The US anti-vax group
Children’s Health Defense’s expansion to Europe

Roman Adamczyk, External OSINT Investigator, EU DisinfoLab
Alexandre Alaphilippe, Executive Director, EU DisinfoLab

January 2023
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - The Children’s Health Defense’s efforts to develop its activities in Europe</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – The questions about the online impact of the Children’s Health Defense in Europe</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive summary

- This investigation analyses Robert Kennedy Jr’s movement Children’s Health Defense efforts to expand its activities in Europe.
- The Center for Countering Digital Hate identified Robert Kennedy Jr and his organisation as one of the 12 influencers playing a key role in spreading English-speaking anti-vax disinformation on Twitter and Facebook.
- In this piece, “anti-vax” will be used to qualify entities and people having a general hostility towards vaccination which goes beyond COVID-19 vaccination and is based on beliefs and claims which are not endorsed/approved by scientific public authorities. This can apply to online publications of unverified or distorted scientific results as well as false or distorted statements from public health institutions.
- Since August 2020, the US anti-vaccine group has significantly increased its presence in Europe, creating a legal structure in Belgium and organising events to spread its narratives all over the continent.
- These events also helped the Children’s Health Defense Europe build strong relationships with like-minded anti-vax activists, creating a de facto network of organisations and people collaborating, sometimes not transparently, to disseminate anti-vaccine ideas in Europe.
- Brussels has been central to the Children’s Health Defense Europe’s new activities. For example, the group has developed its lobbying efforts targeting the European Parliament, building up relationships with specific MEPs without being registered in the EU transparency register at the time of our study. It also organised two press conferences at the Brussels Press Club.
- Social media platforms’ efforts to limit the reach of Children’s Health Defense have been limited at best so far, especially in Europe, and the EU remains vulnerable to the influence activities of many questionable actors like US anti-vaxxers.
- It raises an important question: What can be done to limit the opportunities to manipulate public discussions around vaccines in the EU?
Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, one striking phenomenon for any European disinformation analyst has been to witness how content and narratives produced by US anti-vax communities have been able to reach extremely rapidly fringe European information ecosystems. There are multiple factors to explain this trend, and some of this traffic was simply organic. However, it also reflects, to some extent, efforts from US anti-vax leading organisations and actors to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a springboard to expand their activities, spread their disinformative narratives, and find new allies in Europe and other parts of the world. The Children’s Health Defense has been at the forefront of the US anti-vax community’s attempt to gain a foothold in Europe.

I - The Children’s Health Defense’s efforts to develop its activities in Europe

A – The setting up of a legal entity in Belgium

The creation of a legal entity called “Children’s Health Defense Europe” (CHD Europe) constituted an important milestone for the expansion of the Children’s Health Defense’s activities in Europe. It was announced in August 2020 by Robert Kennedy Jr. during a press conference in Berlin, organized one day before one of the first major anti-COVID-19 restrictions demonstrations in the German capital.

This entity was registered in Belgium as an ASBL (non-profit organisation) on August 27th, 2020, initially counting five administrators based in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the USA, and presided by Belgian activist Senta Depuydt. Well connected with the international anti-vax movement, Senta Dupuydt participated in the promotion of the infamous anti-vax documentary “Vaxxed” in France in 2017, together with fellow British anti-vaxxer Andrew Wakefield. The Children’s Health Defense Europe’s board composition changed in April 2022. The new chair of the CHD Europe’s board is Catherine Austin Fitts, an American investment banker and a former member of the George H.W. Bush administration, who participated in many events involving the anti-vax organisation in Europe through her personal organisation called “Solari Inc”. Among the other main visible public figures of the organisation’s board, there is Orsolya Győrfy, who was presented as the new acting Executive director of CHD Europe until December 2022. According to CHD Europe’s website, she is “intensely” involved in a second organisation called “Doctors for COVID ethics”.

In addition to the creation of a legal entity, CHD Europe hired an Operations Specialist in August 2022, highlighting the US organisation’s desire to continue expanding its European activities. Moreover, a look at the agenda of some CHD Europe’s events shows that at least two people are considered as part of “CHD Europe Media”, suggesting a strategy from the group to reach a wider audience in Europe.
In addition to the creation of a legal entity, the Children’s Health Defense Europe developed its own website (https://childrenshealthdefense.eu/), as well as a presence on multiple platforms (Twitter, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube).

**B- The planning of events to spread anti-vax narratives in Europe**

While the most emblematic sign of the increasing presence of the CHD in Europe has been Robert Kennedy Jr’s participation in several demonstrations (Berlin in August 2020, Bern and Milan in November 2021), the organisation has also hosted, co-hosted, or covered multiple events in Europe since August 2020.

**i- Who is behind the International Alliance for Justice and Democracy?**

On May 28th, 2022, the “International Alliance for Justice and Democracy” hosted a press conference at the Geneva Press Club about how the alleged centralisation of power around the World Health Organisation would threaten democracy. Surprisingly, except for the communication around this event, we were not able to find any online traces suggesting that this organisation really exists. As shown by the screenshot below, a Google search for the exact name “International Alliance for Justice and Democracy” collects only 16 results, all of them linked to the press conference in Geneva.
Figure 3: Screenshot showing the limited number of results for a Google search using the exact expression “International Alliance for Justice and Democracy”

Digging deeper, we noticed that the only two contact points mentioned in an International Alliance for Justice and Democracy’s press release to promote this event were CHD Europe current acting executive director (Orsolya Györfy) and CHD Europe Operations Specialist (K.M.). The metadata for the PDF file including the press release also mentions Orsolya Györfy as the document’s author.

Figures 4 & 5: Screenshots of the “International Alliance for Justice and Democracy” press release in PDF available on the doctors4covidethics.org website and the metadata associated with the PDF document

Interestingly, while the event’s speakers list on the CHD Europe website mentions the participation of Mary Holland as “President of Children’s Health Defense USA”, it overlooks
that another speaker, Shabnam Palesa Mohamed, had just been named executive director of Children’s Health Defense Africa around the time of the event. The list also omits that Catherine Austin Fitts has been a very active member of the CHD Europe since July 2021 and was also appointed as a board member of the CHD Europe in April 2022, one month before this press conference.

Experts/Speakers Include:
- Philipp Kruse, Attorney – Kruse Law, Switzerland
- Catherine Austin Fitts – President of Solari, Inc, USA
- Mary Holland – President of Children’s Health Defense, USA
- Leslie Manookian – President/Founder, Attorney, Health Freedom Defense Fund, USA
- Helmut P. Krause, Attorney, Germany
- Dr. Georg Prichtl, Attorney, Austria
- Shabnam Palesa Mohamed, Afro-Asian Sovereignty Coalition, Africa
- Dipali Cijha, Attorney, India
- Diane Protat, Attorney, France
- John Titus, Attorney, USA

**Figure 6:** Speakers’ list for the Geneva press conference in an article published on the CHD Europe website

Finally, it is interesting to note that the event was directly promoted and live-streamed by CHD Europe, which also provided the two moderators for the press conference:

- Catherine Austin Fitts, who, as we have seen, is an active member and board member of Children’s Health Defense Europe.
- Polly Tommey, who is described as affiliated with CHD.TV, the anti-vax group online web TV, in the Children’s Health Defense’s own press release about the event.

According to our findings, it seems quite likely that the CHD Europe and some of its allies organised this press conference at the Geneva Press Club, and that the “International Alliance for Justice and Democracy” never had a legitimate existence beyond this event.

We reached out to CHD Europe on these matters and they did not reply to our questions.

**ii- The use of press clubs in Brussels and Geneva to legitimise CHD Europe’s anti-vax narratives**

To lend credibility to its narratives and disinformation, CHD Europe organised some of its events in places that usually host reliable actors and sources of information.

The same strategy used in the Geneva Press Club to depict the WHO’s proposal for a new Pandemic Preparedness Treaty as an “undemocratic global governance architecture” was repeated in Belgium with two conferences at the Brussels Press Club.

The first one occurred on January 23rd, 2022. This press conference was strategically planned the morning before an important anti-vaccine rally in Brussels. It gathered key members of the CHD team and multiple European figures opposed to COVID-19 vaccination and restrictions, such as Croatian MEP Ivan Sinčić, and controversial German lawyer Reiner Fullmich. The event was also used to launch a call for “a European moratorium on health restrictions”, which was covered by some Belgian mainstream media outlets. A CHD Europe’s publication announcing the press conference also included calls to join the demonstration during the
afternoon. The timing and place of such an event helped the US anti-vax movement gain visibility in Europe.

Figure 7: Screenshot of a press release announcing the CHD Europe press conference at the Brussels Press Club on January 23rd, 2022, which included a call to join the demonstration during the afternoon

On November 14th, 2022, Children’s Health Defense Europe organised a second press conference at the Brussels Press Club to launch its lobbying campaign #HandsOffOurChildren against the COVID-19 vaccination of children. Among the participants was Sucharit Bhakdi, the Thai-German microbiologist whose multiple allegations on the COVID-19 have been fact-checked and known for the co-creation of the anti-lockdown German party Die Basis. The event was also covered by the fringe Italian website ByoBlu.
Figure 8: Screenshot of a ByoBlu article including an interview of Sucharit Bhakdi after the CHD Europe press conference at the Brussels Press Club on November 14th, 2022

It is not the first time some questions have emerged around activities connected to the Brussels Press Club. In September 2021, a Politico investigation described the workings of a pay-to-play media called EU Reporter. In that case, this media offered the possibility to promote content on multiple digital websites, including the Press Club Brussels Europe’s one. In another article, Politico highlighted how some actors engaging in questionable lobbying practices and with professional connections to the former president of the Brussels Press Club got the opportunity to moderate multiple press conferences and events organised there. It raised questions about who can have access and how things are handled in a press club situated a few meters away from the EU Commission. Similarly, the Geneva Press Club hosted an event in 2017 about the alleged Syrian White Helmets’ true agenda, where several panellists amplified Russian conspiracy theories.

From Russian propaganda to anti-vax narratives, these examples show that these press clubs in Europe, which are expected to be strategic places for sharing authentic information, have been hijacked by malicious actors to spread and legitimise their disinformation narratives.

We reached out to Brussels and Geneva Press Clubs to know more about their policies against providing a platform to disinformation. The Brussels Press Club said their “conditions for accepting these events are 1) that they are open to journalists to ensure public scrutiny and 2) [that they] do not engage in the promotion of hate speech, discrimination, violence and other activities which break Belgian law.”

Regarding CHD Europe’s press conferences inside the Brussels Press Club, it declared “We did not promote this event on the Press Club website, we did not send any press invitation to any press club members nor any Brussels based foreign correspondents. The event has been recorded by them and livestreamed on their platform. Children’s Health Defense Europe paid the renting of the Conference hall”.

However, at least until January 1st 2023, the January 23rd 2022 CHD Europe’s press conference was still featured on the Brussels Press Club’s website. For Brussels Press Club,
this publication is not a promotion but represents “an announcement” that was wrongfully publicly available on their website.

The Geneva Press club did not reply to our questions.

**iii- Other large and symbolic events gathering European anti-vax figures**

In May 2022, CHD Europe was listed as one of the two sponsors of the Northern Light Convention, a two-day conference that gathered multiple European and international public figures opposed to the COVID-19 vaccines or to measures such as wearing masks, such as:

- The French doctor Christian Perronne, who has been fact-checked on this matter several times by independent media.
- The German far-right AfD MEP Christina Anderson.
- The controversial Thai-German microbiology professor Sucharit Bhakdi.

According to the event program, two out of the five organisers of this conference had key positions in the CHD Europe organisation around the time of the event (i.e., board member Orsolya Györffy and director of operations Frederique Warner-Allen). While it remains unclear when she started to occupy this position, Lisa Victoria Renberg is now presented as CHD Europe’s Community Coordinator on the group’s website.

![Organisers](Scandinavianfreedom.events)

*Figure 9: Screenshot of the “Organisers” section in the event program’s PDF available on Scandinavianfreedom.events*

Similarly, CHD Europe is part of a coalition called “Action Alliance”, which hosted a public conference commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Nuremberg Code on August 20th, 2022. Instrumentalising history, the meeting advanced very questionable comparisons between the development of COVID-19 vaccines and Nazi medical experiments during the Holocaust. Several speakers during the conference originated from the Children’s Health Defense, which also provided a live-stream coverage of the event through its web TV CHD.TV, making the US anti-vax group one of the main contributors to the event.
Among the several other events held or attended by CHD Europe members, there are, for example, a press conference in Budapest (Hungary) or demonstrations in Milan (Italy) and Bern (Switzerland), to which Robert Kennedy Jr.’s participated.

C – Advancing the CHD Europe’s agenda with legal and lobbying tools

In the US, the Children’s Health Defense is also known for its efforts to lobby public institutions and to try to challenge in court vaccination- or other health-related legislation. For example, the organisation hired a new Washington-based Director of Government Relations in July 2022 and filed a lawsuit against Facebook in August 2020 to protest against the company’s COVID-19 policies, which impacted their Facebook publications. Moreover, as shown by the AP investigation, the CHD’s financial resources have substantially increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, helping it to finance additional lobbying activities and lawsuits. The group seems to want to replicate some similar strategies in Europe.

i- Opening legal battles

As shown on its website, CHD Europe launched or supported several legal actions to fight COVID-19 vaccines and measures in the EU, often in collaboration with fellow European organisations challenging pandemic restrictions and vaccines.

In Europe
1. Children’s Health Defense Europe and 5 other associations are calling for the annulment of the European Parliament’s decision to waive any risk assessment of the use of genetic technology in the development of Covid-19 vaccines (mRNA and DNA vaccines).
2. CHD Europe supported the 6 actions for the annulment of the conditional marketing authorisation of the Covid-vaccines brought by Beate Botte on behalf of Italian doctors and citizens by calling on intervenors from other Member States.
3. CHD Europe and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. launched an appeal to the European Parliament to reject the health pass and rejected the legal analysis written by a collective of European lawyers.
4. CHD Europe supports and disseminates the petitions, letters and memes of liability sent to the European Medicines Agency by the ‘Doctors 4 Covid Ethics’ regarding the risks of death, thrombosis and serious health problems associated with Covid-vaccines.
5. CHD Europe supports the scientific research and criminal investigation work carried out by multiple individual and collective actions (e.g. the League Nationale pour la Liberte des Vaccinations, the association Notre Box Droit, the testimonies and documents collected by the lawyer Reiner Furrer), in order to build up cases of fraud and criminal responsibility concerning the management of the pandemic.

Figure 10: Screenshot of the CHD’s live stream video of the event in Nuremberg taken during CHD USA President Mary Holland’s speech

Figure 11: Screenshot of the “Our legal actions” page on the CHD Europe website
In July 2021, CHD Europe also urged their audience and supporters to join their legal action to stop Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Vaccine Authorization.

ii-  Lobbying efforts targeting the EU Parliament

At the time of this study, the EU DisinfoLab was not able to find any mention of the Children’s Health Defense Europe in the EU transparency register. However, there are several signs suggesting that the group has actively tried to influence the decision-making process in the EU Parliament.

We reached out to CHD Europe to have more details on why the organisation was not present on the EU transparency register. They did not reply to our questions.

The organisation has launched some calls for action encouraging its social media followers (on Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, or Instagram) to reach out to MEPs with pre-prepared lobbying messages before votes on health regulation.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 12**: CHD Europe’s article including detailed recommendations on how citizens should lobby MEPs by email and on social media to encourage them to vote against the EU Green Pass

It also built relationships with MEPs sympathising with vaccine scepticism and disinformation. As an illustration of these likely lobbying efforts, lawyer and now CHD Europe board member Renate Holzeisen tweeted a picture of her meeting with Dutch MEP Robert Roos and Italian MEP Francesca Donato in November 2022.
Prior to this meeting, the organisation had amplified MEP Roos’s anti-COVID-19 restrictions speech in April 2022. It had already established some contacts with Francesca Donato, who attended Robert Kennedy’s Milan press conference in November 2021. She was also supposed to speak at the anti-COVID-19 measures demonstration in Brussels on January 23rd, with many CHD members, and recorded a video with them in a new location when the demonstration ended.

All these contacts with MEPs have opened new doors inside the EU Parliament for CHD Europe to develop its activities and participate in highly visible events. A striking example is the live-streamed press conference with controversial French doctor Christian Perronne held at the European Parliament in November 2022. Co-organised by 5 MEPs, this event was viewed more than 570k times on YouTube and featured CHD Europe’s acting Executive Director Orsolya Györffy.
We reached out to the European Parliament to ask if there were plans to prevent actors spreading disinformation from using the institution’s premises and logo. As CHD Europe is not present on the EU transparency register and conducting lobbying activities, we also asked if the EU Parliament was planning to sanction this organisation and/or individuals cooperating with this organisation.

In response, the Press service of the European Parliament said that “It is part of the free mandate of MEPs that they have the possibility to invite guests and to organise press conference”.

For EU DisinfoLab, this example shows how undeclared lobbying and the absence of strict enforcement of guidelines about using this EU institution’s symbols is benefitting to actors spreading disinformation.
II – The questions about the online impact of the Children’s Health Defense in Europe

A- The seemingly limited direct impact of the Children’s Health Defense Europe online

A study by the German Marshall Fund shows that the CHD’s verified account shares (retweets on posts by “blue check mark” accounts including a link redirecting to the website childrenshealthdefense.org) increased “by 9.133% from the third quarter of 2020 to the fourth quarter of 2021”, outperforming for this metrics some US well-known media such as the Verge or Buzzfeed. Moreover, as we already mentioned, the Center for Countering Digital Hate identified Robert Kennedy and his organisation as one of the 12 influencers having a central role in the spreading of English-speaking anti-vax disinformation on Twitter and Facebook.

Nonetheless, the CHD Europe website and its social media accounts are far from reaching these figures in terms of interactions. According to SimilarWeb, a web service estimating online audience for websites, childrenshealthdefense.eu received an average of 7k monthly visits in the last quarter of 2022. At the time of our writing, its Facebook page has 2.2k followers, its Twitter account 363 followers, its Telegram channel 2.5k subscribers, and its Instagram account 215 followers.

![Figure 16: Screenshot of the CHD Europe Facebook Page](image)

B- The Children’s Health Defense Europe benefits from its network to indirectly spread deceptive narratives

While CHD Europe does not have a relevant direct audience, a backlink analysis with the platform Ahrefs shows that a small number of websites (1.3k) seem to regularly publish links redirecting to content hosted on childrenshealthdefense.eu (34k backlinks). It could suggest that CHD Europe has some influence on a larger community of European anti-vax websites, which often quote its content.
The launch of CHD Europe’s new anti-vax campaign #HandsOffOurChildren at the Brussels Press Club on November 14th, 2022, was amplified by several fringe media. The event was live-streamed by conspiracy media UK Column (72K Facebook followers), alternative Belgian media Kairos Presse (116.8K followers on Facebook), and it was covered by Italian fringe outlet ByoBlu (91K Facebook followers), showing that the anti-vax group is well-positioned among the biggest players in the European conspiracy ecosystem.

Figures 17, 18, 19 & 20: Screenshots from UK Column, Kairos Presse, and ByoBlu’s social media posts promoting content linked to the CHD Europe’s press conference organised at the Brussels Press Club on November 14th, 2022
C – The inconsistencies of social media platforms’ measures against harmful anti-vax content

In August 2022, Meta removed the main Facebook page and Instagram account of the Children’s Health Defense. However, Robert Kennedy Jr. kept his personal Facebook page (345K followers), and none of the CHD’s international and US-based Facebook pages and Instagram accounts were banned, meaning that the organisation was allowed to continue developing its presence on Instagram and Facebook with its European page and account. Very few CHD Europe’s posts include fact-checking or informational labels from Meta about COVID-19 vaccines, despite sometimes containing some very clear disinformation or conspiracy narratives. This raises questions about Meta’s capacities to detect and act on this content.

In response to this, a Meta spokesperson said that they removed the Children’s Health Defense Organization Facebook Page and Instagram account for repeatedly violating their policies. Regarding the publications of its European chapter, the spokesperson added that they “are currently investigating the Facebook Page and Instagram account of Children’s Health Defense EU.”

Furthermore, a California-based CHD chapter continued to publish Facebook ads undisturbed until at least October 2022, despite the ban applied on the organisation’s main page in August 2022. Meta’s team informed EU DisinfoLab that these ads promoting a book claiming that COVID-19 is man-made was not infringing their COVID-19 and vaccines policies.
Similarly, Twitter has not taken any measures against the CHD-related accounts and Elon Musk’s decision to end the platform’s COVID-19 misinformation policy could suggest that no action against the anti-vax US group will be taken in the foreseeable future. Only the CHD Europe YouTube channel, which had 916 subscribers in January 2022, is, at the time of our study, suspended.
Conclusion

The Children’s Health Defense has deployed extensive efforts to grow its presence in Europe since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the metrics linked to the CHD Europe social media accounts could suggest these efforts have been limited so far, the global picture is more complex. The US anti-vax movement relies on diverse and subtle lobbying strategies to gain influence in Europe. The group’s ability to reach out to prominent like-minded organisations and activists, and contribute to events in symbolic places in Europe offers evidence of this strategy. Moreover, the CHD is now expanding the scope of its activities beyond the pandemic, such as 5G issues. It is highly likely that the Children’s Health Defense is here to stay in Europe.

This case is emblematic of the safeguards that should be designed by policymakers, regulators, and companies to protect the EU from influence activities, this time originating from the US, that can have an extremely harmful impact in that case on critical public health issues:

- Ensuring availability and access to sufficient funding for civil society actors working on monitoring and investigating health disinformation and the actors spreading it;
- Proper enforcement of existing regulations and policies to ensure that platforms have the means to diligently implement their own rules against health disinformation without differences between geographic areas;
- Implementation of practical measures to prevent the use of European institutions’ image during events to legitimise disinformation actors and narratives, e.g., using the EP logo during press conferences organised by a limited number of MEPs;
- Better enforcement of the EU rules regarding lobbying transparency.