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**BIPR Webinar: Racism and Discrimination in Europe as Tools to Increase Distrust,
Undermine Democracy, and Threaten Liberal and Internationalist Governance**

The Bologna Institute for Policy Research (BIPR) hosted a webinar on the security threat in Europe posed by racism and discrimination. Mr. Alfiaz Vaiya, Coordinator at the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup, focuses beyond the discourse on morality to analyze how racism and discrimination are becoming tools for security threats. The European Union (EU) member states, political parties, and countries outside of the EU have used fear to obtain political power and achieve their policy aims. COVID-19 will only exacerbate extremism and polarization unless the EU is able to adopt a clear and inclusive narrative.

The EU is often a target of populist rhetoric because it regularly advocates for multilateralism, human rights, and a democratic rule of law. Yet several EU members are moving away from these principles. Euro-skeptics seek to seize power from the EU, preventing the EU from combating anti-democratic reforms. Additionally, euro-skeptics aim to undermine EU soft and normative power limiting the EU's ability to influence global politics, making it increasingly irrelevant internationally. Therefore, Vaiya claims racism and discrimination as political weapons to undermine democracy should be considered through a security lens. Xenophobia and racism fosters polarization and distrust within societies while populist parties are fully aligned on key issues such as migration, anti-Islam rhetoric and sexual orientation, enabling populists and euro-skeptics to win elections. In Poland, the Law and Justice Party targeted minority groups to achieve political power to further their own political objectives. Moreover, these political parties often cooperate with countries outside the EU, like Russia, to produce propaganda and disinformation on divisive issues. The actions threaten the EU when they undermine democracy by creating disenfranchisement and public distrust.

As discrimination and racism constitute security threats for Europe, the EU must offer policies that can combat these fears not only in terms of morality, but to mitigate these security concerns. Populism limits the ability of the EU to act decreasing its influence in both Europe and in its foreign policy goals. The center left and center right have proved to be more reactive rather than proactive in setting its agenda. The EU should become more aggressive in combating extremist parties by offering its own strong narrative. Vaiya argues, to effectively resist the discriminatory discourse, the EU must offer a unique wide-reaching message that creates a positive vision for moderates. COVID-19 has most recently tested the EU. However, Vaiya claims the EU response has been weak. Without strong economic support, the EU public will likely continue to align with extremist parties that offer economic and social benefits. The EU must promote policies that bring an equivalent level of social and economic benefits as well as promote a fact-based inclusive narrative to reach emotions. Otherwise, the political repercussions after the pandemic will pose a dangerous threat to the EU institution.