New Direction

the Foundation for European Conservatism

MARGARET THATCHER

AWARDS NIGHT

2025



The Night of European Conservatism

New Direction

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New Direction – Foundation for European Conservatism, was founded in 2009 as the official foundation of the European Conservatives and Reformists. Since then it has grown to become a leading voice for the European conservative movement – providing a platform for national foundations and civil society groups to be heard at the heart of European politics.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

My Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It gives me enormous pride as President of New Direction to welcome you to this year's Margaret Thatcher Awards Night. This event is a chance to showcase the best of our movement – from leaders in politics, journalism, and the arts, to activists – it is the night of European conservatism.

When I became President of New Direction at the start of the year, I wanted to make sure that we celebrated the hundredth birthday of our founding patron Margaret Thatcher in an appropriate way. I can think of no better way of doing so than by recognising those who continue to carry on the legacy of the conservative movement after her.

For the last fifteen years, New Direction has worked on promoting the kind of conservative changes in Europe that I am sure she would be proud of. As the intellectual hub of the European Conservatives and Reformists Movement, New Direction has acted as a champion for free markets, deregulation, traditional values, and the empowerment of working people.

New Direction continues to be proud of our association with Margaret Thatcher, and with the values that she stood for. And whilst we are reflecting on the past, and on the history of the conservative movement in Europe, I would like to take the chance to thank my predecessors as President of New Direction: Geoffrey Van Orden who set up the foundation in 2009, and Tomasz Poręba who guided it forwards from 2015 until earlier this year.

I would also like to thank our board, our partners, and of course our members. And I would like to thank you all for joining in this important event, as we celebrate the life and legacy of one of history's greatest conservative leaders, by honouring those who have come since.

Thank you,

Nicola Procaccini MEP
President of New Direction,
Co-Chair of the ECR Group


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THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF

Margaret Thatcher

Margaret Hilda Thatcher (née Roberts) was born in the sleepy market town of Grantham, in the county of Lincolnshire, on the 13th of October 1925. The daughter of a shopkeeper, she grew up above the family shop, where she worked when not studying.

In 1943, she started studying Chemistry at Oxford. Deeply religious, she practised as a lay-preacher at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, as well as attending the college chapel at Somerville College. It was also at Oxford that she was first introduced to the works of the Anglo-Austrian economist F A Hayek, having been influenced by ‘The Road to Serfdom’, first published in 1944. ‘The Road to Serfdom’ would have a formative role in her future political direction.

From Oxford, she went to work as a research chemist, first developing plastics, but later working in food sciences on ice cream. Despite her day job working in the sciences, she had not given up on her political ambitions. She joined the local branch of the Conservative Party, and it was there that she met local businessman Dennis Thatcher. The two married in December 1951, with twin children arriving in 1953.

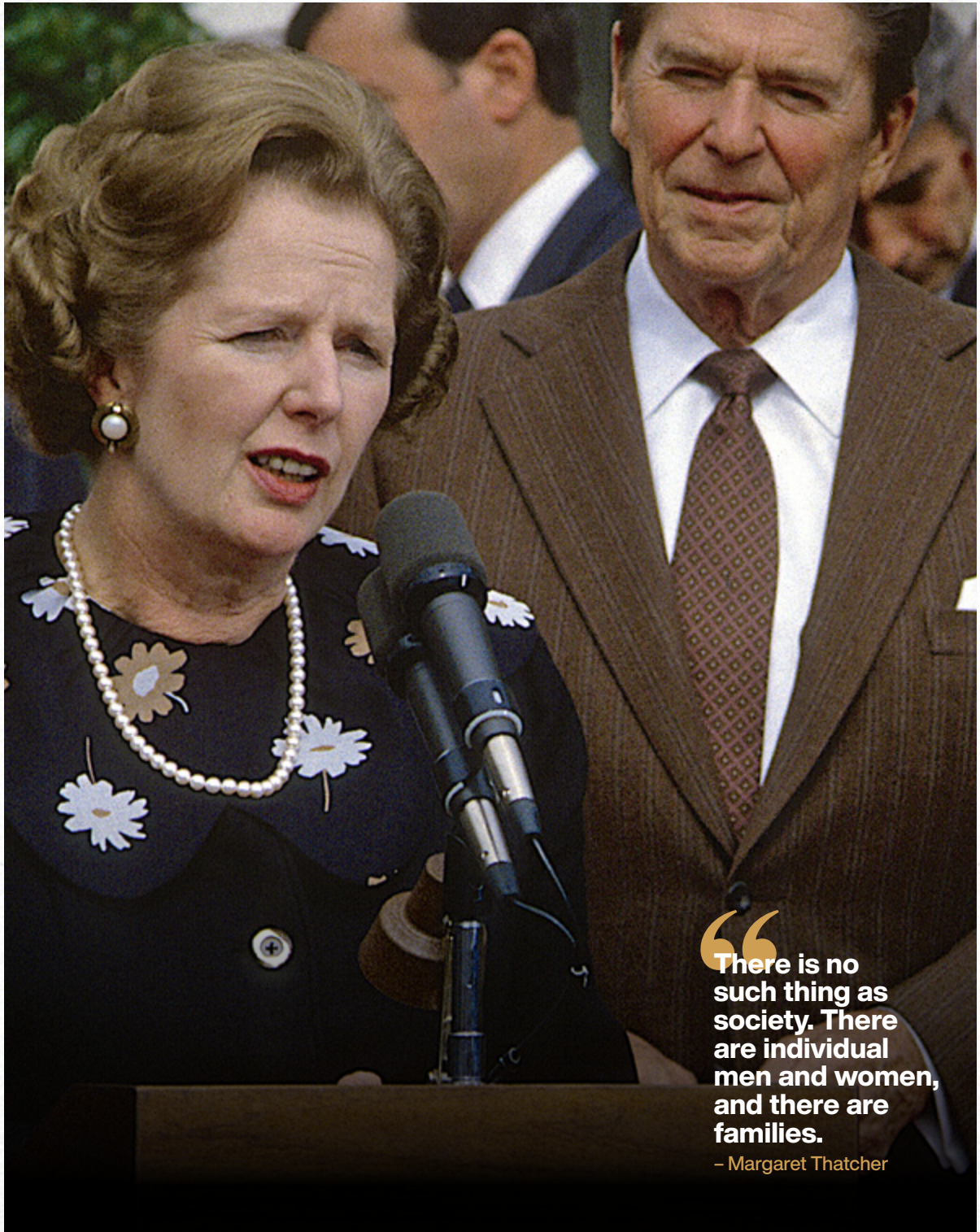
In 1958 she was selected for the North London seat of Finchley, and in 1959 she entered the House of Commons for the first time during Harold Macmillan’s landslide election victory. Her first speech in the Chamber was the introduction of a bill she had proposed on transparency for local government. A year later Thatcher was promoted to her first job in government, as a junior minister responsible for pensions.

In 1970 she entered the Cabinet of Edward Heath, in the role of Education and Science Minister until the 1974 elections, when Labour returned to power. In February 1975, she challenged Heath for the leadership of the Conservative Party, beating him on the first ballot, and winning the leadership for herself on the second. In doing so she became the first woman to lead a major UK political party.

Her early leadership was challenged from many directions, not least by her predecessor Edward Heath who never fully accepted her in the role of party leader. However, she found her chance for success in her opposition to the disastrous economic policies of the Labour Government who led the country into the so-called 'Winter of Discontent'.

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher became the United Kingdom's first female Prime Minister. She immediately set about reforming the country's institutions and restoring confidence in the British state. She bravely took on the trade unions, took the country through a process of economic liberalisation, and de-regulated in a way that put the public back in control of their own lives. Her economic changes saw the British economy go from stagnation to unprecedented growth.

On the world stage she worked with Ronald Reagan and other leaders to stand up to the totalitarian threat of Communism. During her time as Prime Minister she saw communism collapse in Central and Eastern Europe, and encouraged the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the issue of Europe, she remained supportive of the project until she saw that it was moving towards ever closer union, at which point she moved towards a more Euro-realist perspective, as set out in the now famous Bruges Speech. In 1990 Thatcher's leadership was challenged again, and despite winning the first ballot of MPs, she could see that she was losing support amongst her own party. In order to avoid further division in the party, she resigned and was succeeded by John Major. She left the House of Commons in 1992 and was elevated to the House of Lords in the same year.

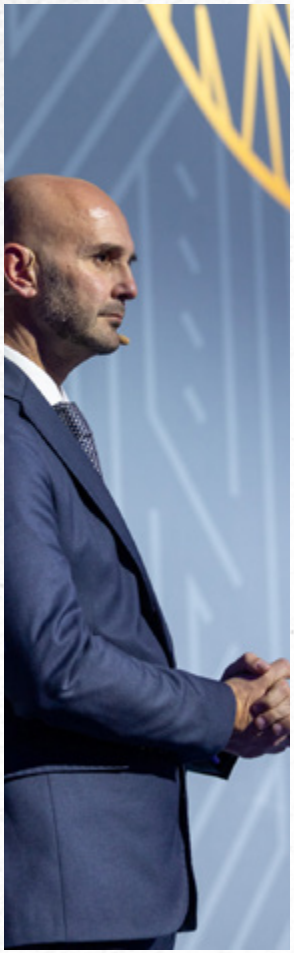


From the Lords she became a vocal critic of the Maastricht Treaty, and an ardent supporter of Croatian and Slovenian independence in their struggle against the Serbs. Through the 1990's she was the Chancellor of the University of Buckingham – an educational institute she had helped to set up as Education Secretary in a bid to prove the higher education could exist without state funding.

In 2010, New Direction founding President Geoffrey Van Orden MEP invited Baroness Thatcher to take on the role of founding patron. At what would be her final public appearance, Thatcher helped to inaugurate the foundation at its launch event in London – playing a part in securing the future of the European conservative movement for years to come.

On the 8th of April 2013, Margaret Thatcher passed away at the Ritz Hotel in London at the age of 87. She was granted a Ceremonial Funeral with full military honours, attended by her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II – marking only the second time she would attend the funeral of a former Prime Minister (the first being Winston Churchill in 1965).

The United Kingdom has since had two more female Prime Ministers, Theresa May and Liz Truss both from the Conservative Party. Today, Kemi Badenoch is the fourth female leader of the Party.







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Giorgia MELONI

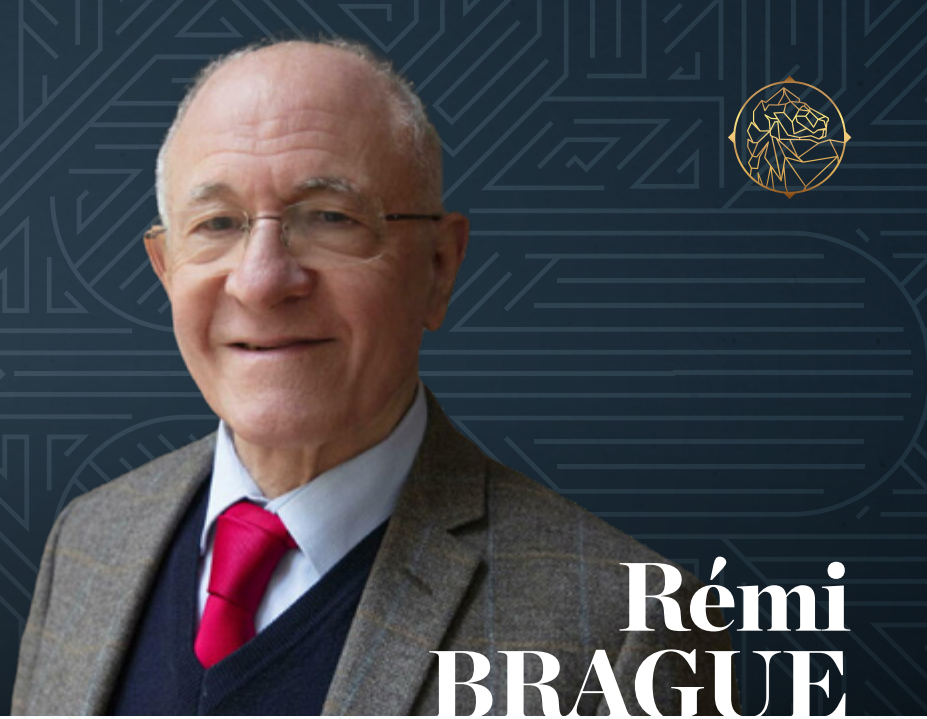
If you want something said, ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman.

– Margaret Thatcher

Giorgia Meloni, Italy's first female Prime Minister and leader of Fratelli d'Italia, has redefined the country's political landscape with a message rooted in national pride, family values, and personal responsibility. Rising from the ranks of Italy's conservative youth, she has shown remarkable political tenacity turning a small party into the leading force in Italian politics.

Since taking office in 2022, Meloni has sought to blend patriotic conviction with pragmatic governance, steering Italy through complex debates over migration, energy, and Europe's future. Her leadership is marked by discipline, resilience, and a refusal to be underestimated qualities that echo the Thatcherite spirit of conviction over conformity.

Much like Thatcher, Meloni embodies a politics of purpose rather than posture. She combines ideological clarity with a keen sense of the possible, presenting herself not only as a conservative reformer but also as a woman determined to translate words into lasting action.



Rémi BRAGUE

Rémi Brague is a French historian, philosopher, and writer known for his deep erudition and his ability to bridge ancient thought with contemporary questions. Trained as a classicist, he began his career immersed in Aristotle and medieval philosophy, driven by the ambition to produce the book on Aristotle that he believed Heidegger should have written. His scholarship spans Greek, Jewish, and Islamic intellectual traditions, reflecting a rare commitment to understanding Europe's civilizational roots through dialogue rather than dogma.

Brague has long been a champion of what he calls Europe's 'Roman' identity, an openness to inheritance, transmission, and reinterpretation. His essays and books challenge prevailing academic fashions, insisting that meaningful debate requires courage, clarity, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths.

I love argument. I love debate. I don't expect anyone just to sit there and agree with me – that's not their job.

– Margaret Thatcher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Michael GOVE

"I am not a consensus politician. I'm a conviction politician."
– Margaret Thatcher

Lord Michael Gove is one of the most influential conservative thinkers and reformers in modern British politics. Over a career spanning education, justice, environment, and housing, he has consistently championed institutional reform, accountability, and the renewal of civic responsibility. His intellectual rigor and moral seriousness have earned him both admirers and adversaries across party lines.

A journalist before entering Parliament in 2005, Gove has been a leading advocate of evidence-based policymaking and the importance of moral clarity in public life. His tenure as Education Secretary was transformative, reshaping British schooling in the name of higher standards and opportunity. Like Thatcher, Gove has been guided by conviction rather than consensus.

He now edits The Spectator, Britain's oldest magazine first published in 1828, and the first in the world to achieve 100,000 editions. The Spectator remains a leading voice for the conservative movement.

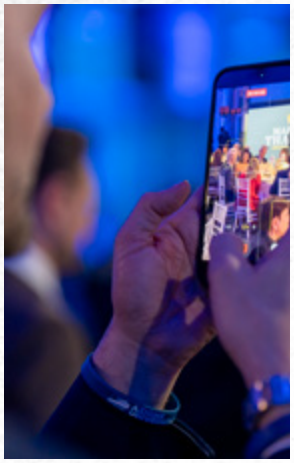


Sviatlana TSIKHANOUSKAYA

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya emerged as the symbol of democratic resistance in Belarus after the 2020 presidential elections. A former teacher and translator, she entered politics only when her husband, opposition figure Siarhei Tsikhanouski, was imprisoned by the Lukashenko regime. In the months that followed, she galvanized a movement that united millions of Belarusians in a peaceful struggle for freedom and dignity.

Tsikhanouskaya continues to lead the Belarusian democratic movement from abroad, advocating for human rights and international solidarity. Her moral courage and quiet determination have made her a global symbol of hope against tyranny. In the spirit of Thatcher's words, she represents the enduring power of conviction the belief that even in the darkest circumstances, good can prevail through faith and perseverance.

"I am in politics because of the conflict between good and evil, and I believe that in the end good will triumph."
– Margaret Thatcher





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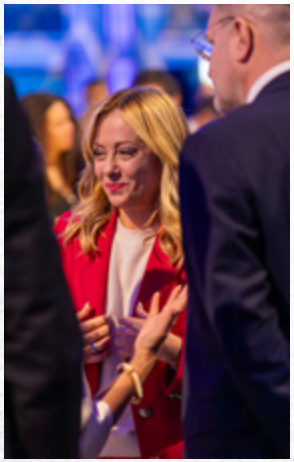







Jack NICKLAUS



ANGEL Studios

> **These days we have so much more opportunity to watch sport on television and I watch golf.**
> – Margaret Thatcher

Jack Nicklaus is one of the greatest golfers in the history of the sport. Over a career that spanned decades, he set a standard of excellence that remains unmatched, with 18 major championships and countless records that continue to define competitive golf. His combination of power, precision, and strategic insight reshaped expectations of what a professional golfer could achieve.

Beyond the fairway, Nicklaus has devoted himself to golf course design, philanthropy, and mentorship, extending his influence far beyond his own playing days. His thoughtful, analytical approach to both sport and life reflects a lifelong love of golf not only as a competitive pursuit but as a discipline that rewards patience, observation, and constant refinement.

Founded by Neal Harmon and his brothers on a model that empowers communities to support the stories they believe in, the company has positioned itself as both a creative venture and a cultural movement. At Angel, 1.6 million members of the Angel Guild both watch and decide what stories get produced and distributed, in theatres and on the Angel platform.

Angel is one of the fastest-growing streaming platforms, bringing values driven and family-friendly entertainment to a whole new audience. ‘David’, an animated musical featuring songs by multi-platinum artist Phil Wickham, will premiere worldwide in theatres on December 19, 2025.

> **It is not enough to conserve the heritage, we have to enlarge it before we pass it on.**
> – Margaret Thatcher



Neal McDONOUGH

> **I don't quite know why I entered politics any more than a musician knows why he takes up music, or an actor why he goes into theatre.**
> – Margaret Thatcher

On screen, he has embodied heroes, villains, and everything in between. His performances have stirred our hearts, ignited our imaginations, and challenged our perspectives. Yet, it is his character off-screen that truly shines. A man deeply rooted in his Christian faith, Neal has used his platform to inspire and uplift. His unwavering belief in God has been the cornerstone of his life, guiding him through challenges and triumphs with grace and humility.

From the battlefields of history to the modern dramas of our time, his work has entertained millions. But it is his impact as a man of faith that leaves an enduring legacy. He has shown us that it is possible to pursue excellence in one's craft while remaining steadfast in one's convictions.

SAVE THE DATE

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9th December 2026

Royal Museum of Arts and History

Brussels \ Belgium



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