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# European union as a road to serfdom: The Alt-Right's inversion of narratives on European integration

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## ABSTRACT

The Alt-Right, a loose coalition of far-right groups which are particularly active online, claims that European integration is a part of a master plan by cosmopolitan elites to encourage globalisation and 'corporate capitalism' in order to partly replace and 'blend' the predominantly white population with migrants from outside Europe. Many Alt-Right followers argue that this conspiracy for a 'white genocide' can be traced back to Coudenhove-Kalergi's plan for a Paneuropean Union. Although this Alt-Right counternarrative to European integration is only believed in its entirety by a small group of people, who do not care that their historical claims are evidently false, bits and pieces of the narrative filter down to mainstream political actors. By employing narrative analysis and drawing on new research on online news websites and social media forums, this article will examine the Alt-Right's narrative entrepreneurs and their narratives.



## KEYWORDS

Alt-right; European integration; European union; narratives; counternarratives

## Introduction

Shortly before the outbreak of the 2020 coronavirus crisis in Western Europe, members of the Dutch parliament held a debate on the European Union's (EU) budget for 2021–2027. One of the speakers was Thierry Baudet, founder and leader of Forum voor Democratie (FvD), a Dutch nationalist and anti-immigration political party that claims to be the 'flagship of the Renaissance fleet in Dutch politics' – a reference to the maritime *grandeur* of the (confederal) Dutch Republic (1579–1795). FvD held two seats in the Dutch parliament, out of a total of 150 in the Second Chamber, from 2017 to 2021. The party became the largest in the Netherlands following the provincial elections on 20 March 2019 with 14.5% of the votes. As a result of these elections, the party won 12 seats, out of 75, in the First Chamber. In November 2020, a row ensued amongst the party apparatus about Baudet's apparent reluctance to end the flirtations with Nazi ideology in the FvD's youth organisation. A frantic struggle for power arose between Baudet and FvD's more moderate politicians, during which most of the elected politicians left the party in protest against how Baudet dealt with the crisis (De Witt Wijnen and Rutten 2020). In the first months of 2021, the party was resurrected as a significant leader in the protests against the lockdown in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The party won eight seats in the elections for the Second Chamber of March 2021, but internal tensions about Baudet's provocative political style soon led to a new split of more moderate FvD members of parliament.

Until the end of 2020, Baudet had been a rising star in European far-right politics. In February 2020, he was a prominent speaker at the 'National Conservatives' conference in Rome, which aimed at an

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alliance between parties such as Fidesz in Hungary, Lega in Italy, Rassemblement National in France, and Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, in order to fight against ‘EU totalitarianism’ and the ‘pink police state’. The aim of the alliance was to transform the centre-right, while seeking to work alongside parties associated with violent Nazi-style fascism (Broder 2020).

In the parliamentary debate on the EU’s budget in February 2020, Baudet argued that the EU was a state in the making that aimed at replacing the national states. All the money spent on the EU would ‘go to the establishment of ferry services to transport immigrants from Africa to Europe in order to weaken the national identity with the aim of abolishing the national states’<sup>1</sup>. Baudet’s plea against the EU seemed to refer to the interpretation of it as an organisation that aims to demographically replace the predominantly white population of Europe with people of mixed ethnicity through a process of intermingling with migrants from outside Europe.

Many movements and parties of the far-right ecosphere share this counternarrative to European integration, but it was made especially popular by the Alt-Right movement. This movement is a loosely connected, leaderless, far-right internet movement that started in the United States about ten years ago, but soon became a transnational movement. The Alabama-based civil rights organization Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) defines the Alt-Right as ‘a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that “white identity” is under attack by multicultural forces using “political correctness” and “social justice” to undermine white people and “their” civilization’ (Lux and Jordan 2019). Its main features are its organisation through the internet and its ironic-provocative style. With this, it gave a new dynamic to groups and organisations in Europe that utilise the same themes and share a narrative style of promoting conspiracy theories and manipulating facts for political ends, such as Baudet’s FvD (Kouwenhoven and Lievisse Adriaanse 2017). When speaking of these ideological family members in Europe, I will use the term Alt-Right broadly to describe a diversity of groups that would consider themselves to be European ‘National Conservatives’ or that are part of the European Identitarian Movement. Their ideas are anchored in a rejection of the ideological heritage of ‘the Sixties’ and the claim that Europe’s culture and territory belong to its predominantly white population. They share the same political style using suggestive language and counternarratives in an attempt to garner support from more mainstream groups. Their main aim is a long-term ‘Gramscian’ cultural struggle for hegemony.

Narratives cross back-and-forth between the broad church of the Alt-Right and other parts of the far-right ecosphere. One of the central theories of the Alt-Right movement, a ‘great replacement’ of the politically conscious, predominantly white population of Europe and North America with people from ‘mixed ethnicity’ who are manipulated into submission by a ‘replacist power’ was not invented by Alt-Rightists, but by the French writer and 1968 counterculture defector Renaud Camus ([Jean-Yves] Camus and Lebourg 2017). Renaud Camus claims that as a homosexual he hates to be associated with fascism. He was a candidate for a small far-right party for the European elections of 2019 (Croucher 2019). Since the early 2010s his ideas have been shared and spread by far-right individuals and movements all over the world, not just the Alt-Right, but also the Norwegian terrorist and mass-murderer Anders Breivik, Pegida in Germany: the middle-class protest movement against *Überfremdung* [being overwhelmed] by Muslims, the Greek National Socialist organisation Golden Dawn and the far-right para-squatters’ movement Casa Pound in Italy – which claims that it ‘loves difference’ and therefore interprets integration between ethnic groups as a ‘form of violence that is preached by the left’ (as cited in Flesher Fominaya 2020, 191).

The transnational Alt-Right, understood as an umbrella term, uses historical claims as the foundation upon which it constructs its counternarrative about European integration. It connects the alleged attacks on ‘white identity’ with processes of European integration by referring to a plan from 1923 made by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi for a Paneuropean Union. According to the Alt-Right narrative, the secret aim of this plan would have been to intermingle the predominantly white population of Europe with migrants. Although the Alt-Right counternarrative is only believed in its entirety by a small group of people, who do not care that their historical claims are evidently false, elements of this narrative filter down to mainstream political actors. As I will show in this article,

Baudet's political style and his use of this counternarrative about the EU could well be regarded as one of the best examples of the penetration and permeation of the ironic Alt-Right type of politics into the parliamentary debate of the EU member states. As an exponent of the Alt-Right political style, Baudet is especially interesting for researching counternarratives to European union because of his obvious attempts (in his PhD thesis and other publications) to systemise the preoccupations of the Alt-Right into a more-or-less coherent counternarrative to European integration. His motion against a clause in the EU migration pact, which according to him would allow NGOs to function as an 'illegal shuttle service', was approved by the Dutch Second Chamber on 11 November 2020.<sup>2</sup>

While focusing on the case of Baudet, this article will deal with other narrative entrepreneurs who spread the Alt-Right counternarrative to European integration. By employing narrative analysis and drawing on new research on online news websites and social media forums, this article will examine the permeation of the Alt-Right discourse into mainstream politics.

## Transnational nationalism of the Alt-Right

The transnational Alt-Right should be understood as a broad church of interconnected movements with largely similar political grand narratives and styles, which addresses various context-specific issues in North America and Europe. It started in the U.S., when Barack Obama's two terms as US president from 2008 onward led to an increase in online activism of the far-right in the United States. The Trump presidential campaign of 2016 further intensified these activities (Winter 2019). The American white supremacist Richard Spencer particularly popularised the term Alt-Right in the second half of the 2000s, when leading Alt-Right blogs such as Spencer's own *AlternativeRight.com* (or *AltRight.com*) and Andrew Breitbart's *Breitbart.com* were established. The online continuation of the magazine *American Renaissance*, founded and led by Jared Taylor, the American self-proclaimed 'race realist' who agitates against the 'notion that white racism explains black failure' in the U.S. (Taylor 1993) is usually also counted among these most influential Alt-Right platforms, as is *DailyStormer.com*, founded by the anti-Semite Andrew Anglin.

Central to the Alt-Right's political philosophy is their concept of 'cultural Marxism', the idea that cultural cosmopolitans and liberal internationalists want to apply the Marxist class warfare to a broader range of identities, such as ethnicity and gender (Stewart 2020, 7). The Alt-Right is a populist movement according to Cas Mudde's broadly accepted definition, as it separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite', and argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people (Mudde 2004).

The Alt-Right seems to care more about revealing the supposed true nature of the 'powers that be' and thereby changing people's mindsets in order to cause a rebirth of the nation, than about grabbing political power. Initially, the movement's ideas were spread through online message boards and discussion threads like Gab, 4chan and 8chan's /pol/. After several racist mass shootings in 2019, especially the El Paso shooting on August 3, that were linked to 8chan, this board was temporarily taken offline and had to change its name to 8kun. It was used by supporters of Donald Trump's false claim that Democrats stole the 2020 U.S. presidential election ahead of the violent attack against the U.S. Congress on 6 January 2021 [Figure 1](#) (Paul, Harding, and Carrell 2021).

Many Alt-Right followers are also active on more mainstream internet platforms like Reddit, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, and news comments sections, where they have adapted their modes of communication, using memes, irony and 'trolling' (Lux and Jordan 2019). The use of memes such as Pepe the Frog serves as an identification mark, as does the use of 'dog whistles'; a method of sharing controversial, racist messages by using 'coded language' that permits white supremacists to hold discussions in public without the general public catching on. One example is the 'Jewish Echo', three sets of parentheses that encase the surname of a supposedly typical 'cosmopolitan', 'rootless', Jewish person: (((Name))) (Kien 2019). According to Keegan Hanks of the SPLC, 'If you make racism or anti-Semitism funny, you can subvert the cultural taboo. Make people laugh at the Holocaust – you've opened a space in which history and fact become worthless,



**Figure 1.** Drawing of Pepe the Frog on a protest board of Trump supporters at the 'March 4 Trump' rally in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Detail of photo by Fibonacci Blue, Wikimedia Commons.

period' (Winter 2019, 51). Irony and anonymity allow people on these platforms to make extreme comments.

With its radical anti-establishment attitude and its playful approach to politics that seems to be inspired by its main enemy, the counterculture of the Sixties, the movement has a fresh and edgy appearance. With its innovative use of cyberspace, references to the Hobbit film series and concepts like being 'red-pilled' (from the film *The Matrix*, meaning that you understand that everything you were taught and led to believe is a lie), it appeals to youth culture. As a result of this, and because of its lack of a consistent ideology or an organisational form (Winter 2019), the movement especially attracts younger generations.

### **The resonance of the Alt-Right in Europe**

European populist and nationalist-identitarian politicians seem to cherish the contacts with the mouthpieces of the American Alt-Right movement, even though they kept their distance when Steve Bannon, the American former executive chairman of Breitbart.com and former political strategist of Donald Trump, wanted to form a movement uniting populist and nationalist voters across Europe ahead of the European election of May 2019 (Ritter 2019). Especially Thierry Baudet had gained the interest of Bannon. During a meeting of the European populist movements in March 2019 in Rome, Bannon said that he regarded Baudet as the 'populist-nationalist alternative' to veteran MP Geert Wilders, the most well-known radical right Dutch politician abroad, whom he seemed to think of as an important forerunner of today's populism, but also as a has-been (De Jong 2019). Wilders focuses mainly on his anti-Islam agenda, while Baudet claims to fight a political battle with all mainstream,



'cultural Marxist' parties and their alleged buttresses: the universities, the civil service and the judiciary (Baudet and Staal 2020).

In the past, Baudet has boasted about his contact with one of the other favourites of the Alt-Right, Milo Yiannopoulos, the homosexual, riotous anti-feminist and LGBTQ-basher of British-Greek descent (who is a former staff member of the Alt-Right website Breitbart.com, but denies being part of the Alt-Right movement). In 2017, Baudet's dinner with Jared Taylor aroused major political and media outcry in the Netherlands. Some of his own FvD-supporters prefer to compare Baudet with Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist and activist against the identity politics of left-wing 'social justice warriors' who claims to reject white supremacy. This is why many journalists and researchers label Peterson's ideas as 'Alt-Light' (Minna Stern 2019, 88).

Debates about the transfer of the (often rather blurry) Alt-Right ideology seem to miss the point that the Alt-Right is primarily about a controversy-seeking offensive political style that prevails over a coherent substance. In terms of content, the Alt-Right did not offer that much new, but the Alt-Right's creative style of causing confusion by blatantly turning dominant narratives upside down undoubtedly made the European younger generations ready to believe fear-mongering myths by European populist and nationalist-identitarian politicians, especially after the EU's refugee crisis of 2015. One example is the Hungarian government's poster campaigns of 2017 and 2019 in which the EU was portrayed as the cause of this crisis, not as an organisation that proved unable to find a rapid solution because of opposition from its member states. Unsurprisingly, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government was supported by Alt-Right websites such as Breitbart.com. Eurocrats including the Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker were accused of 'working hand-in-hand with [the Hungarian-Jewish billionaire] George Soros to flood the bloc with migrants'. Breitbart poured scorn on attempts to paint Hungary's claims as false, for instance, by the British newspaper *The Guardian*, which the website depicted as a tool in the hands of 'globalists' [read: 'Jews'] [Figure 2](#) (Hale 2019).



**Figure 2.** A government billboard in Budapest, Hungary, March 12, 2019. The billboard reads, 'You also have the right to know what Brussels is up to', accusing European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker of pushing migration plans encouraged by U.S.-Hungarian businessman George Soros, in a media campaign rebuked by the Commission. Photo by REUTERS/Bernadett Szabo.

Neither the 'culture wars' it is trying to provoke, nor the apocalyptic battle it pretends to fight against the 'white genocide' that is supposed to be secretly orchestrated by global forces, is unique to the Alt-Right. The same applies to the utilisation of memory by, for example, using the word 'genocide' in the concept of 'white genocide'. As a deliberate reference to the hegemonic postwar European memory of the Shoah, it is an example of the effective use of 'memory appropriation'; a term that is coined for the abuse of Shoah memorials for the commemoration of non-Jewish alleged or real victimhood (Subotić 2019).

Research on the direct influence of the American Alt-Right in Europe is scarce, but suggests an extremely effective online 'fearmongering about the perceived decline' of idealised, predominantly 'white' countries in Europe on American forums like AltRight.com (Sontheimer 2019). In Europe, the movement symbolises new impulses to populist nationalism, with its playful impertinence. Dog-whistling and pretended indignation about being misunderstood, to make the point that the 'left-wing judiciary' or the 'mainstream media' do not accept opinions beyond a narrow 'left-wing' spectrum, are effective techniques to gain media attention. And it uses pretended coquetry and irony in order to make far-right issues mainstream.

Thierry Baudet also has effectively made use of the aforementioned tools from the Alt-Right playbook, such as pseudo-ironic dog-whistling at his Alt-Right followers, often with Twitter as a medium (De Koning and De Witt Wijnen 2019), with anti-Semitic codewords like 'globalists' and 'internationalists' for 'wandering Jews' and pretended indignation about being ignored by, or purposely misinterpreted in, the 'mainstream media' that would suppress differing opinions (Court District Middle Netherlands 2020).

An example that clearly shows how he plays to his racist and anti-Semitic supporters is his response to the link that the American-Polish journalist Anne Applebaum, who has a Jewish background, posted on her Twitter account on 26 April 2020 (@anneapplebaum) to a documentary 'on the Dutch politician Thierry Baudet and his links to (and admiration for) the Kremlin'. Baudet's party, a former think tank, had been one of the driving forces behind the April 2016 national referendum in the Netherlands on the association agreement of the EU with Ukraine. Moreover, the party long questioned the independence of the Dutch-led international research team that suggested Russian involvement in the shooting down of Flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014, with the death of 298 passengers (most of them Dutch) and crew members. In April 2020, the Dutch television programme Zembra suggested that Baudet had ties with one of Putin's agents in Russia's media war. Their suspicion was based on WhatsApp messages that Baudet claimed were meant to be ironic. After Anne Applebaum had pointed her followers on Twitter to this television programme, Baudet immediately retweeted (@thierrybaudet): 'Surprise! Ultra-globalist who believes in every Russia conspiracy theory and bought into Trump collusion hoax now also spreads Zembrabla #fakenews'. One of his followers, a self-proclaimed 'Dutch nationalist' (@FoxBased), responded to the Applebaum retweet by commenting: 'Rootless liberal internationalist cries about people that want to connect back to their roots'.

However, unlike this follower, most of his voters, as well as some journalists and academics, do not take Baudet's words seriously, arguing that he's just flirting with racism and anti-Semitism, even though some radical members of FvD's youth organisation have secretly glorified racist mass murderers like Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant (Van Dijk 2020). Initially, other FvD politicians dismissed protests against Baudet's xenophobia and anti-Semitism as irony magnified by the 'left-wing mainstream media'. However, in November 2020, Baudet's unwillingness to dismiss the leader of this youth organisation eventually led to a power struggle in the FvD between Baudet and several other party politicians. They accused him of having responded to concerns about anti-Semitism in the party, at a dinner party of prospective MPs, by saying that almost everyone he knows is an anti-Semite. This statement and his apparent statement at the same meeting that 'George Soros and others' are the evil geniuses behind the COVID-19 pandemic were the straw that broke the camel's back. Baudet managed to remain party leader, but during and after a chaotic tussle most of the FvD's members of the national and European parliament, and most of the FvD's members of the provincial

assemblies left the party (De Witt Wijnen and Rutten 2020). Judging from the comments on the FvD's Facebook page, most of the party supporters kept supporting Baudet.

## The Alt-Right's use of history

The historian Louie Valencia-García identifies seven main features of far-right and Alt-Right history construction: denying contradictory historical evidence; belief in a cyclical, or teleological, history that shows where we are going; declining narratives that assume a theory of degeneracy in place of understanding of change; mythologisation, through which facts are replaced with chimeras; nostalgia for an imagined past; ahistoricism based on untruth and the often fragmented and biased ways that history is remembered and portrayed in popular public memory (films, textbooks, television shows, etc.) (Valencia-García 2020). An important characteristic of Alt-Right history construction connected to Valencia-García's second feature, belief in a teleological history, is the desire to see the outcome of history solely as the product of intentions, instead of a contingent process with unintended outcomes, driven by colliding interests, in which one party blocks what the other party wants and vice versa, resulting in something that no-one had wanted in advance.

This special relationship with facts and conspiracy theories suffuses Alt-Right discourse more generally. Alt-Right supporters often question the validity of facts. They seem to have adopted a post-factual attitude according to which facts in general have no value.

Valencia-García argues that for people like Richard Spencer, history can be entirely invented as long as it legitimises the greater truth of their ideologies. As an example, he mentions the fact that in 2016, Richard Spencer began advocating the peaceful creation of a white 'homeland for all Europeans from around the world'. Thereby, Spencer often referred to the drawing of new national boundaries after the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 as a successful example of 'peaceful ethnic cleansing'. In reality, displacing populations was never a goal of the Paris Peace Conference and the creation of new 'nation states' was neither peaceful, nor successful. 'In effect', Valencia-García concludes, 'Spencer used a decontextualised historical occurrence to legitimate a potential future – creating a distorted, alternative version of history that attempted to legitimate a violent process hidden behind a *peace* conference' (Valencia-García 2020, 8 and 9).

Speaking of the followers of Jordan Peterson, Valencia-García comes to a similar conclusion. Valencia-García argues that they have a desire to reject the complexities that are attached to postmodernism for an imagined simpler world of the past.

People fear everything is subjective—that facts are moulded to benefit bottom lines and political expediency—which is not untrue. This does leave the common person asking if everyone has an interpretation and whether all interpretations are equal. The expert thus loses credibility—replaced with internet conspiracy theories. (Valencia-García 2020, 9 and 10)

Despite the Alt-Right's rather cynical view of historical facts, many researchers do assume that to a large extent, it genuinely views recent history as a conspiracy of manipulating powers as well as the desire to generate a national rebirth by restoring an idealised past. Many supporters of the Alt-Right put in a lot of effort to support their arguments with unsystematic and selective pseudohistory. The political scientist Sebastian Schindler rightly argues that truth is not just simply being relativised, 'but [the Alt-Right] also naturalizes the belief in specific "facts", notably the belief that "conspiracies are behind it all"' (Schindler 2020, 1). So, the Alt-Right movement seems to have adopted and embraced the postmodern infinitude of interpretations, but only on the level of the interpretation of historical events, not on the level of higher truths about society.

## The Alt-Right and EU history

In left-wing Eurosceptic narratives about the European Union, the EU is portrayed as a right-wing tool of big business. In some right-wing Eurosceptic narratives, the EU smothers national traditions in



leftist cultural relativism and political correctness. In others, it smothers business with socialistic bureaucracy and regulation (De Bruin 2014). The counternarrative of the Alt-Right disrupts this standard left-right dichotomy of narratives. Supporters of the Alt-Right interpret European integration as the result of the machinations of cultural Marxist, cosmopolitan elites who impose their will on the people, like the members of the annual Bilderberg Conference or the members of the somewhat similar annual Davos Conference.

Many conspiracy theorists linked to the Alt-Right movement interpret European integration as a catalyst of processes of neoliberal globalisation, considering it a cultural and socio-economic threat to national sovereignty and democracy. They give this rather traditional left-wing narrative a twist by accusing 'cosmopolitan elites' of, for example, secretly orchestrating economic crises for political purposes. The EU and its predecessors, like the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC), are depicted as instruments in the hand of sinister global elites. The antagonism between liberal capitalism and heavily criticised left-wing politicians is interpreted as a false antagonism invented by cosmopolitan elites to 'divide and rule', in more or less the same manner as the Nazis regarded global-free trade and communism as part of the same Jewish conspiracy for world domination (Herf 2006, 98). One of their main objections against the alleged 'cultural Marxist' EU is that it would try to flood the internal market with cheap labour; an idea that, in fact, is fundamental to the Marxist critique of capitalism that it always ensures that there is an oversupply of labour in order to keep the wages low. Despite the fact that the Alt-Right accuses the cosmopolitan elites of being cultural Marxists, its own narrative is reminiscent of Marxist theory.

A prominent target in transnational conspiracy theories about the EU is the Bilderberg Group. The Bilderberg Conferences started in 1954 as informal meetings of Western European and North American non-communist politicians, business leaders and trade union officials. They were called together with the purpose of removing sources of friction between the United States of America and its Western European military allies in the Cold War against global communism (Gijswijt 2018). The initiative for the conference was taken by the Polish politician-in-exile Joseph Retinger, a prominent member of the *Mouvement Européen* who also had been the driving force behind the organisation of the European Congress in The Hague in May 1949 (Pieczewski 2010). The group still organises annual meetings.

Alt-Right supporters often accuse this Bilderberg Group of trying to form a secret world government, made up of the leaders of banks and multi-national corporations, by using international and supranational organisations such as the EU. Many Alt-Right propagandists have accused this Bilderberg Group of trying to impose a planned economy across the globe (Dagelijkse Standaard 2013). However, in fact, the very first question that was raised at the very first Bilderberg Conference of 1954 was how to guard against the developing system of social security in western countries that eventually would destroy free enterprise. The accusation that the Bilderberg Group itself tried to impose a planned economy is based on blatant misinformation. The same applies to the accusation that the Bilderberg Conference should be regarded as a secret world government (Gijswijt 2018).

According to the Alt-Right's view of European unification, these same political elites in Europe have had a secret 'cultural Marxist' agenda for decades. Just as the classical Marxists of the past wanted to expropriate the property of the bourgeoisie and hand it to the state, the Alt-Right story has it, now cultural Marxists are trying to gain control of the organs of culture (education, newspapers, magazines, the electronic media, music, the visual arts and so on) in order to expropriate the rights of white men and give special privileges to feminists, ethnic minorities and homosexuals (Moyn 2018; Mirrlees 2018).

A second element that the Alt-Right has added to the narrative of conspiring elites is the idea of multiculturalism as an 'indigenous suicide', as the Alt-Right supporter 'John V.' called it in a manifesto that was published on Academia.edu, the platform for academics ('John V' n.d.). Many Alt-Right followers argue that mass immigration to 'Europe', the subsequent multi-racial integration and 'gender neutralism', which according to them leads to lower birth-rates, are being promoted in predominantly

'white' countries. This is intended to replace the strong, politically conscious populations of these countries with passive subjects that could be manipulated into submission (Moses 2019).

According to the Alt-Right movement, members of today's political elites in Europe, for example, Federica Mogherini, the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, are encouraging and welcoming an 'invasion' of 'refugees' and 'migrants' from Africa and the Middle East in order to cause this demographic decline of the 'native' European population (Liddell 2017). They identify the EU with the optimistic statement of the German chancellor Angela Merkel in August 2015 that 'we can do this!', about the German ability to host large groups of refugees. They never mention or refer to the activities of the European border and coast guard agency Frontex, often far beyond the European boundaries, to prevent migration from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.

Many supporters of the Alt-Right see the alleged conspiracy for a 'white genocide' as the spiritual successor of what they call the 'Kalergi Plan' ('Dr. Eowyn' 2015), an invention of the neo-Nazi Austrian poet Gerd Honsik. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, who developed a plan for a pan-European Union in the 1920s, and many other 'founding fathers' of today's EU are depicted on Alt-Right websites and social media as willing instruments in the hands of globalist elites, often equated with 'global Jewry', who want to cause the extermination of the 'white race'.

It is striking that many of today's memes under the umbrella of 'cultural Marxism' unintentionally and unconsciously attribute imagined conspiracies retroactively to conservative or even reactionary organisations, groups and individuals of the past. Judging from recent publications by historians such as Quinn Slobodian and Marco Duranti many right-wing European founding fathers basically had the same core beliefs as the Alt-Right supporters (Duranti 2017; Slobodian 2019). Duranti has, for example, argued in a critical book reinterpreting the origins of the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) of 1950 that many of those founding fathers, who identified themselves as conservative, were primarily motivated by a desire to protect their citizens against either French state policies of *laïcité*, the strict separation between politics and religion, or anti-private property measures taken by the post-war Labour government (Duranti 2017). These politicians actually pushed for reform in order to preserve: preserve the market economy, preserve European colonial domination, preserve Christianity, preserve family values, preserve the rural areas, etc. At first sight, many of these 'conservative reformers' could therefore be regarded as kindred spirits to the sympathisers of the Alt-Right movement who long for the imagined simpler world of the past.

The architect of the 'Kalergi Plan' that Alt-Right supporters see as the original blueprint for the extermination of the white race, the Austro-Japanese Coudenhove-Kalergi, is probably the best example of such a conservative European founding father. In 1923, Coudenhove-Kalergi, a fervent anti-communist, published his famous book *Pan-Europa*, which contained a plan for the political and economic unification of Europe. This plan was a response to the processes of economic globalisation. In Coudenhove-Kalergi's eyes the European continent, together with its overseas colonies, would have to form one large economic entity in order to protect the Pan-European agriculture and industry from cheap imported products. This European economic unity would lead to rationalisation, increased production and lower prices, leading to greater prosperity for all. The 'class struggle' would be prevented by European unity, and as a result communism would lose its appeal. The reformist nature of his plan for a Pan-Europe went hand-in-hand with the maintenance of 'white' European colonial dominance around the globe. He advocated a unification of Europe and Africa ('Eurafrica') in which Europe would be 'Eurafrica's head' and Africa 'its body'. The benefits of a joint exploitation of Africa would make the European continent's leaders realise the necessity of European integration, Coudenhove-Kalergi argued (Hansen and Jonsson 2014, 18 and 38).

Coudenhove-Kalergi was a staunch supporter of European global dominance and his call for a European rebirth also shows a strong similarity with the aims of the Alt-Right. In *Pan-Europa*, he wrote that Europe's culture was 'die Kultur der weißen Rasse' ('the culture of the white race'), which was a product of Antiquity and Christianity. As a result of migration within Europe, all the people of

Europe were 'Mischvölker' ('people of mixed ethnic background'), he argued (Coudenhove-Kalergi [1923] 1982, 34 and 135). In fact, there was one white European race.

However, as the son of a Japanese mother and an Austro-Hungarian father, and being married to a Jewish Austrian wife, Coudenhove-Kalergi was certainly not a traditional white supremacist. Coudenhove-Kalergi thought that 'Jewish blood' should form an important ingredient in the to-be-created European 'mixed race' (Ziegerhofer-Pretenthaler 2004). In his 1925 book *Praktischer Idealismus*, he wrote that racial groups, like the Jews, and social classes would gradually disappear in the future. An 'eurasisch-negroide Zukunftsrasse' ('Eurasian-Negroid future race') would replace the existing races. 'Die Rassen und Klassen im heutigen Sinne werden verschwinden', he concluded, but 'die Persönlichkeiten bleiben' ('Race and class in today's understanding will disappear, but the personalities will remain') (Coudenhove-Kalergi 1925, 23 and 55). A few years later, he changed his views and argued that the white race should stand united in case of conflict with the black race (Coudenhove-Kalergi 1929, 1; Richard 2010). Internal divisions would weaken the European race 'in the face of the real racial opposition between Whites and Blacks' (Coudenhove-Kalergi 1937, 199; transl. Richard 2010).

Today, representatives of the Alt-Right movement mix up these phrases about these various expectations for the future in an attempt to prove that Coudenhove-Kalergi, as a tool in the hands of Jewish puppet masters, had developed a plan for a large-scale blending of people from Europe with people from Africa. Endless references to this alleged 'Kalergi Plan' can be found online, from the Greek neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn to the discussion boards of quality newspapers. In 2017 even a former member of the Dutch Lower House for the Conservative Liberal VVD, who now is an adviser to Thierry Baudet's FvD, said on Twitter that the European political response to the refugee crisis was apparently meant to bring the aims of this 'Kalergi Plan' to fruition (Klei 2017). Even those with no sympathy for white supremacists continuously repeat this same meme. The Reddit.com board (or subreddit) for people of mixed ethnic, partly Asian heritage held discussions of Coudenhove-Kalergi in 2017, because 4chan's '/pol/' board had portrayed the 'mastermind behind the destruction of the white race' as a 'disgruntled WMAF [child of a white male and an Asian female] Eurasian male seeking revenge'.

One of the subreddit contributors noted correctly that Coudenhove-Kalergi was 'the only non-Jew to be mentioned literally thousands of times on /pol/ ["4chan"] as the dark force behind white genocide'. Another contributor concluded on Reddit that 'the readers of the [Alt-Right website] Daily Stormer were quite disturbed that a Half Germanic, Half Samurai would do something like this to the white race'. A third person concluded that the 'jews [sic] will often use good goys [like Coudenhove-Kalergi] to carry out their plan, thus masking their actions and avoiding reciprocity'.

One question that remains puzzling is why the Alt-Right movement is so obsessed with Coudenhove-Kalergi – despite the fact that he could, to some extent, be regarded as a kindred spirit to the sympathisers of the Alt-Right movement (Van Der Horst 2017). Why do they focus on conservative figures like Coudenhove-Kalergi rather than left-wing advocates of European federalism such as the Italian Altiero Spinelli? An answer could be found in a fully internalised, fundamental conviction that the nation state belongs to the natural order of things, and is threatened by the process of European integration. They might feel betrayed by an influential person who was both a conservative and an advocate of European union. His being of 'mixed race' might be an aggravating circumstance.

## Adaptation for political use

Inspired by the ideas and the methods of the Alt-Right, Baudet has invested a lot of energy in the construction of an alternative history of the EU that would be acceptable to a larger audience, as an instrument for the dissemination of his higher truths. These efforts go back to the late 2000s, when he worked as an academic and a public intellectual. In his PhD dissertation in law from 2012, *The Significance of Borders*, co-supervised by the late British conservative philosopher Roger Scruton, he

developed the idea that Nazi racism was a form of imperialistic universalism, as was European integration, and had little to do with nationalism (Baudet 2012a, 196 and 197). As a politician, he repeated this indictment against the EU in the Dutch parliament in February 2020 by saying that it was the result of a false interpretation of the Second World War. The Second World War was not caused by nationalism, he argued, since nationalism, according to him, was inherently peaceful. Fascism and National Socialism should be regarded as anti-national or post-national imperialistic ideologies, just like the EU<sup>1</sup>. In doing so, Europe's dark past is being othered, but today's EU is connected to that other past, or is presented as a remnant of this other past. As a result, a counternarrative about the EU is invented that is based on exactly the same foundational past as the prevailing narrative of the EU as a peace project, for which it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012: the horrors of the Second World War (Manners and Murray 2016). Baudet's political friend the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, who also supports the Alt-Right's crusade against 'cultural Marxism', made use of the same principle when he stated in 2018 that national socialism, fascism and communism all chased imperial, supranational dreams, and that today in Brussels 'new imperial marches' are being played again by the European empire (Orbán 2018a, 2018b).

Baudet's *The Significance of Borders* can be interpreted as an attempt to systemise 'alternative facts' about the EU in a more or less coherent narrative to create an 'ideologically coherent world view' (Kleinpaste 2018). It defends the argument that true representative government and the rule of law can exist only within the framework of a nation state. Therefore, supranational institutions, like the European Court of Human Rights, the EU and other institutions, gradually undermine the nation state and replace democracy with bureaucratic totalitarianism. The EU is gradually and stealthily assuming the responsibilities of statehood, which according to Baudet proves the untenability for the member states of the idea of supranationalism (Baudet 2012a, 155). He sees Ernst B. Haas' superseded theory of neofunctionalism from the late 1950s, in which European supranational cooperation in relatively undisputed fields will in the end lead to political integration as a result of 'spillover processes' (Haas 1958), as central to the strategy of the European 'supranationalists', which he rejects (Baudet 2012a, 153).

*The Significance of Borders* interprets supranational European union as an attempt to dismantle the nation states from above that is accompanied by the multicultural ideology of mainstream opinion-makers in EU member states, undermining 'the territorial jurisdiction and the shared national culture of the nation state' from below (Baudet 2012a, XV). Baudet remains unclear whether European integration should be regarded as a conspiracy in his PhD thesis, but in his accompanying journalistic publications he speaks of the EU as the result of a gigantic plot of the political elites against the will of the people (Baudet 2012b, 2012c). Apart from John Laughland's *Undemocratic Origins of the European Union*, about the alleged shared hatred of both European federalists and Nazis towards the nation state (Laughland 1997), Baudet hardly gives any attention to the historiography of European integration. He ignores work that contradicts his argument, such as Alan Milward's famous thesis from the 1990s, which interprets European integration as 'the creation of the European nation-states themselves for their own purposes' (Milward 1992, 18).

The alleged connection between European integration and migration from sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab countries that eventually would lead to an 'Eurabia' (Bat Ye'or 2005) became Baudet's main focus after starting a career as a politician in 2016. In 2017, he claimed that Dutch society was being 'diluted homeopathically' by an influx of migrants and that 'malicious, aggressive elements are being introduced in unheard numbers into our societal body'. He suggested that the EU was one of the causes of an 'autoimmune disease' of the West (Kleinpaste 2018). With this message FvD became the largest party in provincial elections in the Netherlands on 20 March 2019. The night after these elections, Baudet repeated his core message, denouncing 'uncontrolled migration' and 'the transfer of power to the European Union' (Kleinpaste 2019). His main ammunition to 'unveil' the EU as an organisation that promotes multiculturalism and the weakening of 'traditional' European identities is a quote from the former German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who according to Baudet 'literally' said in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) that 'if Europeans wouldn't

mix [with people from other parts of the world], they would fall prey to incest'<sup>1</sup>. Though the centre-right Christian Democrat Schäuble (not an EU official, but a federal German politician) indeed said that Europe could not isolate itself (not in an interview with FAZ, but with *Die Zeit*), he certainly didn't make a plea for uncontrolled migration (Schäuble 2016).

Some Dutch MPs strongly criticised Baudet for 'whitewashing' [sic] racist conspiracy theories<sup>1</sup>. The effects of these conspiracy theories, such as the legitimisation of possible violent behaviour of far-right supporters, are taken seriously by the Dutch authorities. Nevertheless, many people still consider Baudet's remarks as relatively innocent *flirtations* with the racist far-right, not as the real thing. The same applies to Geert Wilders' PVV's members of the Second and the First Chamber, who have started using the words 'omvolking' and 'omvolkingspact' ('replacement pact') in parliamentary debates on the EU Migration Pact in October and November 2020. 'Omvolking', a Dutch translation of the German word 'Umvolkung' (changing the demographic composition of a population), was the Nazi word to describe the process of ethnic Germanification of the occupied territories during the Second World War, but it's now being used for accusations against the EU of promoting replacement migration to Europe with its aging population.

Baudet's initial success as a politician cannot just be attributed to the effectiveness of his edgy Alt-Right style of politics. His political opponents are hesitant to draw the conclusion that his controversial statements are more than just flirtations, because ever since the murder of populist anti-immigration politician Pim Fortuyn by a left-wing animal rights activist in 2002 they have been extremely anxious, for good reason, of being accused of 'demonising' politicians with an anti-immigration agenda. Subsequently, the Alt-Right counternarrative to the EU is step by step being normalised for a more mainstream audience. This normalisation process can, for example, be identified in the increasing number of opinion articles by journalists (Karskens 2017) and books by academic researchers (Emmer 2017) that blame the EU for not closing the European borders for refugees, thereby encouraging migrants from Africa to risk their lives trying to reach Europe.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how narratives cross between the Alt-Right movement and other radical right movements and parties in the US and Europe. The movements and parties that can be counted among the Alt-Right utilise the same themes and share a narrative style of conspiracy theorising and manipulating facts for political ends. The Alt-Right is an important vehicle for popularising controversial far-right ideas.

This article has shown that the Alt-Right builds on a more generally shared interpretation of European integration as the result of the machinations of 'cosmopolitan' elites in its counternarrative to the EU. The Alt-Right incorporates two new elements in this narrative. It claims that 'neoliberalism' and 'cultural Marxism' should be seen as two sides of the same coin, in order to make the point that the European integration process is part of a plan to replace the 'honest capitalism' of small entrepreneurs with 'serfdom' by managing globalisation in favour of 'corporate capitalism', as well as by 'infecting' societies and their traditional values with an ideology of social justice and diversity (Lux and Jordan 2019, 159). Many Alt-Right followers argue that mass immigration to 'Europe', the subsequent multi-racial integration and 'gender neutralism', which according to them leads to lower birth-rates, are part of a plan to replace the strong, self-conscious populations of predominantly 'white' countries with passive subjects that would be manipulated into submission. In doing so, the European integration process is connected to the movement's core issue of an alleged conspiracy by sinister elites for a 'white genocide', the supposed attempt to partly replace and 'blend' the predominantly white population of Europe with migrants. Many Alt-Right followers argue that this conspiracy can be traced back to Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's plan for a Paneurope (1923).

By focusing on Thierry Baudet as a narrative entrepreneur, this article has shown how the preoccupations of the Alt-Right provide a more-or-less coherent counternarrative to European integration that is acceptable to a larger audience. The alternative universe of the Alt-Right, made



possible only by the willingness of its followers to believe in easily disprovable falsehoods, is said to primarily serve to build a ‘community with closure’ (Wasilewski 2019). Although only a specific group of people, who do not care that their historical claims are evidently false, are willing and able to believe the Alt-Right’s narrative about European integration in its entirety, aspects of this narrative seem to affect more moderate and mainstream Eurosceptic narratives. Agents of the Alt-Right agenda like Thierry Baudet often refer to this narrative in an indirect manner to a larger audience. Consequently, the Alt-Right counternarrative to European integration is currently – step by step – being normalised for a more mainstream audience.

## Notes

1. Plenary debate Dutch Second Chamber, February 18, 2020. accessed May 24, 2021. <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20192020-55-34.html>
2. Parliamentary motion Baudet in Dutch Second Chamber, November 11, 2020. accessed May 24, 2021. <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-32317-650.html>

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