
THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK IN THE
UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

By
Thomas Greven



This book was published with the financial support of the European Parliament. It does not represent the view of the European Parliament.

This book reflects the opinions of the author, not those of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). The responsibility of FEPS is limited to the publication inasmuch as it is considered worthy of attention by the global progressive movement.

Bibliographical information of the German National Library

The German National Library catalogues this publication in the German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic information can be found on the internet at: <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-8012-3110-1

Copyright © 2026 Foundation for European Progressive Studies
Copyright © 2026 Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH

Layout and editing: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH
Cover picture: Birgit Sell
Printing and processing: Bookpress, Olsztyn

Published by



Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH
Dreizehnmorgenweg 24, 53175 Bonn, Germany
www.dietz-verlag.de

Published in association with the

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



**FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)**

Avenue des Arts 46 - 1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.feps-europe.eu

@FEPS_Europe

European Political Foundation – N° 4 BE 896.230.213

All rights reserved

Printed in Poland 2026

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	7
2 The radical right	16
3 Globalisation and the rise of the radical right	31
4 Cultural backlash	48
5 The crisis of representative democracy	63
6 Cross-border networks of the radical right	80
7 The global hegemonic project of the radical right	90
8 The beginnings of cross-border networking among the radical right up to 2016	113
9 The radical right in the European Parliament	121
10 European parties and think tanks: networking beyond Europe	142
11 Hungary's export of 'illiberal democracy'	151
12 Highlights of the radical right's global networking	174
13 The international networking of the radical right in the geopolitical context	190

14 Annex	208
15 Bibliography	246
About the author	280

1 Introduction

Because of its ultra-nationalism the radical right's cross-border networking was long written off as unlikely to succeed, but it has now hit the headlines. In spring 2026 François-Xavier Bellamy, vice-chair of the conservative European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament, organised a chat group in an attempt to build a majority for a more restrictive migration policy, which included MEPs from the AfD, who belong to the far-right Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) group (Keinberger 2026). EPP group chair Manfred Weber (CSU) may not regard this as a breach of the so-called 'cordon sanitaire' – or firewall – between the EPP and the radical right, but it is clear that Bellamy (Les Républicains, France) had precisely such a breach of taboo in mind. In other words, it is not merely that he would be willing to 'accept' votes from the radical right for his own legislative purposes, but rather that he would be willing to work hand in glove with radical forces to prepare suitable proposals and votes.

It was not that long ago that even France's Rassemblement National (RN) considered the AfD too radical. In the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, Marine Le Pen successfully pushed to have the AfD expelled from the Identity and Democracy (ID) group. The initial trigger was a meeting between AfD politicians and Austrian Identitarian Martin Sellner at which aggressive strategies for so-called 'remigration' were discussed, among other things. The last straw for the RN were statements made shortly afterwards by then AfD MEP Maximilian Krah that downplayed the role of the SS. On the other hand, 'radicalised conservatives' (Strobl 2021) from the German CDU/CSU and WerteUnion also participated in the meeting with Sellner, so it's not entirely surprising that ties are now being forged with the AfD from those quarters as well.

Above all, the AfD itself has intensified its cross-border networking activities, which the German media are naturally much more likely to pick up on than the long-standing and increasing efforts of other far-right groups, such as Hungary's Fidesz. The American German Institute in Washington, DC, has compiled a detailed list of recent transatlantic activities of the

AfD (AGI 2026). In this context it's important not to overestimate the various trips by AfD politicians to the United States, such as those by co-leader Tino Chruppala to Donald Trump's second inauguration or the trips by Markus Frohnmeier, foreign policy spokesperson for the Bundestag parliamentary group. After all, the party's stated intention to keep channels of communication open with Russia remains in effect, which is a priority particularly for the still-strong East German factions within the AfD. More important than sporadic meetings are concrete efforts to learn campaign techniques from the American MAGA ('Make America Great Again') movement, which has effectively subsumed the Republican Party. For instance, Alex Bruesewitz, Donald Trump's social media advisor, gave a presentation to the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag, on which moderator and member of the Bundestag Beatrix von Storch commented enthusiastically on Telegram: 'Patriots are networking globally. We are fighting the same fight' (quoted in Haupt 2025a).

Nevertheless, the AfD remains a relatively insignificant player in the radical right's cross-border networking, particularly with regard to establishing institutionalised cooperation. In short, the party is rather a recipient of support. For instance, Elon Musk's repeated endorsement of the AfD as Germany's 'only hope' 'set the hearts of many party members racing' (ibid.). The hope for significant campaign assistance also stems from the explicit thrust of the new US National Security Strategy to support 'patriotic parties' in Europe. This inevitably paves the way for a greater role for activist US government officials. For instance, the Franco-American Jacob Helberg, a department head at the State Department, has opened communication channels with the French far right, not only with Le Pen's RN but also with Éric Zemmour and his partner Sarah Knafu (MEP, Reconquête; see Nüsse 2026). Furthermore, Sarah Rogers, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy at the State Department, coordinates the allocation of financial aid to European organisations, including to support the fight for greater 'freedom of expression', which in reality is a fight against European regulation of digital corporations (GPAHE 2026a).

But it was clear even before publication of the US National Security Strategy that the American radical right would intensify its cross-border activities following Donald Trump's election victory in 2024. For example, Poland's first Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), held on 27 May 2025, was in part organised as concrete campaign support for presidential candidate Karol Nawrocki, backed by the PiS

(Law and Justice) party. The Heritage Foundation, a think tank central to the development of Trump's 'Project 2025' government programme, has identified organisations in several European countries with which to institutionalise partnerships, including financial support, such as Western Arc in France and the Free Speech Union in the United Kingdom (Mathiesen et al. 2026). The Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE 2025) has documented earlier 'Christian nationalist' activities of the Heritage Foundation and its president Kevin Roberts in Europe, for example in Spain with organisations such as the Vox party, the Christian organisations CitizenGo, Centro de Estudios, Formación y Análisis Social (CEU-CEFAS), and PNfV (Political Network for Values), as well as with the mainstream conservative Partido Popular.

The new US national strategy now ensures that these activities will receive the government's active support. Immediately after the Munich Security Conference in February 2026, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio travelled to Slovakia and Hungary to provide campaign assistance. As in other cases, such as the support for Javier Milei in Argentina, this involved the threat that American financial aid and investments could be withheld if the respective MAGA partners are not elected (Mayer 2026a). Rubio's trip to Hungary, which is the 'fantasyland of the American right' (ibid.) and a 'laboratory for illiberal democracy' (Zsuzsanna Vegh of the German Marshall Fund, cited ibid.), shows that this is not simply a matter of 'exporting MAGA ideology' (Meiritz/Schäuble 2025) or 'Christian nationalism' (GPAHE 2026b). For one thing, it is clear that the cross-border activities of the radical right originate from many different places and that Hungary, in particular, plays a central role. Furthermore, the US national security strategy naturally pursues explicitly national interests that may conflict with the interests of other countries governed by radical right-wing parties. This applies to the US initiative for a 'Shield of the Americas' because the participating radical-right governments from Latin America – including Javier Milei of Argentina, Daniel Noboa of Ecuador and Nayib Bukele of El Salvador – must know that the Trump administration is pursuing a strategy of hegemony within its 'sphere of influence'. The goal of the so-called 'Donroe Doctrine' is to secure the US's old 'backyard'. The same applies to radical-right governments and opposition parties in Europe, who must realise that the Trump administration is focused on dismantling or at least weakening the EU, simply because the US can better assert its superiority over every member state individually.

Thus, it is scarcely surprising that there is a recurrent ‘Trump backlash’, from which the respective opponents of the radical-right parties benefit – such as Mark Carney in Canada and Anthony Albanese in Australia – but which can also cause political parties sympathetic to the MAGA movement at least to have second thoughts, as has been the case, for example, in light of rising oil and gas prices following the US-Israeli attack on Iran in the spring of 2026.

The underlying cause of these inevitable tensions between governments that are ostensibly friendly and ideologically aligned is the nationalist core of the radical right’s ideology. This can lead to severe conflicts of interest, especially when these actors are in government (and when, as these actors desire, international rules and arbitration bodies are absent). In other words, the successes of the radical right’s international networks already contain the seeds of this cooperation’s future failure. François Mitterrand put it bluntly: nationalism is war (see Fix 2026 on the legitimate concerns that German regional hegemony would trigger among its neighbours).

This is why the international networking of the radical right has long been viewed as contradictory and counterintuitive. In social science research, for example, little attention has been paid to the question of cross-border cooperation among the radical right. At best, it was seen as involving tactical, short-term alliances of convenience, or ‘unity in opposition only’. Taking the view that this situation has changed fundamentally, at the latest since 2016, particularly with the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump’s first election victory, this book explores the significance of cross-border networking for the radical right today. The question is, are we now dealing with strategically operating networks, or even with a global social movement that threatens liberal democracy and the rules-based world order?

The empirical focus is, first, on Europe and the United States, and second, on physical European and transatlantic networking, in contrast to the – undoubtedly important – networking on the internet and especially on social media. A third focus is on political actors, not on the networking of right-wing extremist terrorists.

The answer I will outline below is, yes, the global rise of the radical right is not some random development occurring in parallel in different countries;

rather, we are dealing with a transnational social movement in the making. The actors within this movement use shared frames and narratives for the purpose of self-identification and to describe their 'enemy'; they contribute their own resources to build an international infrastructure of conferences and think tank networks; and they are formulating a shared political project. This project aims at the destruction of the liberal world order and of liberal democracies and at their replacement with systems characterised by a much stronger focus on national sovereignty, anti-pluralist hypermajority (if not outright autocracy), and the active enforcement of 'traditional' cultural values. Because the actors in this global social movement want to bring about a fundamentally different world, this amounts to a 'global political revolution' (Leonard 2026).

Outline of the book

In Chapter 2, I discuss first why I use the term 'radical right'. In the context of this study, the term is intended to encompass a broad spectrum of actors and is therefore less than precise. The spectrum ranges from radicalised conservatives such as the US Republicans to those violent right-wing extremists who do not rely exclusively on violent overthrow of the state but who also compete politically. While most on the radical right insist on such terms as 'conservative' or 'patriot', I characterise the most active among them rather as 'reactionary revolutionaries'.

Chapters 3 through 5 examine the common, cross-border driving forces behind the current rise of the radical right worldwide. These include first of all the grievances and representation deficits associated with economic globalisation; second, the grievances caused by cultural change; and third, a kind of pervasive torpor in relation to representative democracy, multiple crises and processes of transformation. Of course, in order to adequately explain the successes of the radical right (or, where applicable, its weaknesses) in individual countries we would need to examine these factors' country-specific manifestations more closely. For instance, migration is by no means a clear 'winning issue' for the radical right everywhere. However, it is important to identify these common driving forces because they form the basis for increasing cross-border networking.

In order to examine the particular manifestations of this networking, I use the Transnational Advocacy Networks (TAN) approach, which I explain in

Chapter 6. Other points of reference include social movement theories and neo-Gramscian hegemony theory (the subject of Chapter 7). The core of my analysis comprises the following questions: Have actors on the radical right developed shared frames and narratives for the purpose of self-identification and for identifying their political opponents, and if so, what are they? Do they – beyond their national election campaigns – have a shared political project, and if so, what is it? Are they willing and able to allocate resources to building an infrastructure to disseminate their frames and pursue their political project, and if so, for which purposes exactly? In Chapters 6 and 7, I also discuss some of the global radical right's programmatic contradictions, particularly regarding its economic and social policies. The following chapters are devoted to an empirical examination of these questions.

In Chapter 8, I outline the radical right's attempts at cross-border networking up to 2016. This year marks a decisive turning point with the Brexit referendum and Trump's first election. In its wake the continuous fragmentation and merely tactical alliances observed hitherto increasingly no longer hold true. Actors on the radical right have recognised that individual electoral victories and even withdrawals from international organisations are insufficient to achieve their goal of greater national sovereignty. They tend to blame this on a 'global liberal hegemony' that must be broken globally (and at the European or EU level). Moreover, they conclude that this requires a global movement and a shared anti-hegemonic project.

In Chapters 9 through 12, I discuss how the radical right in the European Parliament, across Europe and beyond is developing shared frameworks and a common project, as well as mobilising resources on an unprecedented scale to create an international infrastructure of conferences, think tank and foundation networks, and media outlets. The European Union offers the best institutional conditions for this (Chapters 9 and 10), and the most active organiser has been Viktor Orbán, who has built an extensive infrastructure to export what he calls 'illiberal democracy' (Chapter 11). There are numerous other internationally active individuals and organisations, particularly Americans such as Steve Bannon and Matt Schlapp. Their networks are presented and discussed in Chapter 12 and in the Appendix, including their overlaps with partly independent but related networks – in particular, transnationally active Christian organisations (for updated information on the networks consult

thomas-greven.berlin). In the concluding Chapter 13, I discuss the study's findings in the context of current geopolitical challenges and finally address the implications for action: what is to be done?

There is at least one ray of hope. While the reactionary revolutionaries are well ahead in terms of motivation and mobilisation, the rise and victory of the radical right are certainly not inevitable. The national political stage remains the decisive battlefield, because political and financial opportunities for cross-border activities depend on success in national elections. Besides the United States, Hungary was the most important country for the international networking of the radical right in recent years. But while Viktor Orbán had managed to reshape the country's democratic institutions, including the electoral system, for the benefit of his Fidesz party (cf. Mayer 2026b), he lost the election in April of 2026 against Péter Magyar and his Tisza party. In fact, the mix between plurality and proportionality tailor-made for Fidesz benefitted the winner, who now enjoys a two-thirds majority in the Hungarian parliament. A 'Polish scenario' of blocking the Magyar government by systemic obstacles and entrenched Fidesz veto players is not likely. Thus, there will certainly be constraints for the cross-border network actively popularizing and disseminating Orbán's authoritarian playbook for an 'illiberal democracy,' which has inspired Trump's Project 2024. However, Orbán may have managed to shield this network financially; organisations such as the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) continue to be active. Moreover, financially viable sponsors, especially from the United States, are ready to step in.

In other words, the global movement of the radical right is already moving on from Orbán's defeat. On a weekend in April 2026 when over 5,000 social democrats were gathering in Barcelona for the 'Progressive Mobilization Summit,' the Patriots for Europe, the European parliament group and Europarty that includes the Rassemblement National, the Austrian FPÖ, and also Fidesz, met in Milan. Matteo Salvini (Lega) seemed ready to try to assume Orbán's mantle as European leader of the radical right. Shortly afterwards, the newly elected Péter Magyar, still as a private citizen, paid a courtesy visit to Italy's prime minister Giorgia Meloni. In the European parliament, Tisza belongs to the EPP, while Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia is part of the radical right group European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR). A further rapprochement of the two groups is thus likely. And after Orbán's defeat it may have become more difficult to organize future

Conservative Political Action Conferences (CPAC) in Hungary, where they have become the most relevant international offshoot of this major gathering of the global radical right. But in July 2026, the first CPAC UK is already scheduled, featuring Nigel Farage, whose Reform UK party is currently reshaping British politics.

Background and acknowledgments

This book has a very long history. In the late 1990s, my research was deeply engaged with the social dimension of economic globalisation, mainly with efforts to socially regulate the liberalisation of the global economy, which was advancing almost unchecked at the time. Examples include provisions inserted in trade agreements designed to protect workers' rights and social standards. Such attempts continue to this day – for example, with the EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive – but they are being successfully stymied by an alliance of conservatives, economic liberals, neoliberalised social democrats and indeed the radical right. As a consequence, they are severely watered down or even blocked completely. There is also resistance from the Global South, because these measures are perceived as protectionism.

The hopes of the broad alternative-globalisation movement were dashed soon after the 'Battle of Seattle' during the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in 1999. A key moment was China's accession to the WTO in 2001, which was followed by the first 'China shock', an intense global race to the bottom in industrial production. Long before migration became the radical right's dominant mobilising issue, competition driven by globalisation had enabled it to position itself as the supposed voice of a working class under pressure. For example, Trump's first election victory in 2016 was clearly based on his success in the US 'Rust Belt', a region beset by deindustrialisation.

While my research focus initially shifted only slightly towards cross-border trade union campaigns in disputes with multinational corporations, a premonition led to the founding of a transatlantic network to combat right-wing extremism in 2002. I surmised that if progressive forces proved unable to bring about the socio-ecological regulation of globalised competition, then sooner or later there would be a backlash against globalisation 'from the right', driven by the non-college-educated 'working class'. When China, then emerging as the 'workshop of the world',

acceded to the WTO and thus effectively gained veto power against any attempt at effective international socio-ecological regulation it became clear to me that such a backlash would occur.

The second motivation for founding the transatlantic network was an observation by my friend and colleague Thomas Grumke that right-wing extremists were networking more actively than the watchdog NGOs working to combat them and the social scientists attempting to analyse them. For a long time, our network meetings focused on exchanging information, primarily about nationally active right-wing extremist actors, the 'lunatic fringe'. But as the network grew in tandem with the rising threat posed by the reactionary revolutionaries in an increasing number of countries, this focus shifted in two ways. On one hand, radicalised conservatives came into view, particularly US Republicans, to whom I dedicated part of my research starting in the mid-2000s. This research included studies on the Tea Party movement, a precursor to MAGA and Trumpism. On the other hand, the increasing cross-border networking of the radical right demanded more attention, precisely because the change in the quantity of networking had been transformed into a new quality.

While I cannot name the network participants here individually (sadly, in part for their own protection), I owe them all my deepest gratitude for an exchange that has now lasted two and a half decades. This book would not have been possible without the conversations, reflections, information, studies and contacts. I would also like to thank various departments and individuals at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, which has supported both the network and my research on the US Republicans, the Tea Party movement, and the European and global radical right over many years. A special thanks goes to my research assistant, Emma Hubbard. Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude to the organisers of the many events and conferences at which I have been able to present my research findings for discussion, and to my hosts during research and lecture trips. Unfortunately, Thomas Grumke's observation from 2001 still holds true: when it comes to cross-border networking, the radical right has a significant head start over the defenders of liberal democracy and pluralistic society. This book is therefore dedicated to all those who are helping to close this gap through their tireless and courageous work.