

Democracy Week

14-17 September 2020

Overcoming Adversity,
Innovating Democracy



Register [here](#)

“The COVID-19 pandemic threatens more than the lives and the livelihoods of people throughout the world. It is also a political crisis that threatens the future of liberal democracy. It represents a formidable global challenge to democracy. Authoritarians around the world see the crisis as a new political battleground in their fight to stigmatize democracy as feeble and reverse its dramatic gains of the past few decades. The COVID-19 crisis is an alarming wake-up call, an urgent warning that the freedoms we cherish are at risk and that we must not take them for granted”

[A Call to Defend Democracy, June 2020](#)

2020 has thus become a pivotal year for European and international leadership on democracy, in which the actions of today will shape the world of tomorrow. As such, this year’s International Democracy Week will focus on what we can do to strengthen democracy and foster democratic innovation.

To inspire discussions, the series will also mark the launch of the Report *“[Global Democracy and COVID-19: Upgrading International Support](#)”*. It assesses the impact that Covid-19 is having on democracy around the world and examines how international democracy support organisations and donors are responding to the challenges related to the pandemic. The Report was drafted at the initiative of the European Endowment for Democracy and supported by 11 democracy organisations, including organising partners of the International Democracy Week.



14 September – Monday

Global Democracy and the Coronavirus Fallout

14:30 – 16:00 (CEST)

As the coronavirus pandemic tests governments and societies around the world, it is also stressing the already fragile state of global democracy by undermining critical democratic processes, sidelining human rights, and unfettering authoritarianism.

How can Europe's response to the crisis address the immediate issues and bolster democracy, protect human rights, and foster longer-term peace and stability around the world?

On the eve of International Democracy Day, this high-level political discussion will explore the state of global democracy, European foreign policy, and democracy support amid the pandemic.

Speakers:

Per Olsson Fridh, Secretary of State for International Development Cooperation, Government of Sweden.

Anu Juvonen, Executive Director, DemoFinland, Political Parties of Finland for Democracy

Stefano Sannino, Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global Issues, European External Action Service.

Moderator:

Rosa Balfour, Director, Carnegie Europe.

15 September – Tuesday

European and international responses to the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on democracy

15:00 – 16:30 (CEST)

The global pandemic has highlighted the resilience of our democratic institutions, the universal desire for fundamental freedoms, and the necessity of multilateralism.

Yet the crisis has also shed light on the ease with which restrictions can be imposed on democratic checks and balances, civic participation, and human rights, and it has exposed challenges for cooperation in times of need.

Now more than ever, the international community needs to stand up for democracy. In celebration of International Democracy Day, this high-level event will showcase visions of European and international leaders for the future of democracy support, post-pandemic.

Opening message:

David Maria Sassoli, President of the European Parliament – pre-recorded message

Speakers:

Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission – pre-recorded message



Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights – pre-recorded message

Heidi Hautala, Vice-President of the European Parliament

Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General, International IDEA

Moderator:

Peter Sondergaard, Director of Programmes, European Endowment for Democracy

Democracy and Tech policy – what COVID-19 has taught us

18:00 – 19:30 (CET)

The COVID-19 crisis has pushed digitalisation to the top of the EU's agenda, with tech companies developing contact tracing apps and countering the infodemic, while civic tech groups have developed tech solutions to mitigate the crisis. This is a critical moment for the EU's digital future, with the opportunity for policies to center around how citizens and their elected representatives can regain control over the digital space.

This session serves to explore how the trends in digital technologies and opportunities in digital policy interact with the trend of autocratisation in Europe and around the world. The session will aim to answer the following questions: How has the covid-19 pandemic accelerated and intensified some of the trends in digital technologies? How are some of these trends in conflict with democratic principles? How has this affected the already fragile state of European democracy? How can digital technologies and digital policy be leveraged to strengthen democracy in Europe and in EU external action?

Speakers:

Danilo Türk, former President of Slovenia, President of Club de Madrid

Krzysztof Izdebski, Policy Director, ePaństwo Foundation

Alexandra Geese, Member of European Parliament, IMCO Committee (TBC)

Marietje Schaake, International Director of Policy, Stanford Cyber Policy Centre

Moderator:

Guillermo Beltra Navarro, Tech Team Leader, Open Society Europe Policy Institute

16 September – Wednesday

The impact of COVID-19 on media – rise of infodemics?

15:00-16:15 (CET)

In recent years, disinformation and misinformation have become the dark realities of our increasingly connected and technologically advanced world. During the COVID-19, disinformation reached new heights with an avalanche of false information, distorted facts and crude conspiracy theories about the virus.



Today, we increasingly talk of an 'infodemic', a term first coined in 2003 during the SARS outbreak to describe the story of both the viral and the information epidemics.

Malign disinformation campaigns emanating in particular from Russia, Iran and China have attempted to blame the West for the coronavirus outbreak in recent months and have accused it of being unable to tackle the crisis. Their narratives look increasingly similar, with disinformation stories attempting to instrumentalise the health crisis and undermine public trust in democratic countries.

This media expert panel will take stock of the post-Corona media landscape, analyse the impact of COVID-19 infodemics on democracy and try to establish how to combat this phenomenon.

Speakers:

Natalia Antelava, Co-founder and editor-in-chief, Media start-up Coda Story

Sami Ben Gharbia, Co-founder, Tunisian collective blog Nawaat

Peter Pomerantsev, Visiting Senior fellow, LSE, Producer, Author of "Nothing is true and everything is possible"

Moderator:

Bernard Guetta, Member of European Parliament

Political parties in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

17:00-18:30 (CET)

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only the socio-economic aspect of people's lives, but it also had a strong impact on political life around the world. Over the last months we observe negative tendencies of decrease in civil liberties and power concentration in political leaders under the pretext of measures against the propagation of the virus.

The following session will explore the implications of the crisis on political parties and the mechanisms they put in place to fight against undemocratic measures, aimed at silencing opposition actors. It would further explore the challenges linked to elections and the impact on internal party democracy processes.

Is the crisis only a burden for the executive power or was there a constructive engagement from opposition parties? Did parliaments experience cuts in their powers as a result of the crisis? How has the pandemic influenced the work with sister-parties in partner countries? Have political leaders used the restrictive measures against the pandemic as pretext to silence opposition parties?

Speakers:

Natasha Mazzone, MP Chief Whip, Democratic Alliance South Africa

Julio Borges, Chair of the National Assembly of Venezuela

Machris Cabrerros, President of Akbayan (The Citizens' Action Party), Coordinator of the Network of Social Democracy in Asia



Moderator:

Bent Nicolajsen, Chair of Working Group Democracy, European Network of Political Foundations

Closing Remarks:

Denis Schrey, Chair of Working Group Democracy, European Network of Political Foundations

17 September – Thursday

Belarus - A new democracy in the making?

10:30 – 12:00 (CET)

The run-up and immediate aftermath of the presidential elections in Belarus in 2020 have made international headlines in recent weeks. Electoral fraud, popular dissatisfaction with Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the country's economic and social challenges, excessive violence against the peaceful protesters have resulted in an unprecedented social and political mobilization of society. The citizens of Belarus are demanding change and have come out to the streets of the country's cities in large numbers for the first time since the fall of the USSR. It is clear that an important and seemingly irreversible social change is taking place.

This session will focus on the current situation of Belarus with policymakers and stakeholders in Brussels and Europe, as well as Belarusian and European experts and activists.

Introduction:

David McAllister, Chair of Committee of Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Keynote speech

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, candidate in Belarus 2020 presidential elections

Statement

Ambassador Thomas Ossowski, Representative of Germany to the Political and Security Committee of the EU

Panel speakers:

Ales Belyatsky, Human Rights Centre Viasna ('Spring'), Belarus

Hanna Liubakova, Journalist, Belarus

Dietmar Köster, Member of European Parliament

Moderator:

Miriam Lexmann, Member of European Parliament

The coronavirus pandemic continues to have a profound impact on both governance priorities and democratic processes. Parliaments around the world are looking at if and how innovations they have adopted to continue functioning during the pandemic will be integrated into the 'new normal' of parliamentary work. Can innovations such as virtual parliaments strengthen engagement with citizens? Can governments be effectively held to account through online questioning? Are current technologies adequate and secure? What are the overall impacts of COVID-19 on democratic governance, and how can parliaments address emerging threats?

In answering some of these critical questions, the workshop will: examine the future of virtual parliaments – challenges and opportunities; explore parliaments' responses to the pandemic highlighted in the INTER PARES Primer "Parliaments and crisis: Challenges and Innovations" and "Parliamentary responses during the COVID-19 Pandemic – Data Tracker"; address the overall impact of the pandemic on democratic governance and share current findings of the Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, implemented by International IDEA.

High-level Closing Session Speakers:

Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General, International IDEA

Henriette Geiger, Director, Directorate for People and Peace, Directorate General for Development and Cooperation (DEVCO), European Commission

Fabio Castaldo, Vice-President, European Parliament

Mohamed Nasheed, Speaker of the People's Majlis, The Republic of The Maldives

Tomas Tobé, Chair of the Development Committee, European Parliament

Practitioner Session Experts:

Jonathan Murphy, Head of Programme, INTER PARES, International IDEA

Piedad García-Escudero Márquez, Professor of Constitutional Law, Complutense University of Madrid

Keiba Jacob, Procedural Clerk and Head of the Financial Scrutiny Unit, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

Brian Caesar, Clerk of the Senate, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

Moderator:

Marilyn Neven, Programme Manager, International IDEA