

**EGPP Annual Conference**

# **Resisting autocracy: actors, challenges, and tools for democratic resilience**

**27 and 28 March 2025**

Sala Europa - Villa Schifanoia, Via Boccaccio 121 - Florence

**Veronica Anghel** | European University Institute

**Lorenzo Cicchi** | European University Institute

**Erik Jones** | European University Institute

## **Introduction**

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Reports and indicators confirm that we are witnessing a steady rise in autocratisation, reversing the democratic gains of past decades. The expectation of a global liberal democratic order has given way to a new reality in which authoritarianism is not only resurging but also embedding itself within democracies. Populist leaders increasingly employ autocratic tactics, eroding institutions from within, while digital tools and transnational networks enable authoritarian consolidation on an unprecedented scale. The ongoing invasion of Ukraine, a democratic European country, by an authoritarian regime is just one symptom of this broader transformation.

This international conference brings together scholars, civil society actors and experts to examine the workings of autocracy in the 21st century. How do authoritarian regimes sustain their grip on power, and why does autocratic governance continue to gain traction within established democracies? What role do social, psychological, and historical factors play in these trends? Crucially, we aim to shift the focus from the problem to the response: how can democracies resist and counteract these tendencies effectively?

Panels will explore a range of critical themes, including digital authoritarianism, the interplay between autocracy and gender equality, and the role of media literacy in resisting autocratic narratives. Discussions will also address the tools available to democratic actors—governments, civil society organisations, media, and citizens—to counter autocratic reforms without resorting to anti-democratic measures themselves. Additionally, the conference will investigate how science skepticism and distrust in democratic institutions fuel the autocratic appeal.

## Programme

### 27 March

13.45 - 14.00 Arrival

14.00 - 14.15 Opening remarks

14.15 - 16.00 Panel I – State capacity, institutional capture, and democratic fragility

Chair: **Lorenzo Cicchi**, European University Institute

**Nicholas Cheeseman** and **Licia Cianetti**, University of Birmingham | *The state-as-context in an era of democratic decline: how capacity shapes pathways of autocratization*

**Erik Jones** and **Veronica Anghel**, European University Institute | *How to anticipate democratic failure: the lessons of democracy bubbles in Eastern Europe*

**Aleksandra Krstić**, University of Belgrade | *Captured institutions, government's pressure, rigged elections and the silence of the EU. The case of Serbia*

**Paweł Marczewski**, Batory Foundation | *Polish counter-democracy: long-term results of civic mobilisations 2015-2023*

16.00 - 16.30 Coffee break

16.30 - 18.15 Panel II – Countering autocratization: opposition, resilience, and external influence

Chair: **Veronica Anghel**, European University Institute

**Luca Tomini**, Université Libre de Bruxelles | *Theorizing the oppositional Turn: three existential arenas of contesting autocratization*

**Richard Young** and **Elena Panchulidze**, Carnegie Europe | *Democratic resilience in Europe – and its limits*

**Stefano Bottoni**, University of Florence | *The resistible rise of authoritarianism in Orbán's Hungary: geopolitical contingencies and historical legacies*

**Tiziana Corda** and **Andrea Cassani**, Università di Milano | *Countering autocratization from the outside: evidence from Africa*

18.15 - 19.15 Keynote speech

**Giovanni Capoccia**, University of Oxford | *Countering illiberalism in liberal democracies: actors, strategies, temporalities*

20.00 Dinner – Sala Bandiere

## 28 March

09.15 - 09.30 Arrival

09.30 - 11.00 Panel III – Media, manipulation, and democratic resilience

Chair: **Erik Jones**, European University Institute

**Iva Nenadic**, European University Institute | *Democratic implications of the growing role of online platforms in the contemporary media landscape*

**Kris Rujgrok** and **Conny Roggeband**, University of Amsterdam | *Influence operations 2.0 as an authoritarian innovation: evidence of the evolution of social media manipulation from south East Asia.*

**Maria Zuffova**, European University Institute | *The Hostile politics effect: how politicians' attacks on the media shape public trust*

11.00 - 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 - 13.15 Panel IV – Citizens, movements, and democratic backsliding

Chair: **Licia Cianetti**, University of Birmingham

**Manuela Caiani** and **Batuhan Eren**, Scuola Normale Superiore | *Democratic regression across borders: the transnationalization of far right political parties and social movements*

**Jelena Dzankic**, European University Institute | *Citizenship and the democratic struggles in Montenegro and Serbia*

**Lisa Janssen**, University of Ghent | *When they go low, we kick them": the reciprocal nature of citizens' support for democratic transgressions*

**Jozef Michal Mintal** and **Kamila Borsekova**, Matej Bel University | *Gender fatigue? Framing and counter-framing gender in the struggle for equality*

13.15 - 13.30 Concluding remarks

13.30 - 14.30 Farewell Lunch – Sala Bandiere

## **Speakers**

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<b>Veronica Anghel</b>	European University Institute
<b>Stefano Bottoni</b>	University of Florence
<b>Kamila Boursekova</b>	Matej Bel University
<b>Giovanni Capoccia</b>	University of Oxford
<b>Andrea Cassani</b>	Università di Milano
<b>Nic Cheeseman</b>	University of Birmingham
<b>Licia Cianetti</b>	University of Birmingham
<b>Lorenzo Cicchi</b>	European University Institute
<b>Jelena Dzankic</b>	European University Institute
<b>Batuhan Eren</b>	Scuola Normale Superiore
<b>Luc Fransen</b>	University of Amsterdam
<b>Lisa Janssen</b>	University of Ghent
<b>Erik Jones</b>	European University Institute
<b>Aleksandra Krstic</b>	University of Belgrade
<b>Paweł Marczewski</b>	Batory Foundation
<b>Jozef Mintal</b>	Matej Bel University
<b>Iva Nenadic</b>	European University Institute
<b>Elena Panchulidze</b>	European Democracy Hub
<b>Conny Roggeband</b>	University of Amsterdam
<b>Kris Rujgrok</b>	University of Amsterdam
<b>Luca Tomini</b>	Université Libre de Bruxelles
<b>Richard Youngs</b>	Carnegie Europe
<b>Maria Zuffova</b>	European University Institute