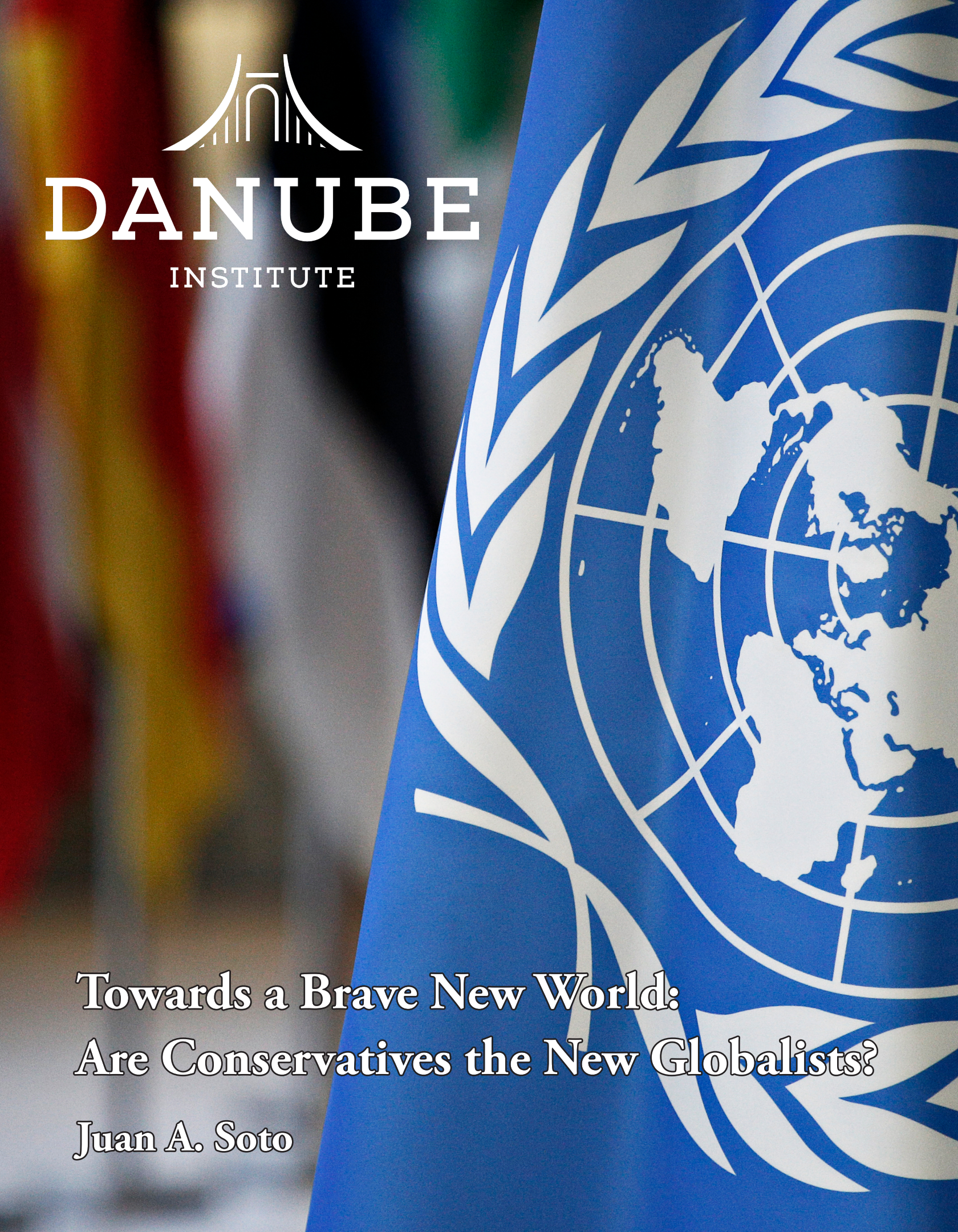
DANUBE INSTITUTE



Towards a Brave New World: Are Conservatives the New Globalists?

Juan A. Soto

All rights reserved. Printed in Hungary. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Author: Juan A. Soto

Danube Institute Leadership

President: John O'Sullivan
Executive Director: István Kiss
Director of Research: Calum T.M. Nicholson

Designed by: Gavin Haynes

© 2025 by the Danube Institute

July 2025

Cover: Designed by Gavin Haynes, Max Keating

Image: Flags of UN and EU stand in European Council Building, from Shutterstock.

DANUBE
INSTITUTE

Contents

About the Danube Institute……iv
About the Author……v
Abstract……vi
Introduction: The Strange Death of Conservative Patriotism……1
Historical Bedrock: Conservative Patriotism……3
From a Liberal to a Conservative International Order ……5
The Rise of the International Conservative Movement ……7
Ideology vs. National Interest: A New Conservative Dilemma……8
From Symbol to Substance: The Aesthetic Trap of Conservative Internationalism……12
Asymmetry Within the International Right: Government vs. Opposition……13
The Limits of Hegemony: A Conservative Realism for Europe……16
Conclusion: What, Then, Are We Actually Trying to Conserve?……18

DANUBE
INSTITUTE

About the Danube Institute

The Danube Institute, established in 2013 by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in Budapest, serves as a hub for the exchange of ideas and individuals within Central Europe and between Central Europe, other parts of Europe, and the English-speaking world. Rooted in a commitment to respectful conservatism in cultural, religious, and social life, the Institute also upholds the broad classical liberal tradition in economics and a realistic Atlanticism in national security policy. These guiding principles are complemented by a dedication to exploring the interplay between democracy and patriotism, emphasizing the nation-state as the cornerstone of democratic governance and international cooperation.

Through research, analysis, publication, debate, and scholarly exchanges, the Danube Institute engages with centre-right intellectuals, political leaders, and public-spirited citizens, while also fostering dialogue with counterparts on the democratic centre-left. Its activities include establishing and supporting research groups, facilitating international conferences and fellowships, and encouraging youth participation in scholarly and political discourse. By drawing upon the expertise of leading minds across national boundaries, the Institute aims to contribute to the development of democratic societies grounded in national identity and civic engagement.

About the Author

Juan Soto graduated in Business Administration and Management and Law from the University of Navarra, and in Political Science and Administration from the UNED. He has a master's degree in Political and Legal Theory from University College London (UCL) and is currently doing his doctoral thesis in political science at St. Mary's University, London. In 2015, he founded Fortius Consulting, a strategic consulting firm specialized in think tanks and operating in Europe, America, and Africa. He has also held different executive positions in various think tanks, being executive director of the Civismo Foundation (2018-2021) and international director of the Disenso Foundation (2021-2023). He is a social entrepreneur and has founded numerous student and civic organizations, such as Fortius Foundation and Principios, of which he is president. He contributes regularly to Spanish and international media outlets and teaches political theory at the University of Navarra.

Towards a Brave New World: Are Conservatives the New Globalists?

Juan A. Soto

Abstract

Through shared political policies, deference to the principle of national sovereignty, and cohabitation of global networks and conferences, conservatives have constructed a sovereigntist alternative to the liberal international order. This alliance, irrespective of ideological differences, has created a common set of signs, symbols, and communication methods for conservatives internationally. Yet, while figures such as Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán have become icons of this rising international movement, the unique national character of conservative movements and their patriotic nature are at risk of thinning.

In this brave new conservative world, it is essential that conservatives remain patriotic and considerate of the things which distinguish their nation's needs and interests from others'. While policy collaboration is emerging in focal points such as migration and scepticism of international institutions, countries must not lose sight of their national interests, especially as the creation of a sovereign internationalism, or national internationalism, is ambitioned, in which the underlying patriotic grounding of the global new right is preserved.

Despite the resonance of conservative patriots and their policies with their electorates, if left unchecked, this international alliance risks transforming into a mirror-image of the liberal international system it seeks to replace. As such, conservatives must sincerely confront the question: are we the globalists now? And most importantly—what will our new globalism look like? Will it be a patriotic vision which respects the principles of national sovereignty, or will it seek to impose new universal modes of thought and governance like its liberal predecessor?

Introduction: The Strange Death of Conservative Patriotism

There was a time when to be a conservative meant, above all, to be rooted. Rooted in nation, in history, in the peculiar customs and inherited institutions that shaped one's people. Conservatism was never just a theory of government or a philosophy of man and much less an ideology. It was a disposition, a loyalty to place and community, a reverence for what Edmund Burke called the "little platoons" of national life. In this tradition, patriotism was not an accessory virtue but one of the key pillars of the conservative worldview: one could not conserve anything without a homeland to conserve it in.

And yet, something has shifted in the past decade. As the liberal international order that once defined global politics begins to fragment under the weight of its own contradictions, a new internationalism has emerged—this time not from the left, but from the right. From Rome to Washington, from Budapest to Buenos Aires, an ideological current of nationalist, traditionalist, and civilisational conservatism is knitting together parties, think tanks, digital media platforms, and political entrepreneurs. It is dynamic, interconnected, and—for many disillusioned with the West's progressive decay—deeply hopeful. At last, it seems conservatives are fighting back on a global scale.

There might be, however, some unintended consequences in this comeback of Western conservatism, that can fundamentally transform both its philosophical foundations and its ability to shape international and national politics. For there is a hidden cost to this new breed of conservatism that some see underlying the so-called 'New Right'.[1]

This essay explores a growing tension at the heart of what I regard as an ascending "conservative international order" (CIO): the fading bond between patriotism and conservatism, and the uneasy question of what comes first—national interest or ideological preference—for conservatives. Whereas liberal globalism openly subordinated the national to the supranational, a new conservative globalism tends to obscure this trade-off beneath shared values and cultural symbols. But the dilemma remains: are today's conservative movements aligning with foreign governments and platforms because their interests converge, or because their ideologies overlap—perhaps even at the expense of national priorities?

This tension is especially acute among the intellectual and political elites of the new right. For them, the temptation to build transnational solidarity—shared manifestos, joint declarations, ideological summits—is often stronger than the sober calculus of national interest. And increasingly, it appears that conservatives in opposition are more vulnerable to this temptation than conservatives in government. The former, lacking access to statecraft, can afford ideological purity; the latter, confronted with geopolitical realities, cannot. The result is a paradox: those who speak most of patriotism may number among the most likely to compromise it, in the name of international conservative fraternity.

What began as a noble and necessary response to liberal cosmopolitanism may, if unchecked, become just another side of the same coin: another abstract project, another universal ideology—another form of globalism. In doing so, we must look ourselves in the mirror and unapologetically ask: Are we the new globalists?

The analysis that follows will trace this transformation, from the historical foundations of conservatism to the present-day tensions of ideological loyalty and policy pragmatism in a new world order.

[1] By *New Right* I do not refer to the *Nouvelle Droite* associated with Alain de Benoist and the French intellectual movement of the late 20th century, but rather to the national-populist right that emerged first in the Anglosphere and parts of Europe in the mid-2010s, crystallising politically with the Brexit referendum (2016) and the first Trump administration (2017–2021).

Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly at UN Headquarters, New York. (Shutterstock)

Historical Bedrock: Conservatism as Patriotism

To understand what may be fading out today, we must first recall what once defined the conservative tradition: an intrinsic, often visceral connection between political conservatism and national belonging. Across centuries and continents, conservatism emerged not as a blueprint for universal governance, but as a defence of particular ways of life—of languages, liturgies, constitutions, monarchies, customs, and inherited norms. Its heroes were not revolutionaries or abstract theorists, but statesmen, jurists, and philosophers who grasped the moral significance of continuity, and the fragile beauty of things built slowly over time.

The British tradition, most famously articulated by Edmund Burke, grounded conservatism in inherited institutions. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke presented society not as a contract among the living alone, but among the living, the dead, and the unborn. Authority was not derived from pure reason or the general will but from tradition and the accumulated wisdom of national experience. The British constitution, the monarchy, the common law—these were not mere tools, but the embodiment of a national moral order.

This principle of rooted conservatism found echoes across continental Europe. In France, Charles Maurras' "*nationalisme intégral*" championed the Catholic, monarchist, and cultural identity of France against the abstract rationalism of the Republic. In Spain, Donoso Cortés and the Carlist movements defended throne and altar as inseparable from national cohesion. In Hungary, conservatism was forged in the dual context of resisting foreign imposition and preserving internal coherence.[3] Figures such as Széchenyi and Kossuth—though politically divergent—both were united by a deep belief that Hungary's future depended on a strong and distinct national identity, and saw national identity as foundational to any serious political project.[4]

In all these cases, conservatism emerged not as an exportable ideology, but as the defence of something particular: a way of life grounded in history, place, and shared memory. Conservatism was not meant to travel well, and in fact, it distrusted those ideologies that claimed to be universal. Where liberals spoke of reason and progress, conservatives spoke of limits, inheritance, and duty. In short, conservatism had no global aspirations—as liberalism did— but responded to local demands.

This aversion to abstraction was central during the Cold War. While alliances were formed and institutions built across borders, conservative leaders retained national character. De Gaulle's France insisted on its autonomy. Thatcher's conservatism was inseparable from British sovereignty. Reagan's rhetoric of liberty was always filtered through the American tradition. Even in moments of bloc formation under a bipolar world order, and during shared Western resistance to communism, conservatism remained domestically inflected.

[2] Charles Maurras' *nationalisme intégral* ("integral nationalism") was the doctrinal cornerstone of the French monarchist movement *Action Française* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Maurras argued that the nation was the supreme political reality—more enduring and important than individual liberty, parliamentary democracy, or abstract ideals. His nationalism was called *intégral* because it was meant to permeate all aspects of political, social, and cultural life, binding together history, tradition, religion, and authority into a single, coherent national project.

[3] In Spain, Juan Donoso Cortés (1809–1853) articulated a counter-revolutionary Catholic conservatism that viewed political authority and religious orthodoxy as mutually reinforcing pillars of the nation. His writings, especially the *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* (1851), argued that the survival of national cohesion depended on the unity of *throne and altar*—a formula also embodied by the Carlist movements (1833–1876), which fought to preserve the Bourbon line of succession they considered legitimate, along with the fueros (regional rights) and the primacy of Catholicism.

[4] István Széchenyi (1791–1860), often called "the greatest Hungarian," championed gradual reform, economic modernisation, and cultural renewal within the Habsburg framework, believing that strengthening the Hungarian language, infrastructure, and industry would secure the nation's future. Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894), in contrast, was a liberal nationalist and revolutionary leader of 1848–1849 who sought far-reaching political independence from Austria and the establishment of a representative system. Despite their deep political differences—Széchenyi's cautious reformism versus Kossuth's radical separatism — both saw the cultivation of a strong and distinct Hungarian national identity as indispensable to any viable political program, reflecting a shared conviction that sovereignty was inseparable from cultural and historical self-awareness.

Above all, conservatism was pluralistic—civilisationally, not ideologically. A Polish conservative was not meant to look like an Italian one, nor a Spanish one like an Englishman. The conservative task was not to replicate a model but to preserve a home.

Beyond the historical record, in recent scholarship, several authors have treated the historical alignment of conservatism with patriotism or sovereignty as a near-given. Works such as John J. Mearsheimer's *The Great Delusion* and Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism* contend that the defence of national sovereignty is inherently bound up with a conservative disposition, insofar as it prioritises inherited traditions, cultural continuity, and the primacy of the nation-state over supranational structures.

Similarly, Niall Ferguson, in his essays on the limits of liberal internationalism, implies that a sovereign order is more likely to flourish under conservative stewardship. Notably, Douglas Stokes's concept of *Sovereign Internationalism* (SI) also makes this linkage, presenting sovereignty and conservatism as almost axiomatic partners.[5] Stokes argues for a renewed European—and even global—order grounded in the sovereignty of its constituent states, suggesting that such an arrangement would, by its nature, both reinforce conservative politics and be reinforced by them. Yet, as later sections will show, the assumption that sovereignty and conservatism are naturally and mutually sustaining has become far less secure in the contemporary political landscape.

However, this rootedness is slightly but surely eroding today. The conservatism that once flourished through its differences now risks flattening itself into ideological sameness. National traditions are reduced to slogans; cultural specificity is lost in translation; political life becomes a question of global alignment rather than domestic renewal. As a result, conservatism, if it is to remain truly conservative, must rediscover its original instinct: to defend the particular against the universal, the real against the abstract, and the national against the merely symbolic.

[5] Stokes, D. (2025). 'Sovereign Internationalism: Reclaiming Europe's Democratic Order in a Post-American Era,' *The Hungarian Conservative*. Available at: https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/current/sovereign-internationalism-europe-democracy-post-american-era/

From a Liberal to a Conservative International Order

To understand the rise of the international conservative right, one must first examine what it is reacting against: the liberal international order (LIO). Built in the wake of the Second World War and consolidated during the Cold War, this order shaped not only the geopolitical architecture of the West, but also the moral and institutional vocabulary of global governance. It presented itself as a project of peace, prosperity, and cooperation—anchored in the United Nations, the Bretton Woods system, NATO, the European Community, and, later, the European Union. But over time, this order evolved into something more than an alliance of interests. It renounced its original purpose as an "incomplete ethics," as Professor Pedro Schwarz refers to it, and deepened its aspirations, developing a full comprehensive worldview. As a result, it became an ideological system in its own right: a progressive moral project, designed to universalise a particular vision of democracy, rights, and markets. Its proponents rarely described it as such, as the liberal order was initially framed in procedural terms—rules-based governance, institutional dialogue, global norms—but in practice, it privileged a distinct set of cultural assumptions: individual autonomy, technocratic expertise, economic interdependence, and secular cosmopolitanism. This project was deeply ambitious. In Europe, economic integration gradually gave way to political centralisation. What began as a customs union became a supranational regime with jurisdiction over law, borders, currency, and social norms. The European Union emerged not merely as a facilitator of cooperation, but as a regulator of meaning—prescribing what member states could define as marriage, citizenship, education, or discrimination, reaching a point of nearly melting into a heartless and shapeless United States of Europe.

In parallel, the United States of America played the role of guarantor and exporter of this liberal system. Through military alliances, trade pacts, aid conditionality, and cultural diplomacy, it extended liberal norms across continents. Whether in promoting open markets, funding NGOs, or conditioning development aid on gender or environmental benchmarks, Washington often operated with missionary zeal. For all its appeals to neutrality, the liberal order became a vessel for value exportation, enforced as much by soft power as by legal mechanisms. This model marginalised the national forum. It treated particular identities as obstacles to be managed rather than legacies to be honoured. National sovereignty became suspect, especially when it conflicted with human rights law, environmental standards, or the logic of global markets. Conservative parties found themselves labelled as reactionary or authoritarian for defending traditional institutions or resisting immigration quotas. Political dissent was framed as moral failure. It is in this context that the new right has emerged—not merely as a policy reaction, but as a civilisational revolt. Figures such as Orbán, Trump, Meloni, and others have positioned themselves as defenders of national heritage against the encroachments of supranational bureaucracy and progressive globalism. They critique not only the outcomes of liberal governance, but its underlying assumptions: the idea that history is linear, that all national legacies and civilisations are the same, and that sovereignty is an anachronism.

Under President Trump's second administration, this shift has accelerated into something approaching a full conservative international order (CIO). The collapse of the liberal consensus has not merely left a vacuum; it has been actively filled by a coordinated network of right-leaning governments, media platforms, and policy institutes operating with unprecedented synergy. Washington DC now serves, once again, as a political epicentre—this time not for liberal democracy promotion, but for an assertive agenda of national sovereignty, cultural traditionalism, and economic nationalism. From trade realignments that bypass legacy multilateral frameworks to diplomatic summits explicitly framed as "civilisational partnerships," the architecture of the old order is being repurposed to advance a different set of values. For the first time, conservatives are not simply contesting the rules of global governance—they are rewriting them. And yet, in opposing this order, the international conservative movement increasingly adopts the form of what it opposes. Where once conservatives resisted ideological blueprints, today they circulate shared slogans. Where they defended difference, they now promote a transnational style. Where they insisted on limits, they now imagine a conservative bloc with moral authority and institutional reach across borders. Thus the central irony: in the effort to counter liberal globalism, the new right risks constructing its mirror image—a competing globalism, with its own elite networks, its own orthodoxies, and its own pressure mechanisms. This paradox is not a reason to retreat into isolationism. It is a call for strategic caution. The problem with liberal internationalism was not merely its content, but its structure: the assumption that moral consensus could override national complexity. If the international right repeats that mistake in reverse, it will inherit not only the power of the old order—but also its fragility.

Tourists gather in front of the Trevi Fountain, Rome.
(Shutterstock)

The Rise of the International Conservative Movement

If the liberal international order once held hegemonic sway over national political architectures, the past decade has seen the emergence of its ideological counterpoint: a rising network of conservative actors and institutions that increasingly operate across borders. No longer confined to national debates, conservatism has begun to take on an international dimension—not merely as a collection of sovereign parties reacting to global liberalism, but as a coordinated movement with its own common language, platforms, and aspirations.

This movement lacks a formal institutional centre, for it has many, but its nodal points are increasingly clear. Conservatives strongholds such as Budapest or Washington, D.C. host powerful think tanks which operate as hubs that bring together heads of governments, intellectuals, and media figures from multiple continents. And a growing new conservative media ecosystem and a constellation of stops in the conservative international circuit, such as CPAC, MEGA or NatCon, have helped consolidate a shared worldview.

The language of this movement is remarkably consistent: sovereignty, traditional family, Christian identity, border control, national interest, and anti-globalism. Terms such as "wokeism," "cultural Marxism," "civilisational crisis," and "Great Replacement" circulate with ease, regardless of whether they originate in Washington, Warsaw, or Buenos Aires. In many ways, this ideological lexicon functions as a conservative Esperanto—a portable, emotionally potent language that signals membership and solidarity.

The international right also operates via symbolism through the canonisation of certain political leaders. Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni, Javier Milei, and Donald Trump are not merely domestic figures; they are transnational icons, invoked in speeches, imitated in campaign style, and held up as models of resistance. Their policies—however context-specific—become references for ideological validation. Orbán's migration policy, Trump's trade protectionism, Meloni's emphasis on history and culture, or Milei's libertarianism are treated not just as national decisions, but as statements of civilisational posture. This has had a tremendous positive effect for the conservative movement. Many new right parties once isolated or politically marginalised now feel part of something larger. Political entrepreneurs in opposition gain visibility and legitimacy by aligning themselves with successful foreign examples. Policy coordination has become easier, especially around shared challenges like migration, education, and institutional capture by progressivism. There is a stronger than ever conservative community that shares intelligence, good practices, human capital, etc.

However, the risks are becoming visible as well. One is the flattening of political life into a series of interchangeable battles. Culture war becomes global template. A politician in Portugal denounces "DEI" (diversity, equity, inclusion) while not being mandated; a Spanish MP invokes "CRT" (critical race theory) in a country with no racial tension. In doing so, parties may lose touch with their own history, electorate, and cultural idiom.

Another risk is the emergence of internal hierarchies within the conservative international. Not all members of the movement hold power. Governments, such as those in Hungary or Italy, necessarily pursue a more pragmatic, interest-based strategy. Opposition parties, often lacking real power, tend to adopt more ideologically maximalist positions. This imbalance creates the conditions for ideological mimicry: smaller or weaker parties model themselves on the rhetorical and political strategies of governments whose priorities, while similar in tone, may differ drastically in content due to national constraints. More subtly, the internationalisation of conservatism invites the standardisation of symbolic identity at the expense of national pluralism. A Spanish traditionalist, a Hungarian conservative, and an American nationalist share many broad values, but they emerge from radically different historical and civilisational experiences. A truly conservative internationalism should respect and preserve those differences—not erase them in the name of stylistic coherence. Especially when national interests make their way into the surface sooner rather than later, and when there are not only diverging national interests at play, but also competing ones.

Finally, there is the risk of strategic distortion. As parties begin to orient themselves toward the international right, they may gradually substitute national support for foreign approval. A domestic failure can be hidden away behind international consideration. However, an unpopular position at home can be recast as part of a global movement. In such cases, internationalism becomes not a source of strength, but a mask for domestic weakness. What emerges is a complex tableau: an international right that has gained genuine influence, established formidable platforms, and inspired those alienated by liberal orthodoxy—yet now finds itself compelled to navigate uncharted waters where, as on the sea charts of old, *hic sunt dracones*.

Ideology vs. National Interest: A New Conservative Dilemma

Among the many perils facing the international conservative movement, one stands out as a paradox at the heart of this novel project: the subordination of national interest to ideological alignment. What liberal internationalism once did under the banner of universal rights, parts of the new right now risk doing under the banner of civilisational values. The result is a confusion of loyalties at the core conservative principle that a statesman's first duty is always to his own nation.

This tension plays out most visibly in the realm of foreign policy and symbolic diplomacy. In May 2025, for instance, U.S. commentator Tucker Carlson interviewed the President of Iran. Far from offering a critical or adversarial platform, the interview was widely perceived as accommodating—a gesture of free speech and civilisational dialogue offered at a time when the United States was engaged in a proxy—and very much direct—conflict with the Persian country. Across history, such an act would have been considered, at best, reckless—and at worst, an act of treason. In the context of war or heightened hostilities, giving uncritical media oxygen to a hostile foreign leader would not have been protected under the right to free press but condemned as a breach of national duty.

Similarly, in May 2024, on the very same day that the Spanish government officially recognised the State of Palestine—a controversial and highly sensitive foreign policy decision—leaders from the opposition party Vox chose to travel to Jerusalem to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and proclaim their unwavering solidarity with Israel. Regardless of one's position on the Spanish government's recognition of Palestine, Vox effectively sided with a foreign power against a decision made by their own government. A symbolic act, but one that openly contradicted Spanish foreign policy, not on pragmatic or legal grounds—not for country but party—, but purely for the sake of ideological alignment.

Such episodes are not isolated. In late July 2025, former President Donald Trump negotiated and celebrated a new EU–US trade deal widely seen as damaging to European interests, particularly in agriculture and digital policy. European conservative leaders rightly criticised Ursula von der Leyen, accusing her of capitulation. And yet, not a single major conservative figure in Europe publicly criticised Trump himself. This silence reveals a growing inversion of priorities. While Von der Leyen's role may deserve critique, the willingness to let Trump escape scrutiny—not because he is an ally of Europe, but because he is ideologically aligned with the right—points to a deeper distortion.

Since when did ideological affiliation trump national interest for conservatives? Historically, conservatism rejected such thinking. This is why some accounts of today's conservatism—such as Douglas Stokes's SI—are intriguing but incomplete frameworks for the present debate. Stokes envisions a renewed international architecture—in the case of Europe, potentially even a loose confederation—that would safeguard the sovereignty of its member states while enabling cooperation on the basis of shared values *and* shared interests. The implicit premise is that sovereignty and conservatism are mutually reinforcing: that any genuinely conservative politics must be sovereign, and that any genuinely sovereign arrangement will tend toward conservative principles.

Yet, as seen above, that bond can no longer be taken for granted. Sovereignty, in and of itself, is not necessarily conservative—it can serve nationalist, progressive, liberal, or technocratic ends. Conversely, contemporary conservatism can operate in ways that are neither sovereign nor patriotic, subordinating national interest to ideological or transnational commitments. In this light, the contortion of the conservative project is clear. We should reject the assumption that to be sovereign is to be conservative, and vice versa. Not anymore at least, for the record of recent politics suggests otherwise.

Even in the context of ideological alliances—against fascism, communism, or Islamic extremism—conservative leaders maintained a firm sense of national orientation. Historically, this was not an abstract commitment, but a political instinct tested in moments of national crisis. During Spain's First Carlist War (1833–1840), traditionalist forces, though aware of the sympathy they enjoyed among absolutist courts abroad, refused to invite decisive formal intervention from powers such as France, fearing that such help would dilute the very religious-monarchical order they were fighting to defend. A decade later, in Hungary's 1848–1849 revolution, conservative nobles loyal to the Crown of St. Stephen faced

a similar choice. Even as the liberal insurgency lost ground and defeat became increasingly likely, they declined to seek assistance from Britain or France, convinced that any victory secured under foreign patronage would come at the expense of the Kingdom's constitutional traditions and national autonomy. In both cases, conservatives accepted the prospect of political defeat at home rather than win under conditions that would compromise their sovereignty.

In the 20th Century, this pattern seemed unbroken. Charles de Gaulle did not tailor French foreign policy to match Washington's. Margaret Thatcher defended British industry when needed, even against Reaganite orthodoxy. José María Aznar, while a strong supporter of the Atlantic alliance, acted decisively in protecting Spanish economic and territorial priorities.

My own earlier work—and that of many others such as Lind, J., & Wohlforth, W.C. (2019)[6]—on the advent of a conservative international order to replace the liberal international order also assumed that patriotism and conservatism were an indissoluble pair.[7] I argued that, as the liberal order receded, the conservative project would naturally anchor itself in the defence of national sovereignty, seeing patriotism as its moral and strategic core. Yet the developments explored in this paper show that this hypothesis has not endured the test of time. The alignment of conservatism with patriotic sovereignty, once plausible, has proved contingent and in some cases fragile. Conservatism can operate without a patriotic compass; just as sovereign politics can emerge from non-conservative traditions. The "conservative international order" I once envisioned remains possible in form, but its assumed marriage to patriotism is no longer assured in substance.

Years ago, I envisioned a *truly exceptional* new right—exceptional not only for its rarity, but for its potential to bring about a positive transformation and to reshape both domestic and international politics.[8] Today, I fear that its exceptional character lies elsewhere, pointing instead toward a much darker future for patriots—paradoxically enough—and for all freedom-cherishing peoples.

As a result, today we witness a troubling pattern: some political parties, public intellectuals, and ideologues on the right aligning with foreign leaders, networks, or policies even when they contradict their own nation's strategic position. This is especially visible among opposition parties, which have greater rhetorical freedom and fewer governing constraints. Lacking the burden of statecraft, they embrace ideological purity and symbolic confrontation. But in doing so, they may inadvertently undermine the very sovereignty they claim to defend.

Meanwhile, governing parties must and do remain pragmatic. They face the real world of diplomacy, trade, security, and negotiation. Their decisions often reflect compromise and national interest, not ideological purity. This creates an asymmetry; political realism remains in place behind the ideological maximalism that dominates the narrative. As it cannot be otherwise.

One good example of this phenomenon is Argentina. President Javier Milei—while not a conservative in the traditional sense due to his staunch libertarian economics—aligns with the New Right on certain moral grounds, such as his pro-life stance. In foreign policy, Milei has to some extent subordinated his ideological preference for unfettered free markets to Argentina's national interest, particularly in relation to China. In mid-2025, Argentina's Central Bank renewed a US$5 billion portion of its US$18 billion currency swap line with Beijing—a critical source of liquidity for the country's struggling economy. Though ideologically opposed to China's political and economic model, Milei has pragmatically refrained from severing this financial lifeline, even as he courts a "better deal" with the United States. This illustrates the kind of realism that preserves national interest above ideological purity—a reversal of the pattern increasingly visible elsewhere.

Another striking illustration of this tension can be found in Trump's approach to Venezuela. In the span of just a few weeks, his administration both doubled the bounty on Nicolás Maduro's head—raising the reward for his capture to US$50 million—and simultaneously granted Chevron a

[6] Lind, J., & Wohlforth, W.C. (2019). 'The Future of the Liberal Order Is Conservative: A Strategy to Save the System,' Foreign Affairs, March/April. Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2019-02-12/future-liberal-order-conservative

[7] Soto, J.A. (2021). 'The (Conservative) Future of the International Liberal Order,' The European Journal, New Direction Foundation. Available at: https://newdirection.online/the-european-journal/article/the_conservative_future_of_the_international_liberal_part_1

[8] Soto, J.A. (2020). 'La excepcionalidad de una derecha de excepción', Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político 65, Fundación FAES. Available at: https://fundacionfaes.org/cuadernos-faes-de-pensamiento-politico-65/

new license to exploit Venezuelan oilfields in partnership with PDVSA. The paradox is evident: on one hand, Maduro is branded a narco-terrorist whose removal is a matter of U.S. national security; on the other, his regime is the necessary interlocutor to secure American access to Venezuelan crude. What this reveals is not ideological confusion, but the blunt primacy of interest: for Trump, ensuring U.S. energy security and preventing Chinese encroachment in Latin America outweighs the rhetorical consistency of regime-change policy. Yet here too lies the conservative dilemma: allies abroad may see in Trump's oil deal an act of betrayal of anti-communist principle, while in reality it is a reassertion of America First pragmatism. The lesson is clear—what appears as contradiction from the outside is, from within, the prioritisation of national interest over ideological purity.

These episodes underscore a fundamental truth of statecraft: when it comes to foreign policy, ideology is never an end in itself. It is a means—a rhetorical and diplomatic instrument that great powers deploy to legitimise strategies rooted in their own national interests. To mistake ideology for the driver, rather than the tool, is to misunderstand the hierarchy of international politics. For a conservative statesman, the question is never whether a partner shares one's worldview, but whether cooperation serves the nation's security, prosperity, and autonomy. Even international idealism—as an international relations' doctrine—has always pursued realism-based ends on the part of the hegemons.

The asymmetry does not only affect the interplay between governing and opposition parties, but between stronger and weaker governments. For instance, Levine's *National Internationalism*[9] (NI)—very much aligned with Stokes' SI—illustrates this dynamic with striking clarity. While framed as a mutually beneficial coalition of "like-minded states" to counter the globalist Left, Levine's plan is explicitly rooted in the logic of "America First." The envisioned alliance is not a neutral platform but a U.S.-led architecture designed to advance the Trump Administration's domestic and foreign policy priorities, with Washington retaining "moral leadership" and setting the normative direction. In this conception, other members' participation is advantageous only insofar as it reinforces the United States' strategic objectives—chiefly, the consolidation of its reformist agenda at home and abroad. Such a framework exemplifies the risk inherent in ideological alignment with a hegemon whose national interests will inevitably diverge from those of its partners. What begins as solidarity in values can, under this model, become structural subordination, where smaller states or opposition parties lend legitimacy, diplomatic cover, and even policy compliance to the hegemon's agenda in exchange for symbolic inclusion in a shared civilisational project.

Over time, these imbalances may warp the conservative ecosystem. Leaders and parties may become more concerned with pleasing international allies than addressing domestic needs. Foreign visits, international summits, and symbolic gestures become performative metrics of fidelity to the "cause," even when they sideline or damage one's national priorities. The result is a form of ideological transnationalism that mirrors the liberal globalism conservatives once fought—except with different symbols and slogans. And just like with progressive globalism, ideology is but a tool designed to seek the national interest of global hegemons.

In that regard, conservatism risks becoming what it once opposed: a worldview unmoored from place, one that prizes abstract affinity over real stewardship. If Tucker Carlson gives a platform to a hostile power under the pretence of civilisational dialogue, and European leaders ignore economic harm to their own people to maintain rhetorical loyalty to Trump, then something foundational has shifted. We are no longer preserving national interest. We are prioritising and performing ideological allegiance.

But conservatism, at its best, does not perform. It governs. It defends borders, builds institutions, protects families, and advances the good of the nation—not of a global network. If the international conservative movement is to avoid becoming just another form of globalism, it must recover the old wisdom: national interest is not a betrayal of principle. It is the necessary ground on which principle must stand.

[9] Levine, N. (2025). 'Toward a Nationalist Internationalism: The Case for Building a National Conservative Alliance,' Heritage Foundation. Available at: https://www.heritage.org/conservatism/report/toward-nationalist-internationalism-the-case-building-national-conservative

Inauguration of President Milei, Buenos Aires.
(Shutterstock)

From Symbol to Substance: The Aesthetic Trap of Conservative Internationalism

One of the defining features of the new international right is its powerful symbolism. Unlike the bureaucratic greyness of liberal technocracy, the international conservative movement has mastered the art of visual identity, rhetoric, and emotional resonance. Its leaders deploy the flags, the family photos, the religious iconography, the appeals to history and faith, and the denunciations of "globalism" and "wokeism" with sharp clarity. A speech by Viktor Orbán, a banner at CPAC Hungary, or a meme circulated by a Polish or Brazilian party can instantly ignite enthusiasm among conservative audiences across continents.

This aesthetics-driven politics has had a profound mobilizing effect, especially in Europe. For voters disillusioned by the jargon of Brussels, the international right offers warmth, confidence, and rootedness. It promises not just policies, but belonging. Its symbols are potent because they affirm identities that many had been told to suppress—Christian, Western, national, male, maternal, native.

And yet, there is a risk that symbolic conservatism displaces substantive conservatism. That in our effort to reclaim the visual and rhetorical space of public life, we forget the more difficult work of legislative, administrative, and institutional governance. It is easier to stage a conference celebrating the traditional family than to draft long-term policy to reverse fertility decline. It is easier to denounce immigration in civilisational terms than to build a functional border regime. It is easier to proclaim Western values than to restore the schools, media, and churches where those values were once formed.

This risk is particularly acute in a transnational setting. Because the international right is composed of multiple nations with different legal systems and policy challenges, the lowest common denominator becomes the symbolic register. While genuine collaboration on policy is possible, what travels most easily are phrases, images, and slogans. The result is a kind of conservative mimicry, in which parties and movements adopt the language and style of others—without necessarily adapting them to local conditions.

This aesthetic internationalism, while emotionally compelling, can lead to misalignment between message and context. What works in Budapest may not work in Bucharest. A message crafted for Wisconsin may confuse or alienate voters in Warsaw. The symbolic politics of conservative internationalism can inspire solidarity—but also tempt simplification. When every problem is framed as "the same," the real differences between nations—and the hard choices required within them—fade from view.

Moreover, this flattening creates a hierarchy of style over substance. Movements and leaders who master the visual and rhetorical codes of international conservatism gain recognition, funding, and invitations—regardless of their governance record. This dynamic rewards charisma, not competence; performance, not policy. A party may fail at the ballot box or struggle to pass legislation, but still be treated as a key player because it speaks the language of the movement.

This is not merely an internal problem. It has consequences for public trust. Citizens notice when symbolism outpaces results. If a conservative movement claims to defend the family but offers no tax reform, childcare support, or educational alternatives, it will lose credibility. If it claims to protect sovereignty but cannot secure borders or negotiate favourable trade terms, it will appear hollow. In the long run, symbolism must be grounded in measurable governance. To do so, by the way, conservatives must also aspire to win elections and run governments—not simply serve as permanent opposition with little to no chance of improving people's lives. To be satisfied with symbolic resistance is yet another form of underdelivering.

Finally, aesthetic mimicry can feed into the very homogenisation conservatives have long rejected. The old liberal order aimed to erase differences in the name of universal norms. The new conservative international may risk erasing them in the name of civilisational unity. In both cases, the distinctiveness of the nation is the casualty.

To avoid this trap, the international right must resist the seduction of style without substance. It must return to the harder, slower work of rooted politics—adapted to national traditions, responsive to local needs, and accountable to domestic constituencies. Conservatism should not merely look conservative. It should be conservative.

Asymmetry Within the International Right: Government vs. Opposition

As mentioned above, one of the most overlooked dynamics within the international conservative movement is the structural asymmetry between those who hold power and those who aspire to it. The new right is not a coalition of equals. It is a network in which governing parties and opposition movements coexist, but with profoundly different incentives, constraints, and modes of operation. This imbalance is not merely practical—it shapes the very meaning of what "conservatism" becomes on the global stage.

Governments—such as those led by Fidesz in Hungary, Fratelli d'Italia in Italy, or the Republican Party in the United States—possess instruments of state power. They are forced to reconcile their ideological aspirations with the demands of geopolitics, economic management, diplomacy, and coalition-building. National interest inevitably reasserts itself. A conservative government may oppose illegal migration and embrace national identity, but it must also balance trade agreements, navigate energy dependencies, and maintain strategic alliances—even when those run counter to its rhetoric.

Opposition parties, by contrast, face none of these constraints. They are free to indulge in ideological maximalism, to speak in absolute terms, to brandish symbolic language without fear of contradiction by real-world consequences. Their political capital often depends on the clarity of their vision rather than its feasibility. In a paradox of modern politics, the more detached a party is from power, the freer it is to define what "true conservatism" means.

This has two significant effects. First, it creates a division of labour within the international right: governing parties focus on pragmatic management, while opposition parties act as ideological purists. The former are often quieter on the international stage, the latter louder. But because visibility and rhetorical force are more influential in transnational networks, it is often the ideologues, not the realists, who define the mood and language of the movement.

However, this effect fades away rather quickly, as there is a second by-product of the asymmetry within the new right. Namely, the hierarchy it produces. The ideological language crafted by opposition parties is increasingly calibrated to echo that of the powerful conservative governments—especially those, like the United States' or Hungary's, with resources to support allied movements abroad. The result is a creeping mimicry, in which smaller or emerging parties model themselves on more successful conservative administrations—not by learning from their balancing of principle and interest, but by imitating their slogans, style, and foreign policy preferences.

But here lies the deeper danger: if these opposition movements begin to prioritise ideological allegiance over national interest, they risk not only political irrelevance, but moral incoherence. If one's own government pursues a foreign policy—such as shifting strategic posture toward China—conservative opposition movements may instinctively oppose it. But what happens when they oppose it not in the name of the national interest, but simply because a foreign ideological ally takes a different view?

In such moments, the international conservative network may become not a source of strength, but a platform for anti-patriotic behaviour. The dynamic shifts: ideological coherence with allied governments replaces strategic autonomy. Foreign actors become validators of "true conservatism," even if their national interests directly contradict one's own. This was visible in February 2025 during CPAC Washington, D.C., when, at the peak of President Trump's harsh rhetoric toward Europe—especially after Vice President JD Vance's speech in Munich a few days before—parties such as Vox in Spain and Rassemblement National in France were publicly branded by domestic critics as "traitors" for maintaining close ties with Trump. Similarly, the most recent German and Austrian elections brought significant growth for new right parties, yet both countries ultimately formed centre-right–centre-left coalition governments, arguing that allowing these nationalist forces into power would be an act of political disloyalty to their own nations. In each case, the charge was the same: that allegiance to a foreign ideological ally had come to overshadow the demands of national stewardship.

Specific criticism raised by domestic adversaries to New Right parties may have strong grounds or not. That matters little. What truly matters, by contrast, is that there is a clear shift when it comes to transnational ideological loyalties among conservatives, in a way that is a reversal of how polit-

ical legitimacy traditionally functioned. No conservative party in the past would have sought to invite foreign powers to shape domestic politics—at least not openly, and certainly not in the name of ideological partnership. Political authority was to be built at home, anchored in one's own society. But today, some on the right seem to crave external affirmation, flying to capitals abroad, quoting leaders in foreign languages, and treating international summits as tests of loyalty.

It is ironic, then, that it is often foreign governments, not domestic actors, who initiate political incursions under the guise of ideological kinship. Consider the case of the *One Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis*, the French army that invaded Spain in 1823 to restore King Ferdinand VII's absolutist rule.[10] This was not an act of international solidarity, nor a civilisational partnership. It was a strategic intervention cloaked in ideological clothing—designed not to help Spain, but to secure the legitimacy of Bourbon rule in France by stamping out liberal contagion abroad. It is a clear historical reminder: ideology is often the pretext, not the purpose of foreign influence.

The reality today is similar, though more subtle. Conservative governments with real power understand their national interest and act to secure it. They build influence abroad not to spread abstract ideas, but to protect their position and extend their leverage. That is not a betrayal of conservatism—it is its essence. The tragedy is that weaker opposition parties in other countries, seduced by shared slogans, may begin serving foreign strategic interests without even realising it.

It is worth noting that some of the most prominent voices within this conservative international—such as Balázs Orbán, political director to the Hungarian prime minister—have articulated this principle with remarkable clarity. Speaking at the Danube Institute in November 2024, in the context of a discussion on the foreign policy implications of a second Donald Trump presidency, Orbán described the emergence of a new global paradigm: the "Age of Sovereignty."[11] In his words, "sovereign conservatism has a moral duty to prioritize what is best for your own people. If you are not strong enough to defend your position, you are not sovereign." He further observed that in this sovereign-based world order, "the economy has only one guiding principle: national interest," and that conservatism excels in defense but must improve at offense. Such remarks capture the very ethos that should animate international cooperation among conservatives: solidarity without subordination, partnership without loss of autonomy.

The hegemonic actors of the conservative international are therefore not enemies, nor Trojan horses. They are powerful allies, and in many respects models from whom others can learn—not only in terms of ideological commitment, but in the more essential discipline of pursuing the national interest with clarity and resolve. The lesson they offer is not that patriotism should be abandoned for international cooperation. On the contrary, it is that the only conservatism worth exporting is the kind that first succeeds at home.

For the international right to mature, opposition parties must internalise this lesson. They must stop looking abroad for validation and start asking the older conservative question: what serves the nation best—now, here, under these conditions?

[10] *The One Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis* (*Les Cent Mille Fils de Saint Louis*) was the name given to the French expeditionary force sent to Spain in 1823 under the Duke of Angoulême and authorised by the Holy Alliance. Ostensibly dispatched to assist King Ferdinand VII against liberal revolutionaries, the force quickly defeated the constitutionalist army, entered Madrid, and by September captured Cádiz, restoring Ferdinand to absolute power. The intervention ended Spain's *Liberal Triennium* and inaugurated the *Ominous Decade* of political repression. Far from an altruistic defence of Spain's monarchy, the campaign was motivated by Louis XVIII's desire to bolster the Bourbon dynasty's legitimacy in France and prevent liberal ideas from spreading across Europe.

[11] Orbán, B. (2024). Trump 2.0: Foreign Policy Implications of the U.S. Elections, speech delivered at the Danube Institute conference, Lónyay-Hatvany Villa, Budapest, 19 November 2024.

Park del Retiro, Madrid. (Shutterstock)

The Limits of Hegemony: A Conservative Realism for Europe

The international conservative movement has become more assertive—bolder in language, more organised in structure, and increasingly ambitious in its goals. Yet this assertiveness must be tempered by a principle conservatives should instinctively understand: the limits of political power, especially when exercised at scale. The international left built an entire political apparatus on the dream of a global order governed by its values. It now finds that order fraying. If the new right believes it can simply reverse-engineer a conservative equivalent—a global order governed by right-wing values—it risks falling into the very same trap.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Europe. At a roundtable discussion I took part in during the Tusványos Summer Festival in July 2025, a question was posed: "How can Europe become a global power again?" It was asked earnestly. But the answer, from a genuinely conservative perspective, must be sobering: Europe cannot become a global power again—at least not in the unitary, hegemonic sense that many imagine. And perhaps, it never really was.

Yes, European civilisation has shaped the world. But it did so not as a unified actor, but through the competing ambitions of its individual nations. When we speak of past hegemons, we speak of Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries, Great Britain from the 17th to 19th centuries, France in the Napoleonic and colonial age, or Hungary within the Habsburg imperial structure. These were distinct political entities, each with their own languages, interests, and governing philosophies. There was no collective "we" exercising power in the name of Europe. On the contrary, Europe was the stage of almost continuous internecine war—between monarchies, empires, republics, ideologies.

Even when religious identity aligned, as in Catholic Europe, that did not prevent the Thirty Years' War, or the countless dynastic conflicts between neighbours who spoke similar languages, practiced the same faith, and traded across porous borders. Europe, historically, was pluralist, fragmented, and rivalrous. It was also, paradoxically, global only through the actions of individual states.

The United States, in contrast, emerged as a singular, continental power, and China has always thought of itself as a superior civilisation. Europe never had such unity, and still does not. Calls to "restore" European power miss the fact that it was never consolidated in the first place—not unless one goes as far back in time as Ancient Rome.

And today, the structural constraints are even greater. If Europe were to become a global power in the 21st century, it would require a degree of federalism or confederalism that goes far beyond the present arrangements. A unified European foreign and security policy would demand the surrender of national sovereignty—on defence, trade, energy, migration, and diplomacy. But such surrender would contradict the very foundations of modern conservatism, which insists that nations are the primary vessels of legitimacy, culture, and political responsibility. Here, too, the paradox is served: national interest of single, small, slim European countries may call for confederation, but the price to pay is sovereignty.

Even if a conservative majority were to take the European Parliament, and even if the Commission were run by right-leaning figures, these contradictions and paradoxes would remain. Could Spain and Poland truly reconcile their positions on Ukraine, or on Morocco? Could Italy and Spain agree on how to manage migration from North Africa, given their overlapping but competing maritime interests? Could Hungary's geopolitical orientation align with that of France, without compromising its special position vis-à-vis the Balkans and Central Europe?

The answer, from a conservative viewpoint, is no. Integration undermines sovereignty, and sovereignty is non-negotiable. That is the paradox. If we take the conservative path seriously, we must also make peace with the fact that European countries—individually—lack the population, territory, and resources to be global hegemons. What remains is a tier of strong, middle-ranking nations: not world empires, but regional actors with specific influence. That is not failure. It is a sober realism, rooted in geography, demography,

and political philosophy.

This second-tier status does carry risks. The smaller and more divided Europe is, the more easily individual countries can be captured—economically or diplomatically—by stronger global players. Germany may drift toward China. France may seek its own geopolitical balancing act. Hungary or the Czech Republic may deepen bilateral ties with powers that help secure their energy needs. Spain may prioritise Mediterranean diplomacy while others look East. In this landscape, sovereignty remains, but it is fragile.

Yet being in this second tier can also be an advantage for autonomy. While a single great power can dominate a smaller nation, that same nation can, in the right circumstances, leverage the competing ambitions of multiple great powers to advance its own position—balancing them off against one another. Hungary, for instance, has at various times engaged pragmatically with the United States, Russia, and China, extracting economic, strategic, and diplomatic gains without fully subordinating itself to any one of them, as articulated in both Balász Orbán's *The Hungarian Way of Strategy* and *The Hungarian Way of Connectivity*.

The task of conservative leadership is not to dream of impossible unities, but to navigate fragmentation with prudence. To understand that global stature is not the same as global

Conclusion: What, Then, Are We Actually Trying to Conserve?

As the dust settles from the ideological battles of the past three decades, and the international right begins to establish itself not just as a protest but as a proposition, it is time for reflection. What, exactly, are we trying to conserve? If conservatism is to be something more than a cultural aesthetic or a reaction to liberal hegemony, it must return to its foundational principle: the defence and cultivation of a nation and its geopolitical national interest. Not in the narrow sense of economic advantage or military posture, but in the fuller sense of serving the political community to which one is morally bound—its institutions, its culture, its families, its traditions, and its capacity to govern itself in the face of pressure.

International conservatism can serve this mission. It can provide solidarity, exchange, inspiration, and strategy. But it should follow the warning of displacing the primary horizon of conservative politics: the nation. The danger today is not only that ideology could become a substitute for national interest, but that it could become a distraction from the hard, concrete work of national renewal. That slogans will replace statecraft. That flags will replace families. That the performance of unity will obscure the fact that our nations are weak, confused, demoralised, and in need of real reconstruction. This is why, even in formulations as appealing as Douglas Stokes's SI, conservatives must resist equating sovereignty with conservatism. Alliances, confederations, and cooperative frameworks can be sovereign without being conservative; they can also be conservative in form yet detached from any patriotic defence of the nation. Sovereignty is a necessary condition for genuine conservatism—but it is not, on its own, a sufficient one.

Worse still, conservatives risk becoming the very thing they once opposed. A new class of transnational elites is beginning to form—intellectual, corporate, and political. They may speak the language of populism, but only when elections are called. In truth, many are engaged in an elite replacement process, not too dissimilar from the one conservatives long accused the liberal order of executing. Particularly in the United States, one finds a growing conservative-industrial complex: think tanks, media outlets, advocacy groups, and political donors who—while defending national sovereignty in word—are building a parallel infrastructure of global coordination.

The irony is stark. Populists in rhetoric, but globalists in structure and behaviour. Rooted in theory, but cosmopolitan in lifestyle and ambition. If this trajectory continues, today's conservative vanguard may wake up to find it has become its mirror images old adversaries: committed not to place but to platform, not to people but to narrative, not to country but ideologies. Yet amid these temptations, one thing remains true and reassuring: when confronted with a genuine choice between ideological allegiance and the national interest, most conservatives will, almost instinctively, choose the latter. They will sacrifice abstract theory on the altar of the nation's interests—because they know that the nation is not an idea but a community, not a framework but a people. This humility before the needs of one's own country is not a betrayal of conservatism. It is the deepest expression of it. And it is worth remembering. Conservatives must reaffirm that ideological affiliation—however powerful, however inspiring—is never an end in itself. It is a tool, a mode of cooperation, a shared vocabulary.

But it cannot override the fundamental imperative of self-rule. The duty of a French conservative is to France. The duty of a Hungarian conservative is to Hungary. The duty of a Spanish conservative is to Spain. And the purpose of international conservatism is to support—not to supplant—those national duties. If we fail to uphold that hierarchy, we may find ourselves where the liberal internationalists ended: with global narratives but hollow nations, with global brands but empty homes.

The weakening of the bond between conservatism, patriotism, and sovereignty raises deeper questions about conservatism's role in shaping global politics. It might be that conservatism is not meant to inform global politics on an ideological level at all. Rather, it may be a philosophy—

or way of life—that becomes active or gets activated when facing a threat or external pressure. In that defensive mode, conservatism often works effectively. Yet when it shifts to the offensive, it encounters dilemmas: whether to prioritise ideological allegiance over national interest, or whether to yield to the authoritarian temptation.

Let us not become what we once opposed. Let us not repeat the mistake of believing that ideological alignment across borders is more sacred than fidelity to one's own people. Let the international right flourish, but let it do so in the service of nations, not at their expense. And let each conservative movement remember that its success will be judged not by how loudly it speaks abroad, but by how well it governs at home.

DANUBE

INSTITUTE

Scan the QR code for more information about the Danube Institute