

## **‘United by a Common Enemy: An Open, Pluralist Society’. Far-Right Parties Sign Declaration on Europe’s Future**

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Led by Poland’s Prime Minister, far-right parties from across the region declare that the European Union is threatening nations, families and tradition.

Far-right political parties from across the European Union have signed a ‘Declaration on the Future of Europe’, authored by Poland’s authoritarian leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

It “concerns the protection of nations, families and traditional Christian values”, according to fellow signatory, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Spain’s Vox, Italy’s Lega, France’s Rassemblement National, and Hungary’s Fidesz party have all signed the declaration, as did the openly fascist Brothers of Italy.

Some far-right parties were notably absent from the declaration, however, including Germany’s AfD, Romania’s AUR, and the Netherlands’ sovereignty party JA21.

It follows the decision by the European Parliament to adopt the Matic Report, which highlights the importance of EU citizens’ access to all essential sexual and reproductive healthcare. These include comprehensive sex education, contraception, abortion, maternal health and fertility services. It also emphasises the need for member states to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence.

Although the European Parliament voted to adopt the Matic Report, it is not binding and there is no compulsion for member states to change their abortion, contraception or sex education laws.

Launching the declaration, Kaczynski accused the EU of “preparing to carry out a cultural revolution [that] will destroy social structures, starting with the family and traditions, and create a new man”.

“We don’t want this revolution, which we believe will bring unhappiness and a drastic decline in the freedoms of individuals and countries,” he added.

Dr Rafal Pankowski, of Poland’s anti-racist organisation Never Again, told Byline Times: “We can call it a paradoxical internationalisation of far-right nationalism. These parties are united through a common enemy: the idea of an open, pluralist society. They seem determined to join forces and challenge the basic values of the European Union such as the rule of law, human rights, and the rights of minorities. They will try to push the European mainstream even further to the right.”

## The Far-Right's Anti-Gender Swing

The declaration is yet another example of how different elements of the European far-right are working together to attack and undermine sexual and reproductive rights in the region.

In January, Poland's Government officially extended its ban on abortion to include a ban on terminations in cases of foetal defect, despite mass protests last autumn. Abortion is now only permitted in cases of threat to the mother's life, fatal foetal abnormality, and in cases of rape and incest. It also continues its assault on the rights of LGBTIQ people, with the EU threatening legal action against the country's so-called 'LGBT-free zones'. Hungary too has been under the spotlight for new laws specifically targeting LGBTIQ-equality – including a ban on LGBT content in schools and on children's television; as well as last year's decision to ban gender recognition.

Matteo Salvini, leader of Italy's Lega party, has been vocal on his opposition to abortion which he links to a perceived demographic crisis in the country. Such rhetoric echoes the far-right conspiracy theory of the 'Great Replacement', which posits that mass immigration combined with reproductive rights is threatening a 'white genocide'.

In 2019, Salvini spoke at the anti-gender World Congress of Families in Verona – a self-designated "pro-life city". He railed against the "crisis of empty cribs" while his Lega colleague in Verona, Alberto Zegler, condemned Italy's "demographic crisis" and said that Lega would "defend the social value of giving birth". Zegler's motion to make Verona a pro-life city claimed that Italy is "missing" six million children "as a consequence of abortion".

Spain's Vox party, meanwhile, has taken aim at laws protecting women and girls from gender-based violence. In its manifesto document, '100 Urgent Vox Measures for Spain', it called for the repeal of a 2004 law designed to protect women and girls from male violence, claiming that it discriminated against men. It has also railed against the Istanbul Convention, which promotes the elimination of gender-based violence.

In this it is joined by Poland's religious-right Ordo Iuris organisation, which is influential in anti-gender activism in the region. Ordo Iuris has even gone so far as to author an alternative to the Istanbul Convention, which claims that threats "to the natural identity of marriage" – i.e. same-sex marriage – are "weakening the basic structures of protection against violence, including domestic violence".

The UK, while no longer a member of the EU, has failed to ratify the Istanbul Convention. And while its status as a non-EU member would exclude it from signing the Declaration, many of the signatories share a table with the UK's Conservative Party at the European Conservatives and Democratic Alliance in the Council Of Europe. The political alliance in the council includes members of Vox, Lega, Law and Justice, Fidesz, Brothers of Italy, and other far-right parties such as the AfD.

"We should not under-estimate the threat posed by the coordinated international action of far-right groups across Europe," Dr Pankowski added.

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