

US foreign policy

US government to fund Maga-aligned think-tanks and charities in Europe

State department grants to spread 'American values' are part of Washington's 250th anniversary celebrations



Senior state department official Sarah Rogers travelled to London, Paris, Rome and Milan last year as part of what was dubbed her 'freedom of speech tour' © US Senate

Anna Gross, Lucy Fisher, David Sheppard in London and **Amy Mackinnon** in Washington

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The US state department is set to fund Maga-aligned think-tanks and charities across Europe to disseminate Washington's policy positions and challenge perceived threats to free speech.

Senior state department official Sarah Rogers travelled to Europe in December to meet influential rightwing think-tanks and has spoken to key figures in Nigel Farage's populist Reform UK party about deploying a pot of money to spread American values, according to three people with knowledge of the matter.

The funding was linked to the 250th anniversary celebrations of US independence later this year, the people said.

It is likely to cause consternation among Washington's allies, particularly centre-left governments such as Labour in the UK, which will be concerned that US government funds are being deployed to undermine their policies.

A US official said the programme was a twist on previous state department projects that channelled funding towards specific causes overseas and was likely to focus on initiatives based in London, Paris, Berlin and Brussels.

The Trump administration has sought to drastically scale back US foreign assistance and cuts have fallen heavily on programmes to support good governance, human rights and democracy.

Rogers' efforts come as the White House has criticised long-standing allies in Europe.

The US national security strategy, released last year, called for "cultivating resistance" to the continent's current trajectory. The document warned that mass migration and "censorship of free speech" could lead to "civilisational erasure".

The Trump administration has interpreted efforts in Europe to regulate online content, including on major US social media networks, as an assault on free speech.

The US official said Rogers, who is under-secretary for public diplomacy, had associates across the European "free speech" community prior to entering government, many of whom had been eager to harness the resources and attention of the US administration under Trump.

The person added that she was targeting the UK's Online Safety Act and the EU's Digital Services Act.

While the laws are different in scope and content, the official said they were viewed by the Trump administration as “fundamentally American-targeted regulatory schemes” that sought to attack free speech, American industry and the independence of the tech sector.

“The US administration is on a crusade to save Europe,” said one senior Reform UK figure who spoke with Rogers about the plans. “They have a real soft spot for the UK but feel it is under threat from dark forces that are spreading across Europe.”

The UK government has defended the Online Safety Act as crucial for protecting children from harmful online material.

Another senior Reform figure said they had been told that Rogers “had a state department slush fund to get Maga-style things going in various places”, adding that she was keen to “fund European organisations to undermine government policies”.

A state department spokesperson described the funding as “a transparent, lawful use of resources to advance US interests and values abroad” but said the characterisation of it as a “slush fund” was “completely false”.

“Under-Secretary Rogers’s job is to support American aims. We’re not shy about that at all. Every grant is fully disclosed and accountable,” they said.

Both Reform figures said there was wariness within the populist party about being associated with any Maga initiatives in the UK, noting that the Trump administration was unpopular in Britain.

Only around 16 per cent of the British public have a favourable opinion of Trump, while 81 per cent view him unfavourably, according to a [YouGov tracker](#).

“There are political dangers for us from being too aligned with the US,” one of the Reform figures said.

Rogers has been one of the Trump administration's most outspoken critics of Europe and during her travels around the region has been clear about Washington's distaste for its online safety laws.

In December, she travelled to London, Paris, Rome and Milan as part of what was dubbed her "freedom of speech tour".

She wrote on X that she would be "highlighting American excellence as we kick off America250 with our closest allies", referring to celebrations to mark the 250th anniversary of US independence.

As part of her visit, Rogers gave a speech in London hosted by the rightwing Prosperity Institute think-tank, where she described the UK's Online Safety Act as "tyrannical and absurd", adding that it was part of a "tangle of laws [in Britain] that have these censorious effects".

"It is clear that the average Brit wants to be a free person, wants to live in a free country . . . the results that Reform UK is getting are proof positive that the British public is not content with this regime," she said, adding that she wanted to help the country win back its right to free speech.

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