

## Hungarian strongman Viktor Orban finds 'right' love

By Cathy Young

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Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban will address the Conservative Political Action Conference on Thursday in Dallas, Texas.

The Conservative Political Action Conference, the annual grand event of the American right, opens Thursday in Dallas, Texas, with a foreign visitor giving the keynote speech: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Orbán's appearance, part of a lineup that features such conservative stars as Donald Trump, talk show host Sean Hannity, and former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, would have been controversial at any time, given his reputation for authoritarian governance and rhetoric some have criticized as xenophobic. But now, it comes less than two weeks after Orbán gave a speech that one of his own advisers — who resigned in protest — characterized as a “Nazi diatribe.” Is this a new low for a conservative movement that has embraced Trump-style populism?

Orbán is not an authoritarian in the same sense as Russia's Vladimir Putin — though he has been openly Putin-friendly. Hungary has opposition parties and reasonably free elections, though Orbán's governing party has rejiggered election rules to make itself almost unbeatable. Newspapers critical of the government exist, but national television is in the hands of the state or of Orbán cronies.

Orbán has also used the power of the state against dissenters — particularly on the issue of immigration from Muslim countries, which Orbán has depicted as a menace. He has made it a crime to “promote and support illegal migration,” allowing the government to target refugee advocacy groups.

He has shut down the Hungarian office of the Open Society Foundation, whose founder and head, Hungarian-born billionaire philanthropist George Soros, is Orbán's boogeyman of choice. His rhetoric demonizing Soros, who is Jewish, has been widely criticized as having anti-Semitic undertones. Orbán has also forced the Soros-sponsored Central European University to shut down its Budapest campus. In another attack on academic freedom, he has had gender studies banned from Hungarian universities.

Orbán's speech at a conference in Romania on July 23 strikes some familiar anti-migration themes — but with startling language that openly embraced “Great Replacement” rhetoric and denounced the “mixed-race world” of liberal Western countries. He declared that Hungarians do not want to be “a mixed-race society.” He also recommended as “outstanding” the 1973 novel “The Camp of the Saints” by French writer Jean Raspail, an unabashedly racist tract — beloved by white nationalists — that shows a liberalism-addled Europe surrendering to hordes of dark-skinned, filthy, sexually insatiable Third World refugees. This all-but-overtly white nationalist tirade has been denounced not only by European public figures across the political spectrum but by Jewish leaders, including Hungary's chief rabbi Robert Frolich.

Yet American conservatives who have touted Orbán as a visionary have either ignored or defended his speech. Rod Dreher, an editor and blogger at The American Conservative, deplors Orbán's unfortunate wording but asserts that by “race,” he really meant the mixing of European and Islamic cultures. In fact, Orbán explicitly referred to the mixing of “European and non-European peoples.”

The Orbán lovefest, like Trump worship, points to the right's embrace of strongmen willing to govern as bullies and spurn liberal decorum — including taboos on racism and other bigotries. Many conservatives believe Western culture has been so thoroughly captured by the left that the only way to push back is to use state power to curb liberals and enforce conservative values such as religion and gender traditionalism. Now that Orbán has made it fairly clear that those values include racial and ethnic exclusivity, his conservative fans are showing their own authoritarian colors by sticking with him.

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