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Social Europe

Europe's Existential Choice: Democracy or Far-Right Chaos?

SALVADOR SANTINO REGILME 21st March 2025

Tax billionaires or risk democracy's collapse—Europe faces an urgent decision between fairness and authoritarian decline.



The European Union is facing an existential crisis that demands decisive action. As the far right gains ground across Europe and Donald Trump's second-term isolationism dismantles the transatlantic security order, the EU must fundamentally rethink how it finances both its defence apparatus and its socioeconomic infrastructure—an infrastructure rooted in the rule of law, universal human rights, and democratic principles. The growing ideological alignment between far-right movements in Europe, the United States, and Russia threatens to entrench an exclusionary, hierarchical order reminiscent of Europe's colonial past. To resist this tide, Europe must reject austerity-driven militarisation and instead embrace a fair economic model: funding security through progressive taxation on extreme wealth and dismantling the oligarchic remnants within its constitutional order. This approach demands a bold redefinition of European identity—one that is genuinely inclusive, promotes racial and gender equality, and embodies an unwavering commitment to universal human rights and economic justice. Only by embedding these principles at its heart can Europe fortify its democratic institutions and stand resilient against the forces of division and authoritarianism. The far right thrives on economic frustration and scapegoating; neutralising its rise requires policies that deliver tangible fairness rather than empty rhetoric.

Europe can no longer afford to increase military budgets at the expense of social welfare. Raising taxes on working and middle-class citizens to fund security would only deepen inequalities and empower the reactionary forces Europe seeks to contain. Instead, the EU should seize this moment to implement a pan-European tax on billionaires and their financial assets, ensuring that those who have most benefited from globalisation and deregulation bear the costs of safeguarding democracy. The struggle against far-right authoritarianism is not merely political—it is economic, and Europe's fiscal policies must align with its democratic values.

Defending Democracy And Funding Europe's Defence

For decades, the European Union has proclaimed its commitment to democracy, human rights, and multilateralism. Yet, its actions have often contradicted these values. The EU has supported authoritarian regimes when convenient, enforced exclusionary migration policies, and promoted neoliberal economic frameworks that favour financial elites, leaving ordinary citizens vulnerable to economic instability. These contradictions undermine the EU's credibility and fuel the very far-right populism it aims to counter.

If the EU is serious about defending democracy, it must do more than issue statements of intent—it must confront the systemic economic inequalities that allow authoritarian movements to thrive. This requires a frank reassessment and reform of its policies, ensuring economic justice becomes central to its fight against the far right. Only by aligning its economic and political strategies can Europe reclaim moral authority and resist the growing ideological convergence of far-right forces worldwide.

The war in Ukraine has highlighted the urgent need for European defence autonomy. With Trump's second administration actively undermining NATO, the EU must invest in its own security capabilities. The essential question, however, is not whether Europe should strengthen its defences, but rather how these defences should be financed.

Cutting back on healthcare, education, and social welfare to fund military expansion would be self-defeating, alienating citizens further and fuelling political instability. The Netherlands, for example, leads in increasing defence spending—but at the cost of essential long-term investments in human capital, particularly in education and healthcare, which undermines future resilience and prosperity. Instead, Europe should impose a radically progressive tax on the wealth accumulated by billionaires and multinational corporations. Those who have disproportionately profited from Europe's neoliberal economic order must contribute significantly to its security. This approach ensures that defence costs are borne by those most capable of affording them, rather than unjustly burdening ordinary citizens.

The Far-Right Threat: A Transnational Battle

The stakes in upcoming elections across Europe could scarcely be higher. Every electoral gain by far-right, ethno-nationalist movements brings Europe closer to democratic collapse. These parties aim to dismantle the EU's legal framework and universal human rights principles, replacing constitutional governance with an exclusionary, authoritarian regime.

If the far right consolidates power at both national and pan-European levels, the EU—or whatever form it might subsequently take—risks becoming a supranational entity rooted in white patriarchal supremacy and authoritarian neoliberalism. This scenario is not merely hypothetical; it carries a disturbing plausibility, potentially forging a strategic alliance among Europe, a Trump-led United States, and Putin's Russia. Such an axis would represent the culmination of global far-right ambitions—a reactionary project to entrench racial and economic hierarchies while systematically marginalising vast populations, especially those from the Global South.

Europe cannot win this battle alone. European liberals, social democrats, and human rights advocates must strengthen alliances with democratic movements across South America, Africa, and Asia, regions also experiencing the rise of right-wing authoritarianism. This calls for genuine, reciprocal partnerships rather than paternalistic engagement, aiming to dismantle neocolonial economic structures and foster global democratic resilience. The EU must acknowledge that the fight against authoritarianism is global and act accordingly.

Europe stands at a critical crossroads. It can either finance its security by redistributing extreme wealth and reinforcing democratic values or succumb to reactionary austerity, accelerating its decline. The far right thrives on economic discontent—neutralising its appeal requires concrete policies that ensure economic fairness and political equality.

By taxing billionaires and rejecting austerity-driven militarisation, the EU has an opportunity to reconcile its security requirements with its democratic commitments. Failure would mean more than a loss of international stature; it would signify abandoning the very principles Europe claims to champion. The era of half-measures is over. Europe must act decisively now to secure its future before it is too late.

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