



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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POSITION PAPER

FREEDOM IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

**A Liberal Agenda for a Stronger
and More Resilient Europe**

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Introduction

The Eastern Europe Summit VI takes place in Prague, a city whose history is closely connected to civic courage, democratic change, and resistance to authoritarianism. The legacy of the Velvet Revolution reminds us that freedom, democracy, and human dignity must be defended and renewed by every generation. Against the backdrop of Russia's war against Ukraine, a fragmented global order, democratic backsliding, and rapid technological change, the Summit focuses on three interconnected themes that are crucial for Europe's future: Europe's role as a geopolitical actor, the defence of liberal democracy against illiberalism and populism, and the protection of democratic integrity in the digital age.

These challenges are closely linked. Europe must strengthen its capacity to defend its security and values, rebuild citizens' trust in democratic institutions, and ensure that new technologies do not undermine public debate and elections. The Summit brings together young liberal leaders from across Europe to develop shared responses to these pressing challenges. By combining strategic ambition, democratic resilience, and international solidarity, we seek to contribute to a stronger, freer, and more capable Europe – one that can act with confidence in an increasingly fragmented world.

Europe as a Geopolitical Actor: Security and Strategy in a Fragmented World Order

Europe's eastern border is the front line of the European security order. Russia is Europe's principal military threat, and its war against Ukraine shows that deterrence fails when aggression appears cheap. Europe must deny Russia victory, sustain Ukraine, strengthen its eastern flank, and build the capacity to defend itself even if the United States is distracted, delayed, or unwilling to act. Strategic autonomy must mean the ability to make decisions, mobilise forces, sustain military operations, and protect European sovereignty without allowing external dependencies or internal vetoes to paralyse action.

We call for:

- NATO to reinforce permanently stationed multinational forces in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, while the EU expands military mobility, defence production, sanctions, critical-infrastructure protection, and security assistance to Moldova.
- Europe to acquire the capacity and political will to shoot down Russian drones and missiles violating NATO or EU airspace, supported by integrated air and missile defence, counter-drone systems, and clear rules of engagement.
- France to explicitly extend its nuclear umbrella to the entire EU, and eastern-flank states to remove remaining national restrictions that weaken NATO nuclear deterrence.
- The EU to establish a permanent hybrid-threat task force protecting airports, ports, railways, energy networks, telecommunications, and underwater infrastructure, while willing states develop offensive cyber and hybrid capabilities, including intelligence-led disruption and hackbacks against hostile infrastructure.
- Sanctions against Russia and Belarus to intensify, including the readiness to close border crossings when security conditions require it.
- Europe to continue rejecting recognition of Russian occupation and uphold Ukraine's internationally recognised 1991 borders as the legal baseline for any settlement, alongside accountability and transitional justice.
- European military support for Ukraine, sanctions on Russia, and European rearmament to continue even after a ceasefire. A peace that rewards conquest would prepare the next war.
- Ukraine's EU accession to accelerate on merit, while preserving credible European perspectives for Moldova and the Western Balkans.

- Europe to build armed forces capable of sustained high-intensity warfare, implement NATO's 5% defence-related spending commitment, and establish a permanent European rapid-response force under European command, additional to national armies and stationed primarily on the eastern flank.
- Europe to massively expand ammunition, missile, drone, and weapons production, build its own anti-missile interceptor capacity, and harmonise military standards so weapons and munitions are interchangeable across European forces.
- Ukraine to be directly integrated into the European defence-industrial base, combining Ukrainian battlefield innovation, drone technologies, and rapid production cycles with European capital and manufacturing capacity. Initiatives such as Freyja should serve as a model.
- NATO to extend missile-defence coverage from Poland over western Ukraine where technically feasible, while Central and Eastern European states develop total-defence models integrating military, civil, industrial, and societal preparedness.
- European investment in Black Sea security to increase, particularly in Romania and Bulgaria, including air defence, maritime surveillance, ports, mine countermeasures, and Danube logistics.
- Critical dependencies in defence, secure IT, satellites, drones, ammunition, and strategic resources to be reduced or eliminated; where independence is unrealistic, supplies must be diversified across dependable partners.
- Europe to secure critical minerals through long-term partnerships, stockpiling, recycling, and European processing capacity, while deepening cooperation with the United Kingdom, Norway, and other reliable democracies and supporting Taiwan's security and resilience.
- Europe to expand the Middle Corridor through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the South Caucasus, including new regional transport links, to reduce dependence on routes through Russia and Iran.
- The EU to overcome unanimity in foreign and security policy through treaty reform, passerelle clauses, or differentiated integration, establish a European Security Council for rapid decision-making, and give the High Representative greater authority to execute agreed strategy.
- Europe to remain allied with the United States while becoming substantially less dependent on Washington for its ability to act. European solidarity must be indivisible: the security of Tallinn, Vilnius, Chişinău, Warsaw, Kyiv, and Bucharest must matter as much as that of Berlin, Paris, Madrid, and Amsterdam.

Liberal Europe: Policy Responses to Illiberalism, Populism, and Democratic Decline

Strengthening Participatory Democracy Instruments: We believe that one of the main causes of illiberal and populist narratives gaining traction more easily is the widespread feeling among citizens that they lack real influence over public decisions. This frustration is too often left unaddressed: citizens' input, even when provided during consultations, surveys, and public meetings, is not used meaningfully, and therefore has no visible impact on their reality.

We call for:

- Public institutions to improve consultation processes and citizen proposal processes, making them more meaningful: public institutions should always provide the status of citizens' proposals and, where required, the rationale behind their incorporation or rejection, to ensure citizen input is not merely a formality or a box-ticking exercise.
- The introduction of more concrete and structured participatory instruments, such as participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies, neighbourhood consultations, and deliberative forums, to give citizens a direct role in decisions affecting their day-to-day life.

Reclaiming Patriotic Narrative from the Far-Right: Liberal and democratic movements have too often ceded patriotism and national identity to populist and far-right forces. This has created a false dichotomy between exclusionary nationalism and a rejection of national identity altogether. We, as liberals, must reject this choice and reclaim patriotism as a democratic, inclusive value, fostering a sense of belonging.

We call for:

- Liberal political parties and actors keep making the case that loving one's country and supporting European integration are not in conflict.
- Liberal political parties and actors embrace "liberal patriotism" as part of their communication strategy, rather than shying away from the term, including through the use of national symbols and flags alongside those of the EU.
- Liberal political parties and actors to communicate to their communities that criticism of corruption, defence of the rule of law, and demands for better public services are themselves expressions of patriotism.

Offering an Anti-Establishment Yet

Liberal Narrative: Far-right illiberals have an appealing story because they portray themselves as anti-establishment. Liberals, by contrast, act as defenders of the established order, including its democratic institutions and the rule of law, against attacks from the illiberal far right. We believe that liberals can and should also portray themselves as anti-establishment while not abandoning key democratic principles.

We call for:

- Liberals to acknowledge that a narrative can be both anti-establishment and liberal at once: challenging entrenched interests, bureaucratic dysfunction, or unaccountable elites does not require rejecting democratic institutions or values altogether.
- Liberal parties and actors to use effective social media strategies to communicate this anti-establishment yet liberal narrative: calling out institutional failures while pairing criticism with a commitment to individual freedom, the rule of law, and accountable government.

Democracy in the Digital Age: AI, Elections, and the Battle for Democratic Integrity

Europe's democracies are under digital siege. Artificial intelligence has made disinformation cheaper, faster, and harder to detect – and foreign actors are exploiting these new tools to manipulate elections, fracture social cohesion, and erode trust in democratic institutions. Existing frameworks like the Digital Services Act are not enough if they are not rigorously enforced. Europe does not need more declarations of intent; it needs clear lines of responsibility, effective early-warning systems, and institutions capable of acting. This paper sets out how democratic integrity can be defended in the digital age – through five recommendations spanning stronger law enforcement, new security structures, and long-term investment in education. The time to act is now, before the next election becomes the next test of our democracies' vulnerability.

We call for:

- Enforcing existing policies, such as the DSA, robustly enough to prevent foreign actors from exploiting gaps to weaken European positions. This includes:
 - Establishing a common analytical framework that identifies distinct modes of interference and captures how they interact.
 - Tailoring enforcement: equip national law enforcement agencies with clear, strict criteria distinguishing benign from malign interference.
 - Transparency must be central. Prosecution and enforcement must always be evidence-based.
- Establishing a joint task force of security and intelligence branches to safeguard the democratic integrity of electoral systems. Transparency must be central as well in this case. The task force must respect private communication channels and existing legislation.
- Identifying societal vulnerabilities across European countries. This includes in the:
 - *Short-term*: Deploying counter-narratives, debunking, and pre-bunking against foreign interference.
 - *Long-term*: Investing in education, AI, and digital literacy campaigns – rolled out in schools, integrated into curricula, and extended across civil society.
- Defining clear operational standards for election campaigns – distinguishing legitimate technology use from

manipulation and misuse — modeled on campaign finance rules.

- Identifying groups in European countries particularly vulnerable to FIMI campaigns and addressing them

strategically. The EU and its member states must tailor communication and outreach to proactively counter narratives designed to undermine societal cohesion and sow unrest.



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