

# Grassroots for Europe Round Table Webinar RT 57w - July 8<sup>th</sup> 2025

## Resisting the Trump Assault: will American democracy survive and what can we do to help?

With Alexandra Hall Hall, Richard Corbett CBE and Dr Grigol Gegelia  
Chair: Dr Monica Horten



## Summary Report

### Background

**Alexandra Hall Hall** [resigned from her post as Brexit counsellor at the UK Embassy in Washington](#) on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2019, three days before the UK general election, declaring in a devastating critique of the UK government her unwillingness to “peddle half-truths on behalf of a government I do not trust”. Her action established Alex as a valued public truth-teller of the Brexit era. She is a former Ambassador to Georgia and a Patron of the European Movement UK.

We invited Alex to talk about the state and future of government and democracy in the USA, where she lives and is now a citizen. She writes: "No-one should feel complacent about what is happening in America right now. The constitutional crisis which many of us feared might happen under a second Trump Presidency is approaching, far faster than most of us had anticipated, and with almost no effective pushback from America's political classes, who are either divided among themselves, or actively complicit...."

Did the 5-million strong 'No Kings' protest across America on June 14th show that ordinary Americans have woken up to this threat? How can Trump's monarchical takeover be stopped? Can democrats outside the US, including Europeans and pro-Europeans, help Americans to stop him, before he comes for us?

**Richard Corbett CBE** joined us to respond to Alex's remarks in terms of Trump's impact in Europe and the emerging EU and UK responses to the Trump presidency. Richard was leader of the UK Labour Party MEPs. From 2010-2014 he was senior advisor to the President of the European Council. He has written widely on EU affairs, including co-authoring *The European Union: how does it work?* (6<sup>th</sup> edition 2022) and *The European Parliament (10th edition 2024)*. He is a former Chair (and now a Patron) of the European Movement UK and has been Chair of the Labour Movement for Europe.

**Dr Grigol Gegelia**, foreign affairs secretary of the LELU/Strong Georgia, elected to the Georgian parliament 2024, and Associate Professor of Politics at British University in Georgia, joined the webinar to provide emergency update on the current suppression of democracy in Georgia, a candidate state for membership of the EU.

## **Alexandra Hall Hall**

What's happening in America is mirrored by what's happening in Georgia [see below], where people are finding that democratic collapse can happen incredibly fast. American democracy is like the frog boiling in water, and not enough Americans understand the gravity of Trump's behaviour.

What makes the current situation in the USA so serious?

**1. The present US administration is very chaotic and disorganised.** There is no systematic process or coherence. It is dysfunctional because people have been appointed based on loyalty rather than competence. Much of the damage being done is deliberate, but there is also much collateral damage. The lack of proper policy-making arises from everybody vying for the attention of Trump or his acolytes, and from being too scared to take decisions without their backing first. For example, there is no systematic national security process where briefing papers are prepared for cabinet ministers' meetings. The deciding factor is catching Trump's ear and persuading him or his acolytes of a particular approach. Huge administrative decisions are made with no congressional oversight.

**2. Blatant challenge to regular balance and checks in the US system.** The normal legislative rights of Congress are being trampled underfoot, executive power is being grabbed from Congress. Trade policy, budget matters or decisions on war - including arguably the decision to bomb Iran - which should be the domain of Congress are being overridden. One of the most obvious attempts to grab power from Congress is Elon Musk's DOGE activities, where vast amounts of money allocated by Congress are being slashed. The administration is retrospectively trying to give legal authority to that by submitting a memo to Congress saying 'we do not want to spend the funds allocated, so approve us not spending them.' If Congress does not approve that, memos can be submitted so late in the financial year that Congress has no chance to approve or disapprove the decision: the allocated funding falls by the wayside by default because it is the end of the financial year. The Executive is blatantly challenging the authority of the judiciary to check whether the President's actions are consistent with the Constitution or with existing legal processes. The overwhelming number of lawsuits brought against this administration's executive orders have been won by the challengers, but without preventing the administration going ahead with its plans. The administration files an appeal, asks for time to submit more papers, argues that the papers are classified, or that national security is at stake, or appeals it to the Supreme Court. By stringing out this process, the legal system has trouble reacting because traditionally the Court issues an order and the administration complies. Policy-making in the US was traditionally based on fighting every decision all the way. The administration is simply ignoring court orders or finding ways around them. So, for example, orders saying deportations are illegal does not prevent them going ahead, and the Supreme Court is increasingly issuing rulings that give the administration cover.

**3. A full frontal assault on all institutions.** In addition to the major branches of Congress and the judiciary, all the independent institutions set up - some of them by Congress itself - to provide further checks and balances on the Executive are under attack. Inspector generals, Judges Advocates in the military, labour boards, ethics watchdogs, or scientific and medical bodies, or auditing authorities have been dismissed or disbanded, or asked not to produce reports. Lawsuits against universities, against law firms who assist cases against the administration or against sections of the media are designed to silence them or warn them about becoming too critical. The administration has recently suggested it will attack CNN for reporting on a recently developed app giving notice of when ICE agents are in your area. The administration is accusing CNN of enabling people to resist law enforcement. Funding has been slashed to relatively impartial organisations like Radio Free Europe, US Institute for Peace and many others.

**4. Astonishingly little resistance.** There has been public opposition, but the elites, people in the administration, people within Congress and the business leaders who should know better are either going along with it or keeping their heads down. There has been no organised resistance from the university sector to the attacks on universities including Harvard, Columbia and Pennsylvania, who are fighting their own battles while others are hoping they won't be next in the firing line. Republicans are utterly cowed and running scared. Some members of Congress who know better have decided to step down and cease fighting. Others like Senator Lisa Murkowski from Alaska, make vague protests, then vote for Trump's budget. Meanwhile, the Democrats have no unified strategy for resistance and bureaucrats are terrified of losing their jobs. They have to sign loyalty pledges and are ordered to report on each other if they support woke policies.

**5. The Supreme Court's recent behaviour.** The Supreme Court has shown that it is willing to give the Executive extensive leeway, and has made a few astonishing decisions, such as the 27 June ruling limiting the ability of federal judges to issue nationwide injunctions, so even if an executive order is unconstitutional, a single federal judge can no longer block it from taking effect nationwide. Most recently, the Court approved the administration's plan to dismantle the Department of Education. It has also sanctioned the dismissal of thousands of public sector workers.

The damage Trump has caused will last beyond this administration and take decades to put right. So many good people have been driven out or purged and institutions turned upside down. Programmes that have been slashed or ended cannot easily be reinstated.

## **6. Will Trump go or step down?**

Trump has publicly flirted with the idea of running for a third term. One argument for the welter of executive orders is that Trump is in a hurry because he knows he's only got two years. In this theory Trump knows that the Democrats will win back power in the mid-term elections, so floating the idea of running for a third term buys him more time and prevents him being seen as a lame duck.

Though many of her Republican contacts insist that Trump will not try to stay on for a third term, Alex personally does not rule out the risk.

He may try to seek a third term for the purely selfish reason that he and the people around him who have facilitated his work risk a flurry of lawsuits when they leave. In a third term, Trump can pardon himself and his family members, but not all those who have been complicit in his law breaking. He could engineer a crisis out of chaos arising from public protests against his administration's actions, or by invoking allegations about Democrats nominating communists to run for office. That would allow him to declare a state of emergency. So his staying on cannot be ruled out.

## **7. Constitutional Crisis or Constitutional Failure?**

Finally, this has already gone beyond a constitutional crisis. The checks and balances in the system and the institutions that are supposed to act as a check on the Executive are failing. They are not working.

Alex concluded: "So what we are facing is a constitutional failure. I think it's incredibly serious. I have no good news. If you're worried you should be. Sorry about that."

## **Richard Corbett CBE**

In addition to the points outlined by the previous speaker, it is relevant to stress that President Trump is more or less overtly seeking regime change in Europe. At their inauguration ceremonies previous American presidents have traditionally invited statespeople, presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers from other countries.

However, it is a telltale sign of Trump's intention to forge alliances with far-right parties that he chose to extend special invitations to leaders of right-wing parties in Europe. Beatrix von Storch, leader of the German far-right AfD, Eric Zemmour, founder and leader of the French far-right Reconquête, André Ventura (far-right Chega party, Portugal), Santiago Abascal (Vox, Spain), Tom van Grieken (Vlaams, Belgium), George Simeon, later to become far-right presidential candidate in Romania, Mateusz Morawieck (PiS), Prime Minister of Poland 2017-23. And from the UK, of course, Nigel Farage. The above are intent on challenging mainstream democratic parties across Europe and are not the kind of mainstream democratic or even centre-right parties which previous US presidents may have been comfortable in supporting.

In his Munich speech (14.03.2025), vice-president J D Vance said that the main threats to democracy in Europe come not from Russia and China, but from its own liberal elite. Subsequently, there has been overt and explicit support for far-right candidates in elections in Romania and Germany and backing for Viktor Orbán in Hungary. There is also support for Wilders in the Netherlands. Before the recent Polish presidential election, the US Secretary of State for Homeland Security, Kirsty Nunn, went to Poland during its election to say that that the far-right candidate Karol Nawrocki should be the next president. Money from ultra-conservative groups in the USA is being channelled to groups they favour in Europe. A recent report in *Le Monde* outlines how the Heritage Foundation is backing certain politicians on the right and far-right in France. Meanwhile, Steve Bannon has been reactivating his network of contacts and meetings across Europe. According to openDemocracy, even before Trump took office, American far-right Christian groups channelled 88 million US dollars to conservative Christian groups in Europe to help them challenge gay rights legislation and abortion laws. The American national conservative right has set its eyes on Europe and is actively intervening in elections and political debate in Europe to a degree not seen before.

Reactions from Europe are interesting. On the one hand, parties which were previously pro-American like the German CDU/CSU have been emphasising the need for European autonomy, for Europe to defend its sovereignty and to strengthen its cohesion through the European Union. Countries like Denmark, which were traditionally somewhat Eurosceptic, have seen a big switch in public opinion which is now much more pro-European and pro-EU. Additionally, Trump's threats to Greenland have focused attention in Denmark and beyond. On the other hand, national governments and the EU Commission are very cautious as there is still a dependency, or a perceived dependency, on the USA for

security. There is the fear that Trump may act on his many hints and pull the plug on NATO, or reduce the American commitment before Europe - faced with overt Russian aggression in Ukraine and threats to other countries - is ready to take up that challenge by itself. Trump's backing of Putin is another reason why Europe is very uneasy and cautious not to cause a complete rift. Attempts to appease Trump, to flatter him with some of the things he likes, such as invitations to palaces, or being seen consulting with monarchs, may seem trivial but are probably necessary. Trump is completely disrupting world trade, tearing up agreements, imposing tariffs, changing his mind, then reimposing them, starting and stopping negotiations, prolonging or shortening deadlines. This chaos is a real threat to the world trading system, crucial to which is transatlantic trade between Europe and the USA. So, whilst European countries are privately questioning just what is happening, they are publicly very cautious about confronting Trump.

As time goes by and European countries – hopefully including Britain - strengthen their cooperation, they may feel more confident in confronting Trump. Europe's hand may well be forced if Trump really does act on his threat to withdraw from or significantly reduce support for NATO, or refuses to compromise on tariffs. Should he decide to up the ante in his trade wars, Europe will be forced, in difficult circumstances, to get its act together.

## **Dr Grigol Gegelia**

Foreign relations secretary for LELO/Strong Georgia - one of the major opposition party coalitions – **Dr. Grigol Gegelia** was elected member of Parliament, on 26 October 2024.

[Won](#) by the incumbent Russian-backed Georgian Dream party, these elections were condemned by the European Parliament as being “neither free nor fair.” Along with the entire opposition, Grigol chose to boycott parliament and is no longer an MP.

The frightening reality of the situation in Georgia was starkly revealed when, just as he was speaking to the Round Table, Grigol received the shocking news that his party's head of public relations, had inexplicably been arrested. His is colleague en stopped on the street for a purported drugs check and taken to an unknown detention centre. Party colleagues were trying to ascertain where he had been taken and on what charge he had been arrested. Previously, two founding members and leaders of the opposition had been arrested for their failure to attend the Temporary Investigative Commission, an entity instigated by the illegitimate parliament as a form of show trial for alleged historical

offences of the entire Opposition and a device to enable their imprisonment. Grigol is aware that his refusal to attend could result in imprisonment for up to one year.

Georgia is now in the final stages of a regime which political science calls competitive authoritarianism, and on the brink of full dictatorship. Indeed, aspects of political discourse and practice, such as a willingness to ban opposition parties and arrest their leaders, go beyond competitive authoritarianism and are characteristic of full-blown dictatorship. Within the past two weeks, almost all of the high-level leadership of Georgian opposition parties had been arrested. As a party secretary and member of the National Political Council, Grigol is in the next highest level. Up to 20 repressive laws curbing all forms of civil rights and dissent have been passed, even including a person's right to post on Facebook. Although many Georgians consider the present ruling party MPs to be slaves, actually referring to them as such will be made a crime. Administrative codes have already been changed to make it possible to impose extortionate fines equivalent to four or five times an ordinary monthly salary. Failure to pay fines can result in arrest. New laws are being introduced to curb all forms of political protest. This is a reproduction of a Soviet Union law, which Georgian Dream has contrived to make even more draconian than the original. Those campaigning for international sanctions on the regime will be tried for sabotage. Indeed, the (so-called) Prime Minister has suggested that Grigol and representatives of three other opposition parties who visited the Baltic States in January were engaged in acts of sabotage. He thus gave the green light to the prosecution service to bring about a trial which could result in seven to fifteen years imprisonment. In summary, the government is using the entire legalistic machinery against its own citizens. The Georgian government continues its attacks on the West, primarily the USA and the UK. They are attempting to exploit gaps in the incoming Trump administration's foreign policy. At present the UK is the country they most fear as it can impose sanctions without the need for international consultation.

Within the past few days, the (so-called) president has said he would pardon opposition politicians if they asked for pardon and agreed to participate in elections. Although they do not want pardons, two of the four coalition parties, including LELO//Strong Georgia, plan to participate in the up-coming municipal elections. He comments: "We believe that even when winning is highly unlikely, every platform should be used to fight the government and show the Georgian people that we are still active. We have been participating in the long-running protests outside parliament in Tbilisi but are very aware that a greater and

more widespread show of opposition is needed. Strong Georgia is being criticised for its decision to stand candidates in the forthcoming elections as this could be seen as legitimising them. We do not expect these elections to be fair or free and are under no illusions but that they and any future elections will be rigged until we get new parliamentary elections. However, they do present the opportunity to open up a new battlefield, giving people the incentive to engage and fight to reclaim whatever they can. By participating in the elections, we are calling on our friends and allies worldwide to speak out, impose sanctions and isolate the present government as much as possible.

Sanctions do work. The government is particularly scared of UK sanctions as many of its supporters try to find safe haven in the UK, buying properties and hideaways like the Russian oligarchs. So, my message to all friends of democracy and of Georgia, is that we need action and we need sanctions. Our message is unchanged and our fight for new parliamentary elections and the release of all political prisoners will continue!

For a report with additional details, see Helen Johnston, "Democracy in danger in Georgia", *Yorkshire Bylines* forthcoming.

## Q and A

**Alyssa, Indivisible London:** What do you think is most important for US citizens abroad to do? We obviously have unique challenges, but also unique opportunities.

**Peter Packham:** Is the U.S.A. now Germany in the 1930s?

**Alex Hall Hall:** One good lesson from Georgia is that the Georgian people haven't taken things lying down, and there is a very active campaign of resistance. They've been on the streets protesting for 250 days now. It's incredible how they've sustained it. Americans who understand the gravity of what is going on here should be lobbying their members of Congress. They should be supporting political candidates who they think will have the courage to stand up and resist. They should be making sure they vote, and they should be taking part in civil activities and peaceful protests when they can. I think the thing that's bothered me most about what's happening in the US. Is the lack of effective pushback. Some people are scared, [Senator] Lisa Murkowski has talked about getting physical threats, and threats of intimidation on her social media. We had two politicians murdered in Minnesota just a few weeks ago. So there is a real worry there. Trump has empowered the people who took part in the insurrection of January 6<sup>th</sup>, he has implicitly given the message

that 'if you get up to stuff on my behalf I will pardon you'. So he has a black-shirted goon squad on call, who display fanatical loyalty and his ability to pardon them offers them a certain amount of immunity. One of the questions I saw coming up in the chat was, why has so much money being given to ICE. The latest budget has tripled the amount of resources to ICE, They are almost acting like mercenary soldiers. They're wearing balaclavas, and they're grabbing people off the streets. And they've assaulted Democrat politicians who've asked questions or tried to attend hearings or support deportees. There is a cadre of activists who feel intense loyalty to Trump, and know that in return Trump will protect them. So it's incumbent on Americans to protest, to vote, to write to their members of Congress, and I think demonstrations like the 'No Kings' are very powerful. They were massive protests and they were peaceful. Are we in 1930s Germany? Well, I wasn't alive then.

It's clear that there's there's something very sinister going on which is weaponising the war on immigration to force you to take sides. if you object to the way that illegal immigrants are being rounded up, you can be accused of failing to adhere to the law, of defending criminals and rapists and gang members. They are building massive detention centres. The latest is this new plan for a series of detention centres in Florida called "Alligator Alcatraz". if you try and protest, then you are creating a disturbance, and then you provide a pretext for Trump to send in the National Guard or the Marines, as he did in Los Angeles. So we're in dangerous terrain here. The American public broadly doesn't support what's going on, the opinion polls have been going down for Trump, even on immigration. They don't like what he's doing. There are cases like where the father of three US. Marines was knocked to the ground and hauled away, and that story went viral. The American American people are not with what this administration is doing. But until there is effective pushback, they're going to keep doing it, and it's a bit like with Putin. Until somebody says, beyond this, you are not allowed to go, they will keep getting away with it, and they're getting away with it right now.

**Sandra:** why are groups of intelligence, military or foreign policy experts not going as a group to the White House to explain the dangerous aspects of Trump's foreign policies, like supporting Russia, cutting counterterrorism and cyber expertise, alienating allies. They would be influential if the spoke out as a group. Do they not have any influence?

**Alex Hall Hall:** Before the election, and in the run up to the election there were dozens of National Security experts, including a former Secretary of Defence, former generals, very senior people who wrote letters published in the media, saying, Trump is a threat to our national security, and it didn't have any effect. There are plenty of individuals, including John Bolton, who was his national security advisor in the first administration, who go out and say that he is a threat to America's national security, and it all feeds the narrative that there is a deep state which doesn't like what he's doing, and is trying to undermine him. One way sometimes that they can be picked off, is that because nearly all these people back Israel, and are very hawkish on Iran, and in order to avoid being dismissed as anti-Trump fanatics, time and again., they can't resist saying, but I support what he did on Iran, or but it's right to show backing for Israel, and some of them hedge their words and say, it's right to show peace through strength, and one of the ways you can do that is by backing Ukraine. So they haven't, a lot of them haven't brought themselves to fully to fully call out this administration. They either try and qualify their words in the hope they can persuade him on Ukraine, or they don't want to be dismissed as a partisan part of the deep state who opposes Trump, no matter what, so they express support for some of his actions. For those who have tried to really speak out it hasn't really had any effect, and for people who work within the bureaucracy enormous numbers of them risk losing their jobs if they speak out.

And America is very hierarchical. People try and work through their system of command, but their system of command is now dominated by Trump loyalists and appointees. And so if you go to your chain of command and say, I'm not happy with this order they say, well, you're fired then. So it's it's pretty tough. What I don't understand is why they don't flood the media more. But those are some of the reasons, I think.

**Richard Corbett:** What Alex said about Trump critics caveating their criticisms with something positive that they can find to say about him reminds me of what we sometimes do as pro-Europeans in Britain, by saying, well, of course I'm not trying to reopen the Brexit question, but could we have a youth exchange scheme, or could we have a better trade deal, or could we have this? But we put in that caveat to try and get listened to, and therefore we don't challenge Brexit itself enough sometimes.

**Alex Hall Hall:** . And that's a similar debate that the Democrats are having with themselves on immigration because, people don't like *how* the immigration deportation is being done now, and some of the individual stories are truly horrendous. But the Democrats deserve some blame for not taking action before. The Biden administration failed to take the immigration issue seriously and more or less did allow people to flood across the border, and under Trump efforts to enter the US have dried up, almost to a halt. So it's hard for Democrats on this, because public opinion supports trying to control illegal immigration. They may not like the way Trump is doing it, but they do support that. And so the same is true with Brexit. Do you oppose Brexit 100%? Or do you say, well, we respect the results of the referendum, but there are different ways we could have done it, and there are ways in which we could seek some rapprochement, and it's very difficult, you end up being divided amongst yourselves. So the Democrats are divided amongst themselves. The more hawkish wing, Alexandra Ocasio Cortez, Bernie Sanders, Zohran Mamdani the new person who's won the primary to be mayor in New York, they are speaking out very vociferously, including criticising US backing for Israel. And then the more establishment Democrats are worried that this opens up to the accusation of being Communists and Socialists and terrorist sympathisers. And saying we have to work with this administration when we can. There is real anger in the Democrat grassroots about this. and I have to confess that even I, a middle-class, home-counties former civil servant who is trained to be disciplined, find myself getting radicalised and wanting more extreme action, which is very tempting but then the risk is is that you lose the centre, that you are painted as just a wacky extremist. So it's very hard to find the right narrative.

**Jo Pye:** Are you picking up, Alex, that US citizens are beginning to reappraise some defects in the US Constitution such as how the right-wing selection of the Supreme Court has led to a stitch-up that effectively gives Trump complete power?

**Alex Hall Hall:** I don't know, is the answer. I don't move in a broad enough circle to get a sense that they are. Americans are all taught at school about the Constitution. They all take civics courses that are much better than the ones taught in UK, They are taught that there is a constitution, and there are checks and balances, and they feel about democracy pretty strongly, the idea that I know my rights, and they know when something's right, and they know when something's wrong. I think you're seeing it in the way people have turned out and protested. I think you're seeing it in the way that people are trying to protect

immigrants. I think you're seeing it in the way the opinion polls are sliding. I think there's a lot of people who are like, well, I voted for Trump, and I voted for a tough stance on immigration, but I didn't vote for a hundred percent of this. So I think there is a sense that a lot of people think, I didn't vote for my own job to be cut, I didn't vote for my neighbour to be deported. I think you will see that. And traditional Democrats are therefore saying we just have to hold out for the midterms, and we will regain control of Congress, and then we'll be able to put more of a check on what the Administration is doing. There is very strong polling evidence that trust in the Supreme Court has completely plummeted.

**Jo Pye:** Tim Walz was saying he was confident there will be free and fair elections in 2026 and 2028, because the States administer the elections. Is that right?

**Alex Hall Hall:** Yes and no. He's correct that States administer the elections. However, the State government can determine or tweak some of the rules of those elections. For example, they can, as some States have done, introduce more rigorous requirements about the ID that you have to show, just as the Conservatives did in the UK, where they allowed bus passes, but not student passes. Some States have said, you're not allowed to bus constituents in, or you're not allowed to offer refreshments to people standing in line, and some of that is seen as a handicap on voting in poorer or more marginalised communities. The state legislature can change electoral boundaries, so you get the gerrymandering of electoral districts, so that a district becomes overwhelmingly Republican, and it's almost impossible to get a Democrat elected there, and then also the official who is in charge of overseeing the count and the conduct of the elections is an elected official, and so some states that are strong Trump backers can vote in an official to oversee the count, who will accept complaints that there was a false return, or that a recount must be done, or that an election official should be disqualified. and in the 2020 election what was very commendable was that in several States, like the famous person in Georgia, where Trump "just needed" another 85,000 votes, and was trying to persuade the Georgia Secretary of State to allow a recount and magically find these votes, that particular official on the ground who was a Republican by politics refused to cooperate. States that are led by Democrats and have Democrat officials can run the elections one way and Republican led States can run it a different way, and Republicans will accuse Democrats of doing gerrymandering of their own. But I think what Democrats may do is not as egregious as what is being tried on the Republican side.

**Sue Wilson [chair of Breman in Spain]:** Is Trump's success in dismantling the checks and balances of democracy in the US emboldening would-be autocrats elsewhere?

**Alex Hall Hall:** Absolutely. They were doing it anyway, the dictator in Belarus is doing it, anyway. The Georgian authorities were doing this anyway. The thing is that some of what Trump is doing, like attacking universities and free media and independent organisations makes it much harder to criticise other countries for doing that. And the Trump Administration has actually slashed funding for its own democracy promotion organisations and actively stated that they don't believe it's in the interests of the US. One of the rescission memos I was talking about where they try and cancel congressional funding has been the slashing of funding to Freedom House, the National Endowment for Democracy and the National Democrat Institute and the memo says, we don't think we should be in the business of meddling in other people's democracies, and it's not in the interest of the American people that our funds, our taxpayers money is spent in this direction. So not only will this administration not criticise other countries for doing some of what it's doing at home, but they're also slashing funding to the classic arms of the US. Government that used to offer support to human rights and democracy activists around the world. Radio Free Europe is a classic example. It was broadcasting to societies that don't have access to a free media themselves, and they've slashed funding for that. And then also the Trump Administration has redefined some of what it deems to be human rights violations. The State Department produces an annual human rights report, and they've revised what human rights they will report on. They're saying some of the things like popular protests against the conduct of elections or challenges to elections are no longer issues that State Department is going to report on because they're the things they want to be able to do themselves in the US. So it's emboldening them in all sorts of ways. One of us asked in the chat, what about Georgia? Will the US care about what's happening in Georgia? And the answer is, no, they won't. Trump's foreign policy is a values-free foreign policy. It's a mercantilist foreign policy. If your regime has something that Trump thinks will benefit America or benefit his own family or himself personally, he's not really going to be concerned about what you're doing to your own people, so he's happy to be hawkish on Iran, because there's no constituency for supporting Iran, and Iran is not offering anything to America. It's not because Iran has a terrible human rights record. He doesn't care about that. It's not a values-based foreign policy.

**Richard Corbett:** On this question, does Trump embolden far right groups or autocratic leaders in Europe and elsewhere? Yes, he does. You just need to look at how Orbán, for instance, who while he is rather isolated among European governments, at least relies on the fact that the US backs him. And you see others doing that at party level. I mentioned the overt assistance given to a number of far-right European parties by Trump. That's very explicit. Back home in their countries, that enables them to sell themselves: "You see, we're not extremists. The President of the United States thinks we're good". We've been through this before, by the way, in a different way, when David Cameron pulled the British Conservative party out of the EPP Parliamentary group in the European Parliament. and they set up a new grouping with right-wing European parties. This was against the will of most British Conservative MEPs, who thought this was a silly idea, but they were desperate to create a new political group and they found some very strange allies across Europe. Some of those were very small and rather extremist parties, small at the time, but the PiS party, for instance, the Law and Justice party in Poland said: "Look, we're not on the fringes of the European Parliament any more. We're in the same political group as the British Conservative party, the party of Winston Churchill, from a long-standing democracy. We're not anti-democratic!". It credibilised them, and that helped the rise of far right parties across Europe. So these external endorsements from countries which still have the reputation of having been democratic for a long time with democratic leaders can be instrumentalised by the far right.

**Jo Pye:** Should Starmer not have refrained from sucking up so much to Trump, even sometimes normalising what Trump is doing by calling Trump's tariffs reciprocal. And should he not have openly questioned Trump's threats to Canada, Greenland and Panama? I'm wondering whether we ought to be asking Labour Party grassroots about this, about what they're going to do. But what does it look like in America?

**Richard Corbett:** In a way, Starmer's doing what most European leaders are doing which is trying not to alienate Trump completely, because, as I said earlier, of the situation in Ukraine, the threats to weaken NATO, and the economic threats of the tariffs which everybody is trying to reduce, and so not overtly criticising him is one of the things which to most of us on this chat looks rather dismaying, but it is what most leaders in Europe are doing. After all, Starmer did at least, straight after the incident with Zelenskyy in the White

House, invite Zelenskyy to London, and went out into the street, on the doorstep of Downing Street, to welcome him very explicitly. He didn't verbally criticise Trump, but in his actions he did make clear that we see things very differently, and certainly, I think on Canada, a Commonwealth country, he's been reasonably clear as well, and got the King to be clear also. So so it's a very fine balancing act at the moment until we get into a position where we have more resilience, and that means Europeans working together a lot more so that we can develop a policy that is, has a greater margin for independence than we have at the moment.

**Alex Hall Hall:** 100%. I think, Richard, you you've absolutely nailed it. I think Starmer's in an impossible situation, and he's taking bullets from the left, and bullets from the right, and I sit there and occasionally fire a missile at him myself, and wish he would be more plucky. But the answer is a responsible British Prime Minister can't afford to rile up the Americans, at least not this one. We're dependent on them for our defence, and to his credit, I would say, Starmer has made some material difference. He has had influence on this administration: you've mentioned through hosting Zelenskyy in London, but I think much more importantly than that, when Zelenskyy and Trump had that awful blow up in the Oval office meeting, Starmer, I've heard from several sources, played a massive role behind the scenes to try and patch that up and prevent a complete rupture. And yes, as we discussed earlier on, Trump's attitude on Russia and Ukraine is less firm than we would like in support of Ukraine and less critical of Russia. But six months on, actually, he's sounding a bit more critical and frustrated with Putin, and he's just overturned a decision by the Department of Defense to suspend some arms provisions to Ukraine last week: Trump just overruled his Defense secretary and insisted those those provisions should be resumed, and I think Starmer has been influential in that. There was a worry that this administration might walk away from the AUKUS deal, which is a nuclear cooperation deal between Australia, the UK. and the US. Which is very important for security in the Pacific. There are some people around Pete Hegseth who are very sceptical about that program, and I think Starmer has kept that on the road. So it's tough for those of us who think Trump is awful. It's nauseating sometimes to see Starmer having to suck up to him a little bit, and appear to be appeasing him and flattering him. But until we are truly independent we can't afford to blow him off. We do need America to stay engaged in Europe. At the recent NATO Summit all the leaders worked on how to flatter Trump and how to keep him on side, and actually it turned out to be quite a successful summit, and Trump said afterwards, actually,

I've changed my mind, I listened to what everybody said, you can see they really care, and we're committed to NATO. So tough though it is, it's probably the right thing to do. However, as Richard, you've said, Europe with the UK absolutely has to be building up their own resilience, investing in their own defence and finding ways to wean themselves off dependence on the US. Because at a whim Trump could change his mind. Or he could do something that is so egregious that Starmer feels he has to call it out, the political pressure not to say something becomes impossible. And then Trump says, Fine, I'm re-imposing tariffs on you. So we've got to build up our own resilience. Somebody just asked, how do European leaders engage with someone who changes his mind every 5 minutes? That's the challenge, it's absolutely impossible! The only thing you can do is shore up your own strength and resilience and independence.

**Prof. Juliet Lodge.** Can the EU build constitutional resilience against autocracy fast enough?

**Alex Hall Hall:** At the end of the day, no constitution can withstand a really determined assault. It has to come down to the people deciding that that they don't like this. I think America has a very strong constitution, and it is being stretched to the limit. And ultimately it's not words on the paper. It's a living document: it's how much people are prepared to say no. And the failure is not coming from the American people: it's coming from the American elites and the people who staff these institutions. That is the failure. So that's my observation on that. Thank you all very, very much. I really appreciate the questions and the engagement.

**Richard Corbett:** Regarding what Juliet is asking constitutional resilience in the EU. The EU's constitution, as it were, is the treaties that lay down what the EU can do, what it can't do, how it does it, how it appoints people to the institutions, and so on. I'm not sure whether Juliet meant external resilience to enable the EU to stand up externally vis-à-vis Trump, or Russia, or internal resilience against autocrats like Orbán coming to power in an EU country. If it's the latter, the EU treaty does have a provision for suspending a Member State, suspending its voting rights, but not its obligations. That, however, requires a unanimous decision of all the other Member States. So constitutionally Hungary just needs one other country to back it. It previously had Poland. Now it has Slovakia. So the EU's constitution is rather weak on that. What it can do, falling short of that, is this: it is a legal

based system. If Hungary violates basic fundamental democratic norms or EU law and is challenged in the Court of Justice, the court can fine Hungary and financial assistance to Hungary can be withdrawn by the Commission. That has happened to a certain degree. So there are tools that don't exist in normal international frameworks. The EU has some limited federal-type features. It's a legal system that enables it to do some things, but they are limited.

If you meant, what can the EU do in terms of resilience to external threats, there's a big divergence. The EU is a hybrid system where for some things the system allows decisions by majority votes, and the EU has the legal instruments to act like that on trade, like on sanctions, on financial assistance. The EU can be quite effective. But on traditional foreign policy decisions, and especially security, it acts by unanimous agreement of the Member States. It's more like an intergovernmental system on these questions. And so there it's rather weak because it's vulnerable to vetoes by a single government. So the EU can do a lot more than most international structures, but in only in some fields; in other fields, it's no more effective than, say, the G8 or other international groupings, or scarcely more so.

**Sarah Cowley [and others]:** The Labour Government is apparently negotiating a big deal with the US tech company. Palantir. Palantir is collaborating with the Trump regime and its ICE department on systems for surveillance, targeting, imprisoning, and deporting. Should our Government stay away from this company, because the part-owner of Palantir Peter Thiel has made it very clear that he doesn't believe in democracy, and apparently thinks countries should be run by tech billionaires or their appointees. What can we do in our own circles?

Is this the sort of thing we must start writing to our MPs about?

**Richard Corbett:** Well, the question applies even more broadly to a number of American companies. The big tech companies, Twitter or X, as it now is, for instance, and quite a lot of things where we we tend to, or attempted to rely on what they provide, even though their owners are colluding with Trump, or even urging him to do even worse things. So yeah, this is something I think we should have a debate about in Britain. On the Palantir question, I don't know the ins and outs of it, but if the Government wants to use Palantir know-how for certain important things relating to the Health Service, you would want to ask whether there no other ways of doing it? I should imagine they're looking at that, but might be faced with a rather difficult choice. I have no idea what they're going to do.

**Jo Pye** : As we discussed in a previous session, the European Movement is working with an All Party Parliamentary Group on Europe, and perhaps we should be getting some policy thoughts together, and consulting across the grassroots about suggestions and questions about this issue and others that we might want to put to the APPG.

**Monica Horten** [Chair]: Our colleague Grigol Gengelia from Georgia, has just told us from direct experience what happens when things really do sadly go quite wrong, or at least as in Georgia look to be on a tipping point of things going really wrong. We look back today to the 1930s and what happened in Germany, and we see how easily a country can slip from being a democracy into autocracy or dictatorship. When I was in Georgia ten years ago, it looked very positive, they wanted to join the EU, they did pull together their application to join the EU, things looked extremely positive and pro-European, and somehow it has completely tilted in the other direction in a very extreme way. That should I think really be a warning to all of us. Trump is also a warning, although perhaps in some ways still not yet quite so visible to many people here in this country as it might be, given the very bleak picture that's been painted by Alex. of the way the US. Government has been heading and the potential instability there.

We've learned a lot here about that. And from Richard we've learned as well about some of the difficulties that the EU faces in terms of its constitution and its structures, and its mix of resilience and lack of resilience to stand up to the forces that are mounting potentially against it, internally and externally in the geopolitical sphere. And of course the UK has all of those issues too. Although at the moment here we seem fortunately a little bit away from the worst developments, we seem more like onlookers that those worst and directly affected, not yet having the worst happen here, or not for the moment anyway.

**Colin Gordon**: We mentioned at the start the crowdfund which Alexandra has started in support of a family she knows in Gaza who are struggling to stay alive at the moment, and are in a way representative of two million people in Gaza who are struggling to stay alive. You can learn more about this appeal here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/save-nabil-and-his-family-from-slaughter-in-gaza>