

How Europe’s ‘Identitarians’ a

Martin Sellner, leader of the Identitarian movement in Austria, has reportedly admitted more extensive email contact with Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant



Identitarian Movement leader Martin Sellner



ANNE APPLEBAUM

Was it an invitation to cocktails or the start of a far-right conspiracy? In Europe, these days, it can be hard to tell. But this week Austrian media are reporting that the links between Martin Sellner and Brenton Tarrant were rather more extensive. Sellner is the clean-cut leader of the Austrian Identitarian Movement; Tarrant is the man charged with shooting up two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The two exchanged emails in 2018 after Tarrant made a donation to the Identitarians; Sellner sent Tarrant a link to his YouTube page and invited him for a beer in Vienna. Tarrant booked a hotel in Vienna, though we don’t know if he got there.

Why does it matter? Because Sellner represents a curious phenomenon in European politics: the far-right middleman. Unlike the neo-Nazis of old, the Identitarians don’t wear jackboots, don’t shave their heads, don’t lurk in the shadows. They have slick websites, professional videos and formal organizations in several European countries, including Britain, France and Germany, as well as Austria. They attract attention with “happenings” — interrupting a play performed by refugees and pouring fake blood on the stage — rather than just marching and shouting. They claim they aren’t racists, that they respect all cultures — and insist that they just want to preserve their



Pakistan traders burn a poster with the image of Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch (file photo)

own. Quietly, they maintain links with extremists like Tarrant while also socializing with the now-mainstream politicians of the “far-right” Austrian Freedom Party, which is a part of the current Austrian ruling coalition. And, in practice, they are steadily pushing racist, conspiratorial thinking from the fringes of the Internet into the political mainstream — and not just in Austria.

Of course they deny that this is what they are doing. In a video he made in English — the Identitarians are keen to be in touch with their white-supremacist American counterparts — Sellner describes himself as a “patriot,” shows off the lovely

Austrian countryside and free speech and . . . Everyone else denies they are doing, too. Strache, the Freedom Party vice chancellor, has just been elected to stop the circulation of Identitarian propaganda. Strache has just been elected to stop the circulation of Identitarian propaganda. Strache has just been elected to stop the circulation of Identitarian propaganda.

It’s not too late to bridge the divides in Sri Lanka — but it won’t be easy

The virulent Buddhist nationalism that has fuelled anti-Muslim attacks not only in recent days but also in the months preceding the Easter Sunday attacks, is a clear and present danger



Heavily-armed Sri Lankan soldiers (L) ride a motorcycle near the Jumha Mosque after a mob attack



ANNE APPLEBAUM

In the days since terrorists carried out attacks on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, a series of violent reprisal attacks have targeted the country’s Muslim community. The assaults intensified during the week of May 13, when marauding mobs torched Muslim homes, businesses and places of worship, compelling the Sri Lankan authorities to order a nationwide curfew.

These attacks are alarming not only because of their intensity, but because they threaten to aggravate the societal divides in Sri Lanka that helped fuel a brutal, 26-year civil war that ended a decade ago.

The schisms during that conflict were different than those playing out today. During the civil war, militants representing the Tamil ethnic minority fought against the ethnic Sinhalese-dominated state for the right to a separate homeland. Today, the tensions are religious in nature, between Sri Lanka’s majority Buddhists, who have staged the violent reprisals, and the Muslim minority. But the broader issues of communal tensions and violence remain the same.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what Daesh, the sectarian-minded terror group that claimed responsibility for the Easter massacre, wants to achieve and exploit: Different

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