scale, the 21st Century Institute (XXI. Század Intézet in the original) also offers grants to researchers and students. The 21st Century Institute is not a think tank, but it invites to its works thinkers of a specific worldview, especially from Hungary. Equally there is the Danube Institute, a conservative think tank founded in 2013, financed by Batthyány Lajos Foundation, a Hungarian-State foundation, that promotes conservatism in cultural and social life. The president is John O'Sullivan, but he is associated with former Hungarian foreign minister János Martonyi, and the Polish politician Ryszard Legutko. It reaches out to conservative fellows, like the American author Rod Dreher³⁴, influential in radical conservative circles, and based in Budapest, who has been a grantee.

The American perspective

As mentioned previously, there is a historical relation between European conservatives and US foreign policy. As for the interest of European far-right parties in American conservative politics, that is a more recent phenomenon. Traditionally, for these parties, the US was responsible for defeating fascism in Europe, while promoting inclusion, tolerance, and *the American dream*. They were also traditionally against America's materialistic culture, expanded due to a globalized free market capitalistic society. On the other hand, the interest of Americans towards European authoritarian ideas has a longer history. During the

³¹ S. Czinkóczi (2020), 'Az MCC alapítványa megkapta a Mol és a Richter részvényeit', *444.Hu*, 18 July, <https://444.hu/2020/06/18/az-mcc-alapitvanya-megkapta-a-mol-es-a-richter-reszvenyeit>

³² F. Garamvolgyi, P. Walker (2023), 'Viktor Orbán-influenced university plans outpost in London', *The Guardian*, 28 August, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/aug/28/viktor-orban-influenced-university-plans-outpost-in-london>

³³ B. W. Szechenyi (2023), 'Viktor Orbán's pet university is all about propaganda – I know, I was there', *The Guardian*, 11 September, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/11/viktor-orban-university-propaganda-london>

³⁴ To know more about the work of Rod Dreher visit: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/author/rod-dreher/>

years leading to the Second World War, there were admirers of Nazism and Italian fascism in the US. This was the result of a view that America had to protect the 'Aryan character of the nation', and that the Jews control important parts of the American society³⁵. Something that was repeated in 2017 with the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville³⁶ mentioned above. As for the interest of some Americans in the Italian fascism model of Mussolini, the aspiration would be that the 'trains would run on time', particularly in moments of crisis, while maintaining traditional values and the Christian family model³⁷.

It is no surprise that the Trump ascendance to power served as an accelerant to a new breed of political thinkers, activists, and voters, that believe authoritarian models of governance are acceptable.

It is no surprise that Trump's ascendance to power, first in the Republican Party, and then to the Presidency, served as an accelerant to a new breed of political thinkers, activists, and voters, that believe that democracy has run its course, and that authoritarian models of governance are acceptable. Therefore, some of the political regimes that once were abhorrent to Republicans, conservatives and even neoconservatives, are now accepted in mainstream Republican politics. Especially the ones led by strong-man, authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán.

Since 2010, when Orbán ascended to power, that the mode of governance in Hungary- a kind of *informal power* that tilts the playing field³⁸ including a domination of the media ecosystem, erosion of the independence of the judiciary system, sidelining of the political opposition, and an electoral gerrymandering creating a disproportional parliamentary rule³⁹- became of interest to part of the new radical conservative ecosystem in the US. The interest of the Americans towards Hungarian governance under Fidesz had a first moment of recognition in a topic of common interest, with the organisation in Budapest of the event Building Families - Friendly Nations: Making Families Strong Again, organised in 2017 by the anti-LGBT group *World Congress of Families*. The Hungarian host committee was led by the then Secretary of State for Youth, Family, and

³⁵ German American Bund (1938), *Free America!* (Shawnee, KS: Primedia eLaunch LLC).

³⁶ D. Lavoie (2023), 'Torch-carrying white nationalists indicted in 2017 Charlottesville rally', *Associated Press*, 18 April, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/torch-carrying-white-nationalists-indicted-in-2017-charlottesville-rally>

³⁷ K. Hull (2021), *The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathy with Italian Fascism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

³⁸ E. Zgut (2022), 'Informal Exercise of Power: Undermining Democracy Under the EU's Radar in Hungary and Poland', *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* (14), 287-308.

³⁹ I. Tharoor (2022), 'The Orbanization of America: How to capture a democracy', *The Washington Post*, 18 May, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/18/orban-democracy-trump-united-states-elections-hungary/>

International Affairs, Katalin Novák, today Hungarian's President⁴⁰, the same that welcomed Giorgia Meloni to the Demographic Summit presented before.

Adding to that, other ambitions resonated across the Atlantic. The utilisations of refugees and migrants as political scapegoats; the existence of an all-powerful, international puppet masters, Jewish cabal (in the form of George Soros); the renunciation of *Islamisation and totalitarian progressivism*⁴¹. Or, again, the great European replacement programme mentioned above, or the gender madness that are sexual minority rights⁴². This language and policies echoes in the US radical conservative movement, that sees modernity and liberalism as a decay of morals, and where Christian nationalism is the only solution to restore a certain moral centre. In another words, the policies needed to Make America Great Again, even if such greatness resembles a theocracy, an illiberal democracy, or an authoritarian state.

From Europe to American governance

In fact, this transformation in governance is already happening in the US at the state level. Recent anti-democratic laws, like the ones seen in Hungary have

Recent anti-democratic laws instituted in Hungary are now see in in multiple states in the America.

been implemented in state legislatures. Some examples are the *Parental Rights in Education* in Florida, also known as the 'don't say gay bill', the *Regulate Experimental Adolescent Procedures* in Mississippi, that bans treatments for transgender youth, or the S03/HB09 in Tennessee, that bans drag demonstrations in public and that can criminalise, for example,

the participation in pride marches. Then there are examples of laws that intend to limit political and minorities' rights or weaken intellectual freedom, for example by affecting the teaching of gender studies⁴³ or race relationships theories⁴⁴ in schools and universities. This is seen in multiple States⁴⁵, in what is a worrisome

⁴⁰ ZHatewatch Staff (2017), 'Anti-LGBT hate group World Congress of Families to gather this week in Budapest', *The Southern Poverty Law Center*, 22 May, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/05/22/anti-lgbt-hate-group-world-congress-families-gather-week-budapest>

⁴¹ See footnote 5.

⁴² See footnote 8.

⁴³ Z. McNeil (2023), 'Florida's Ron DeSantis Is Just a Step Behind Hungary's Fascist Viktor Orbán', *Truthout*, 8 April, <https://truthout.org/articles/floridas-ron-desantis-is-just-a-step-behind-hungarys-fascist-viktor-orban/>

⁴⁴ E. J. Bader (2023), 'New College of Florida Is DeSantis's Launchpad for Attack on Higher Education', *Truthout*, 18 March, <https://truthout.org/articles/new-college-of-florida-is-desantiss-launchpad-for-attack-on-higher-education/>

⁴⁵ ES. Rinkunas (2023), 'Republican politicians went full fascist this week', *Jezebel*, 3 March, <https://jezebel.com/republican-politicians-went-full-fascist-this-week-1850184349>

development when thinking about the maximum that States 'are the laboratories of democracy'⁴⁶, but in this case, of illiberalism and loss of rights.

Equally worrying is the possibility of a second Trump Administration, that would mean a blow to US democracy and governance, but also for the position of America in the world. The governing program presented by the former president for a second administration is eerie similar to the way of capturing institutions seen in Hungary and Poland⁴⁷. The anticipated hollowing-out of civil servants in the government agencies to be replaced with cronies and sycophants⁴⁸ will mean authoritarian tendencies at home, but also the change of foreign policy affecting international aid, participation of the US in international organisations (UN, OMS, WTO), a scale back in the protection of the environment, and the foster of unproductive trade/commercial wars. There are precedents of this in the first Trump administration, when the then President stated that the EU was a 'foe'⁴⁹, while promoting trade wars that threatened European economy⁵⁰.

Another example could be a political change from the United States regarding support to Ukraine defence against Russia's aggression. There are worrying signs of what can be described as a *Russian fifth column* in the US⁵¹, as some Republican members of the House and the Senate are increasingly against that support, to the point of shutting down the government. This is helped by Trump's acquiescence to Putin. It was unfathomable to think of an American president siding with President Putin in detriment of the own intelligence agencies, like happened in the Helsinki Summit of 2018, or when the former president says about Putin that 'The smartest one gets to the top (...) That didn't work so well recently in our country. Or when mentioning Ukraine, (...) I said, this is genius. Putin declares a big portion of the Ukraine – of Ukraine. Putin declares it as independent. Oh, that's wonderful". Or in a speech to CPAC where he said, 'Yesterday reporters

⁴⁶ U.S. Supreme Court (2023), *New State ICE Co. v Liebmann*, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/285/262>

⁴⁷ Visit: <https://www.project2025.org/about/about-project-2025/> and <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/agenda47>

⁴⁸ J. Swan, C. Savage, M. Haberman (2023), 'Trump and allies forge plans to increase presidential power in 2025', *The New York Times*, 17 July, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/17/us/politics/trump-plans-2025.html>

⁴⁹ A. Roth, D. Smith, E. Helmore, M. Pengelly (2019), 'Trump calls European Union a 'foe' – ahead of Russia and China', *The Guardian*, 15 July, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/15/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-helsinki-russia-indictments>

⁵⁰ S. Pettypiece (2019), 'Trump plows toward trade war with Europe as China standoff threatens economy', *NBC News*, 23 August, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-plows-toward-trade-war-europe-china-standoff-threatens-economy-n1045441>

⁵¹ Some of the voices echoing this sentiment are Simon Roseberg from ABC News, Josh Marshal from Talking Point Memo

asked me if I thought President Putin was smart. I said, of course, he's smart⁵². To which I was greeted with "Oh, that's such a terrible thing to say". I like to tell them, Yes, he's smart'. This is then compound by an antagonism towards Zelensky that results from the lack of help from Kyiv in cooking up sham investigations on the Biden family on the eve of the 2020 presidential elections⁵³. Similarly, there are legitimate fears of Trump removing the US from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or, at the minimum, a redraw of American weapons and troops from European soil, possibly to move the focus of the American military to East Asia interests, or simply to make Europe more vulnerable to Russia aggression⁵⁴.

Kindred spirits

For Europeans, it is crucial to understand the vision that this radical conservative transatlantic movement has for the EU, as we move to the constitution of a new European Parliament and European Commission. As mentioned previously, members of the ECR Party⁵⁴ meet with their American counterparts at events like CPAC⁵⁵. This is not new. In 2016, on a similar conference, there was a delegation from the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group, at the time a Gert Wilders and Marine Le Pen project. This trip was paid by European Parliament funds allocated for 'fact-finding missions'⁵⁶.

The last CPAC in Europe, caused a welcomed moment of bipartisanship in the European Parliament, when the Party of European Socialists condemned the decision of Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, to participate in the conference in Hungary⁵⁷, while the same was being done by the ALDE Party Bureau, condemning the participation of Andrej Babiš, leader of ANO in Czech Republic, in the same event⁵⁸. However, others that were present did not suffer the same backlash, like the leaders of the Austrian (Herbert Kickl) and Portuguese (André Ventura) far-right parties, Jordan Bardella the president of RN, and

⁵² C. Cillizza (2022), 'Donald Trump just can't stop praising Vladimir Putin', *CNN*, 28 March, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/28/politics/trump-putin-ukraine-russia-smart/index.html>

⁵³ G. Rachman (2023), 'Western allies are hedging against Donald Trump', *Financial Times*, 3 July, <https://www.ft.com/content/7a8e3267-caa4-4eea-9476-67563d44c39d>

⁵⁴ S. Erlanger (2023), 'In Europe, few even want to talk about Trump part 2', *The New York Times*, 19 August, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/19/world/europe/trump-2024-election-europe.html>

⁵⁵ See footnote 3.

⁵⁶ See footnote 4.

⁵⁷ Party of European Socialists (2023), 'Garibashvili CPAC intervention contravenes European and progressive values', *PES*, 4 May, <https://pes.eu/pes/garibashvili-cpac-contravenes-european-progressive-values/>

⁵⁸ The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (2023), 'ALDE Party Bureau statement on the participation of Mr Babiš at CPAC event', *ALDE Party*, 28 May, https://www.aldeparty.eu/alde_party_bureau_statement_on_the_participation_of_mr_babi_at_cpac_event

Janez Janša from the Slovenia Democratic Party⁵⁹. The lack of criticism for the participation of these national politicians could be due to a lack of concern from the European party where they are associated, or a disinterest by Member States media and political ecosystems.

This *meeting of the minds* also registers on the other side of the Atlantic. Events organised by CPAC, or by Turning Point USA, include some of the most dangerous members of this radical conservative movement: Christian nationalists, conspiracy theorists, anti-government militias, and white nationalists. These political operators are now working with Republican congressional campaigns, while having meetings with leaders of far-right political parties from Italy and Hungary⁶⁰. These are the most aggressively visible. In the background there are organisations working in policies and law proposals, that reflect radical conservative ideals, made ready to be applied after gaining power, that include the Federalist Society, the American Principles Project, the 1766 Project Action Committee, and the American Legislative Council.

It is evident that Putin would benefit from an increase in dissent in the European Union and a return of Donald Trump to the White House

Things can get (even) worse

With the progressive hollowing-out of the Republican Party of ideas and policies⁶¹, progressively becoming the party of MAGA's and radical conservatives, a joint work with radical parties in Europe can lead to an increase in the representation of the ID Group in the European Parliament. This could serve as *Trojan*

Horse for anti-European values, that can cause a change in the future of the EU, from an organisation based in democratic liberal precepts and values, to a union of sovereign nations, a chauvinistic and ultranationalist vision of Nation States⁶², with a dominance of white, Christian, traditional European nationalism, where multiculturalism, openness, equality, and cosmopolitanism are to be eroded. Equally concerning is that a new strength in the European Parliament of the ID Group can generate alliances with the ECR Group, leading to possible

⁵⁹ J-B. Chastan (2023), 'At Budapest conference, Orban draws only second-string far-right leaders', *Le Monde*, 6 May, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/06/at-budapest-conference-orban-draws-only-second-string-far-right-leaders_6025670_4.html

⁶⁰ A. Moore (2023), 'Undercover with the New Alt-Right', *The Nation*, 22 August, <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/undercover-maga-alt-right/>

⁶¹ T. Wheeler (2020), 'The 2020 Republican Party platform: "L'etat, c'est moi"', *Brookings*, 25 August, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-2020-republican-party-platform-letat-cest-moi/>

⁶² R. Wildangel (2020), 'No alternative: What the AfD wants for Europe', *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 5 Mar, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_no_alternative_what_the_afd_wants_for_europe/

contamination of EPP policies and positions, something for what there is precedent^{63,64}.

Equally, it is important to stop the more recently observed tendency of a certain passivity regarding the presentation of authoritarianism as an acceptable form of governance. A recent study showed that 42% of people aged 18 to 35 are supportive of the idea of military rule, and that only 57% think democracy is preferable to any other form of government⁶⁵. In Poland the percentage of people who share this idea is 22%, and in France and the US of 29%. This reflects decades of erosion of democratic liberal institutions that have been accelerated by the new radical conservatives. It is worrisome that this is appealing to young people, that feel disenfranchised and disappointed with the way that crises that affect them directly are being managed, being economic, migration, housing, environment. The boom of interest in non-democratic solutions is now a reality both in the US, and in EU from the Mediterranean to the Central and Eastern part.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Counter narratives

As presented, the radical conservative movements are working together in shaping their own narratives, and how to better broadcast them to voters across the Atlantic. Liberals and democrats are against, in principle, of suppressing speech, or to impede the freedom to produce it. That should not prevent, however, the EU to develop tools for broadening data collection on radical political activity in Member States⁶⁶, particularly if it is aimed at causing extreme political polarisation or incite hatred against minorities or political opponents. Some worth-mentioning examples come from Germany, Hungary, and Italy. In Germany the *Second Report on the Work and Effectiveness of Federal Programmes to Prevent Extremism* highlights the financial investment for a far-reaching funding programme at the federal level, with local partnerships for democracy, 16 regional democracy centres, 40 civil society organisations and 150 model projects that work for democracy and against all forms of extremism. In Hungary, a coalition of NGOs and independent

⁶³ S. Zsiros (2019), 'What do Orban and the EPP offer each other? Euronews answers', *Euronews*, 1 March, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/01/what-do-orban-and-the-epp-offer-each-other-euronews-answers>

⁶⁴ R. Castaldi (2023), 'EU liberals seek to drag EPP away from Meloni's 'extreme right'', *Euractiv*, 13 June, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/eu-liberals-seek-to-drag-epp-away-from-melonis-extreme-right/>

⁶⁵ Open Society Foundation (2023), 'Open Society Barometer. Can Democracies deliver', September, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/e6cd5a09-cd19-4587-aa06-368d3fc78917/open-society-barometer-can-democracy-deliver-20230911.pdf>

⁶⁶ Q. Liger, M. Gutheil (2022), 'Right-wing extremism in the EU', *European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs*, May, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU\(2021\)700953_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU(2021)700953_EN.pdf)

activists supporting victims of right-wing extremism created the *Working Group against Hate Crimes*, including Amnesty International Hungary, Háttér Society, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, with the aim of establishing a more effective legal and institutional framework for State responses to hate crimes. In Italy, it was created the National Office Against Racial Discrimination, and the Observatory For Safety Against Discriminatory Acts, that includes regional centres that collect complaints and work with local authorities.

It is also advised for the European institutions to continue supporting campaigns that counteract the spread of radical conservative ideas, with long-term-programmes that support local organisations, from think tanks to political foundations, but also citizens' initiatives, that are then able to expose the falsehoods, or the radicalisation tactics of these malicious political operators. However, this must be done in a way that it doesn't create the opposite effect, raising support for these radical ideas and policy proposals from the electorate⁶⁷ due to a perceived sense that the rights and freedoms of these operators are being taken away, that can cause interest in them due to the semblance that they are being suppressed.

Political information quality

The EU has several tools to fight the spread of disinformation and the fomenting of polarisation in the Member States. The European Democracy Plan⁶⁸ is one of those initiatives, created to 'empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU'. This plan is also aimed to stand up to rising extremism and to counter disinformation, ranging from online platforms to political consultancies. One of the outcomes of the Plan was the creation of a proposal for transparency and targeting of political advertising, with the inclusion of the definition of scope, who created the add, and if it was on the behalf of a political actor; transparency labels, where political advertising must be clearly labelled and it must provide a set of key information; strict conditions for targeting and amplification where use or infer sensitive personal data, such as ethnic origin, religious beliefs or sexual orientation is banned.

Another important development was the entry into force of the Digital Services Act⁶⁹, equally focusing on protecting Europeans in digital areas, some that can be

⁶⁷ See footnote above.

⁶⁸ European Commission (2023), 'European Democracy Action Plan', https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_en

⁶⁹ Visit: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package>

related to democratic processes⁷⁰. For example, by instituting 'limited measures against illegal activities, laying down the procedural obligations for online platforms to tackle illegal activities, in order to protect users' fundamental rights and ensure transparency', while applying 'asymmetric measures with stronger obligations for very large online platforms, further clarifications of the liability regime for online intermediaries and EU governance with reinforced oversight and enforcement'⁷¹.

There is also a Code of Practice on Disinformation, more focused on online activities⁷², normally on Russian and Chinese disinformation. The code includes 34 signatories, including digital platforms, tech companies and civil society including lessons learned during the COVID19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The code includes actions in the areas of demonetisation by cutting financial incentives for purveyors of disinformation, transparency of political advertising, ensuring the integrity of services, empowering users, researchers and the fact-checking community, and the development of a *Transparency centre and Task-force*. A report of September 2023 showed that an initial set of structural indicators, providing insights on disinformation in digital platforms, was produced. Some results were noteworthy. Google prevented, in 2023, more than 31 million Euros in advertising to flow to promoters of disinformation in the EU, rejecting 141 823 political ads due to lack of identifying verification. YouTube, a part of Alphabet, like Google, terminated 411 channels related to Russian state sponsored influenced operations. Meta, on Facebook, factchecked 40 million pieces of content, doing the same on Instagram with 1.1 million, while expanding factchecking partnership to Czech Republic and Slovakia. TikTok reported that 140 635 videos were removed for infringement to the misinformation policy, and that a partnership with Reuters was set. Finally, Microsoft blocked registration of 6.7 million fake LinkedIn accounts, or those were restricted from being seen in the EU (first half of 2023), and the Bing search engine promoted *authoritative information*, while downgrading less *authoritative information*, on around 800 000 searches⁷³. The same blueprint can be adapted to detect and counteract disinformation that could come from US channels, particularly in social networks.

⁷⁰ R. Silvestre (2022), 'The new Digital Service Act and the protection of freedom and rights in the digital public square', *European Liberal Forum*, 27 January, <https://liberalforum.eu/2022/01/digitising-europe-the-new-digital-service-act-and-the-protection-of-freedom-and-rights-in-the-digital-public-square/>

⁷¹ European Commission (2020), 'Executive summary of the impact assessment report accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act)', 15 December, <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/72158>

⁷² Visit: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation>

⁷³ European Commission (2023a), 'Code of Practice on Disinformation: new reports available in the Transparency Centre', 26 September, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/code-practice-disinformation-new-reports-available-transparency-centre>

Another important front is the European Union External Action (EEAS) organisation, the Diplomatic Service of the EU. This service also works in fighting Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), that is recognized by EEAS as a 'growing political and security challenge to the European Union'⁷⁴. Inside EEAS there is the Strategic Communication Division and its Task Forces (STRAT.2) that addresses FIMI, analysing the 'information environment in order to enable EU foreign policy implementation and protect its values and interests'⁷⁵. It is of note that there is a Policy, Strategy and Global Priority Issues Team, to deal with strategy and policy development, emerging threats, cooperation with Member States (that includes the Rapid Alert System on Disinformation) and international partners. The partners should include organisations in the US. Equally, there is the Information Analysis, Open Source and Data Strategy Team, for assessment of the information environment, the development of sound and scalable methodology as well as analytical cooperation. Finally, there are three Strategic Communications Task Forces cover the geographic priority regions in the EU: The East Stratcom Task force for the eastern neighbourhood; the *Western Balkans Task Force*; and the Task Force South, dealing with the MENA region. It could be excessive to create a Task Force for the Atlantic. However, since the methodologies and instruments are in place, the EU should maintain a vigilant position regarding interferences and growing of polarisation coming from the radical conservative movements (from the US, but not only).

Another battle front is fighting disinformation from media organisations in Member States. Two examples are worth mentioning, CrossCheck in France⁷⁶ and *Correctiv* in Germany⁷⁷. It would be advantageous to extend these models to other regions of the EU, in a way to be State independent, particularly in cases where States are averse to free and independent media, or even worst, when they are themselves the disseminators of misinformation and propaganda. Centrally, there is a European hub of independent fact checkers, the European Digital Media Observatory⁷⁸, to give tools for the citizen to better understand political ecosystems.

⁷⁴ European Union External Action (2021), 'Tackling Disinformation, Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference', 27 October, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/tackling-disinformation-foreign-information-manipulation-interference_en#45330

⁷⁵ European Union External Action (2021), 'Tackling disinformation: Information on the work of the EEAS Strategic Communication division and its task forces (SG.STRAT.2)', 12 October, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/countering-disinformation/tackling-disinformation-information-work-eeas-strategic-communication_en

⁷⁶ Visit: <https://awards.journalists.org/entries/crosscheck-france/>

⁷⁷ Visit: <https://correctiv.org/en/correctiv-investigations-in-the-public-interest/>

⁷⁸ European Commission (2022), 'Hubs of the European Digital Media Observatory now extend to the whole EU27', 30 November, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/hubs-european-digital-media-observatory-now-extend-whole-eu27>

Equally, in building resilience against polarization, the EU should continue to support projects that deal with the risk of letting extreme right-wing ideologies go unchallenged, as it is the case of the BRaVE project. This project aims to 'update the knowledge on polarisation, violent extremism and resilience through mapping relevant literature, policies, and practices', and to 'design new tools for policy-making: the project creates a set of *Polarisation Indicators*, so we can understand how to measure processes of polarisation and extremism'⁷⁹, with the development of a toolkit⁸⁰. Again, even if the influence of American actors in European politics, particularly leading to the EU elections, is not comparable to other adversarial countries, that could easily become a reality, and there should be both awareness and countermeasures ready to apply.

There is a rich history of creating liberal alliances between Europe and the United States. There is the need, again, for both sides of the Atlantic to focus promoting freedom, tolerance, inclusion, and democracy

Creating liberal alliances

There is a rich history of creating liberal alliances across the Atlantic, most notably after the end of the Second World War⁸¹, both politically and economically, as well as with the birth, or development of institutions. The creation of a liberal order in Europe, both after a hot war, but also a cold one, was done in great part because of the joint work of believers in the merits of liberal and democratic values and ideas, in a Wilsonian perspective of international relations⁸². There are no guarantees that liberal democracies will establish themselves and thrive based on its inherent qualities. The work of maintaining this societal model needs to be reinforced constantly.

There is the need, again, for both two sides of the Atlantic to focus on the alliances that promote freedom, tolerance, inclusion, progressivism, and democracy. Some high-level initiatives are worth mentioning, like the Summit for Democracy⁸³

⁷⁹ European Commission (2021) 'Periodic Reporting for period 2 - BRaVE (Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism and Polarisation)', 31 December, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/822189/reporting>

⁸⁰ Visit: <http://brave-h2020.eu/toolkit>

⁸¹ H. Kundnani (2017), 'What is the Liberal International Order?', *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, 3 May, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/what-liberal-international-order>

⁸² W. Wilson (1918), 'President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points', *Yale Law School*, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/9780815738510_ch1.pdf

⁸³ Visit: <https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/>

and the New Transatlantic Agenda⁸⁴. These needs extend to the State, and even regional level. Think tanks and political foundations, or even groups of citizens, should get together, and learn from the experiences of their fellow-minded friends fighting the radical conservative movement in Europe and in the US. In fact, there is a lot to learn about what the radical conservative movement does, one can say, its *best practices*. One can learn on how to replicate them, but to promote liberal values, and exchange of information on what works and what doesn't. The increased digitalised world can be a way to facilitate the creation of these joint work, something that is also already being done by the opponents of liberalism and democracy. Understanding this new breed of radicalisation in the digital world, and how radical movements are built, and operate there, is a potential boon for combating this threat.

Conclusion

One of the main attractions of the radical conservative movement to its supporters is similar to the ones presented by populists, that is, the willingness to provide easy answers to complex problems. The western liberal elite failed to emphasise in recent years, why liberal democracies are better than any other type of government; why the rule-of-law makes people happier, freer, and richer; why human rights matter for our daily life. There should be more open dialogue and effort for an understandable, easily explained, narrative of the liberal world. In both sides of the Atlantic, liberals, conservatives, and other constructive political forces should not abandon the people that are lured into this radical way of thinking about politics, that tend to abandon democratic means due to negative concepts of *others, or elites, or institutions*. Even if *moderate avenues* for dialogue with members of this radical conservative movement seems difficult now, that should not discourage democrats to try and reach those fellow citizens. Creating liberal alliances with potent counter narratives can be a way to reach them and bring them to the democratic fold.

There is a need to create liberal alliances with potent counter narratives

The other avenue is to resoundingly beat the representatives of this movement in the polls. That will lead the members of the movement to moderate their positions, either by necessity or to aspire to be a part of the political dialogue and governance, and by extension, their followers. This includes an effort of all that

⁸⁴ Visit: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/210469/New-Transatlantic-Agenda_EN.pdf

believe in liberal democracy to present the best arguments against the nihilism, intolerance, nativism, and cruelty, that the actual movement displays. It is also possible that this can be a transitory political movement that will collapse on itself. Regardless, we should remain active and vigilant to prevent it from growing in our democratic societies, by presenting to their followers a better world view.

Even if not the scope of this policy paper, the radical conservative movement is not, necessarily, the only threat to EU and US politics, albeit being the one that is more visibly operative in both sides of the Atlantic. Equally, radical left-leaning movements, even if at the moment they are not comparable in political influence to the other extreme, can also be a disruptive force. Something that Europeans and Americans should also follow closely.

In September of 2022, the President of the European Commission delivered the State of the Union Speech. Mrs. von der Leyen called for a response to foreign interference aiming to destabilise Member States saying that this should be done by protecting democracies 'from the external threats they face'⁸⁵. It may sound far-fetched, or even surreal, to consider that a long friend of Europe like the United States of America could become a danger to democracy, and the values that constitute the European project. Still, in this new reality, and using the aphorism from the 26th president of the USA to define the country's foreign policy, this could be a time for the EU to 'speak softly but carry a big stick'. Not in a way to create a departure from a decade old alliance⁸⁶, but to show this new radical conservative, authoritarian, illiberal, and regressive movement that have been gaining strength and influence during the *Trump era*, that they will face a serious and concerted opposition from Europeans. This while believing that the US can continue to be a shining city *on the hill*, and that the project of building a Europe based on liberal democracies is the best example of similar political ideas on this side of the Atlantic.

⁸⁵ European Union (2022), '2022 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen', *European Union press room*, 14 September, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_22_5493

⁸⁶ J. Anderlini, C. Caulcutt (2023), 'Europe must resist pressure to become 'America's followers,' says Macron', *Politico Europe*, 9 April, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-china-america-pressure-interview/>

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