

## **From Memory to Action: Combating the Resurgence of Totalitarian Ideologies in Europe**

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### **Preamble**

Totalitarian regimes have inflicted immense suffering on Europe, leaving deep scars on its collective memory. The 20th century bore witness to the destructive impact of socialism, communism, fascism, and Nazism, which were responsible for the systemic oppression of millions, violating human rights, freedom, and dignity.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the enduring relevance of this dark history, the European Parliament adopted the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism on 2 April 2009, which calls for remembrance, education, and justice to prevent the resurgence of such ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, implementation of the resolution remains inconsistent. Some EU member states, including Slovenia, have yet to formally endorse or integrate its principles, raising concerns about their commitment to addressing the legacy of totalitarianism. In Slovenia, thousands of victims of communist extrajudicial killings remain buried in unmarked graves, and communist-era holidays are still officially commemorated, reflecting an incomplete reconciliation with the past.<sup>3</sup>

This hesitancy occurs against the backdrop of a growing resurgence of extremist ideologies across Europe. For example, far-right and far-left movements in Germany, have gained alarming traction in regional elections, particularly in eastern states. In Italy, incidents such as a rally in Rome where participants performed fascist salutes highlight the persistence of extremist symbols in public spaces.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, nationalist factions in France pose significant challenges to democratic norms and societal cohesion.<sup>5</sup>

These trends underscore the urgent need for unified European action to safeguard democracy and human rights.

### **Recognizing that:**

- Totalitarian regimes in the 20th century caused devastating human suffering, including mass killings, oppression, and denial of basic freedoms.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism*, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament Report on Totalitarian Crimes, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> BBC, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> *The Black Book of Communism*, 1999.

- The European Parliament's 2009 resolution highlights the importance of education, remembrance, and justice as tools to combat the resurgence of extremist ideologies.<sup>7</sup>
- Socialism, communism, fascism, and Nazism share common traits of authoritarianism, suppression of dissent, and disregard for individual rights.<sup>8</sup>
- Extremist ideologies are experiencing a resurgence in Europe, as evidenced by the growing influence of nationalist and far-right movements in Germany and France.<sup>9</sup>
- In Slovenia, thousands of victims of extrajudicial communist killings remain in unmarked graves, and the country continues to officially commemorate communist-era holidays.<sup>10</sup>
- In Lithuania, over 160 monuments honouring the occupying soviet regime remain incorporated into protective lists deeming them of cultural value.<sup>11</sup>
- Failing to address the legacy of totalitarian regimes risks historical amnesia, resurgence of authoritarian ideologies, and the erosion of democratic values.<sup>12</sup>
- Some European countries, such as Germany and Austria, have taken bold and decisive steps, such as the establishment of an "Erinnerungskultur", to confront their history and prevent the resurgence of totalitarianism. Measures such as banning Nazi symbols and organizations and implementing comprehensive education on the Holocaust and World War II, demonstrate a strong commitment to accountability, remembrance, and the preservation of democratic values. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany expanded its culture of remembrance to also address the injustices and crimes committed under the communist regime in East Germany. These actions serve as a positive example for fostering historical awareness and combating extremist ideologies.

#### **Acknowledging that:**

- Some EU member states, including Slovenia, have yet to formally endorse or implement the principles of the European Parliament's Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism.<sup>13</sup>
- Education is essential to instil awareness of totalitarian crimes and prevent the repetition of past atrocities
- Historical accountability fosters unity and strengthens the principles of democracy, freedom, and human rights.<sup>14</sup>
- Recent reports from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum emphasize the importance of memorialization to combat the resurgence of extremist ideologies.<sup>15</sup>
- Ignoring the resurgence of totalitarian ideologies in Europe, such as the far-right and far-left in Germany and nationalist factions in France, poses a threat to democratic institutions and social cohesion.<sup>16</sup>

#### **YEPP calls on:**

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<sup>7</sup> European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> The Anatomy of Fascism, Paxton, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Deutsche Welle, 2023; Reuters, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament Report on Totalitarian Crimes, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> 15 Min LT, Gediminas Kajėnas, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> European Parliament Report on Totalitarian Crimes, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> European Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> USHMM Introduction to the Holocaust.

<sup>16</sup> Deutsche Welle, 2023; Reuters, 2023.

- **Condemnation of All Totalitarian Regimes**
  - Call for the condemnation of all totalitarian regimes, including communism, socialism, fascism, and Nazism, as ideologies that deny fundamental human rights and threaten democratic values.
- **Unified European Action**
  - Encourage all EU member states, including those that have not endorsed the 2009 resolution, to formally commit to its principles and actively implement its recommendations.
- **Support for Victims**
  - Establish mechanisms for legal recognition and commemorative initiatives for victims of totalitarian regimes.
  - In countries where reparations have not yet been provided to victims, call for actions to ensure they receive compensation for the suffering endured under oppressive regimes.
- **International Cooperation**
  - Foster collaboration among EU member states and international organizations to counter authoritarian movements and share best practices in combating extremism.
- **Education and Awareness**
  - Call for the integration of the history and consequences of totalitarian regimes into school curricula across Europe to instil an understanding of democracy and human rights.
  - Call for the establishment of Pan-European programs to commemorate victims of totalitarianism, including the recognition of 23 August as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian Regimes.
  - Foster the creation of an EU-wide Culture of Remembrance, with the German and Austrian ‘Erinnerungskultur’ as an example, to educate and commemorate the victims and effects of Totalitarianisms.
- **Legislative Measures**
  - Enact and enforce strict legislation prohibiting the promotion of totalitarian symbols and ideologies.
  - Support initiatives to establish a pan-European documentation centre to memorialize victims of totalitarian regimes.

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#### Resources:

1. European Parliament. "European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism." Adopted on 2 April 2009.  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2009-0213\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2009-0213_EN.html)
2. "Germany's far-right AfD secures historic win in regional election," *CNN*, 2. September 2024.  
<https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/02/europe/afd-germany-election-thuringia-saxony-intl/index.html>
3. "France's far-right Rassemblement National: The rise and challenges."  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63525377>
4. Courtois, Stéphane, et al. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. Harvard University Press, 1999.
5. Paxton, Robert O. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Vintage Books, 2004.
6. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Introduction to the Holocaust."  
<https://www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust>

7. European Charter of Fundamental Rights. "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union." 2000.  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)
8. Reuters. (2024, January 8). Fascist rally in Rome sparks Italian opposition outrage.  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/fascist-rally-rome-sparks-italian-opposition-outrage-2024-01-08/>.