



**INTERNATIONAL IDEA**  
Supporting democracy worldwide



# The State of Democracy in East-Central Europe

## Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall

**20 November 2019**

Rue Belliard 101, 1040 Brussels

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# About the Conference

## Background

The 9th of November 2019 has marked 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the start of Europe's largest wave of democratisation since the end of World War II. In the 30 years that followed, countries in Central and Eastern Europe have gone through rapid democratization, and profound economic reforms, while the rest of Europe has also seen its democracies deepen further and European unity strengthened. Since 1975, Europe has seen improvements on almost all aspects of democracy, including key attributes, such as Checks on Government and Fundamental Rights. These are measured by International IDEA's Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices.

The past decade has, however, shown that while Europe has the highest number of democracies compared to other regions, the quality of these democracies has often shown signs of stagnation and at times erosion. East-Central Europe has been most affected by these declines, particularly in the sub-attributes of Civil Liberties, Freedom of Expression, and Media Integrity. In other countries, including a number of Western European Member States and beyond Europe, pressing challenges to democracy relate to the falsification of true democratic debate by the spread of fake news or populist speech.

## Event objective

To discuss these developments, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) are organizing a conference "The State of Democracy in East-Central Europe: Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall". The Conference aims to contribute to building greater consensus among policymakers, politicians and thought leaders on the course of democratization in East-Central Europe over the past three decades. In so doing, it aims to form the basis for more open debate on how to reinvigorate the quality of democracies in the region and in wider Europe. It aims to revive the promise of democracy that inspired millions of citizens thirty years ago and helped launch the democratic transitions of the late 1980s.

## Event description

This one-day conference will gather former heads of state and government from East-Central Europe, leading representatives of state institutions and civil society organisations, high-level EU decision-makers, and representatives of democracy assistance organizations.

Panellists will be invited to explore the present state of their democracy, and analyse how the past thirty years conditioned their current state. International IDEA's GSoD defines five key attributes of democracy: representative government, the provision and protection of fundamental rights, checks on government, impartial administration and participatory engagement. The panel debates will reflect on the GSoD findings.

**International IDEA** is an inter-governmental organization, with 32 Member States from across the globe. The Institute works to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and an enabler of sustainable development, through support to the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. The Institute works to achieve these objectives through consolidating and disseminating comparative knowledge on democracy, convening and facilitating dialogues at country, regional and global levels and providing policy advice to actors across the political and institutional spectrum.

**The European Committee of the Regions (CoR)** works to bring EU citizens closer to the EU. By involving regional and local representatives who are in daily contact with their electorate's concerns, but also by inviting citizens to participate in various events and debates, the CoR contributes to reducing the gap between the EU institutions' work and EU citizens and is the voice of regions and cities in the European Union (EU). The CoR represents local and regional authorities across the European Union and advises on new laws that have an impact on regions and cities. The Committee is a political assembly composed of 350 members and 350 alternates from all EU countries who have been elected at local or regional level.

# AGENDA

## Overview

20 NOVEMBER	
08.30 - 09.00	Registration
09:00 - 09:15	<b>Opening session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcoming remarks</li></ul>
09:15 - 09:30	<b>Keynote address</b>
09:30 - 11:30	<b>Session 1: Popular Aspirations, Achievements and Current Challenges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation of International IDEA's 2019 Global State of Democracy Report and Indices</li><li>• High-Level Panel Discussion: Popular aspirations, achievements and current challenges</li></ul>
11.30 - 12.00	Break
12.00 - 13:30	<b>Session 2: Overcoming Democratic Backsliding - Reviving the Promise of Democracy</b>
13:30 - 14:30	Lunch
14:30 - 16:00	<b>Session 3: Leveraging Multi-level Governance for Democratic resilience</b>
16:00 - 16:15	Break
16:15 - 17:45	<b>Closing Session: Learning from the Past, Looking Forward</b>



08.30 - 09.00

### REGISTRATION

*Please bring photo identification*

09.00 - 09.15

### OPENING SESSION

#### Welcoming remarks

**Mr. Kevin Casas-Zamora**, *Secretary-General of International IDEA*

**Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, *President of the European Committee of the Regions*

09.15 - 09.30

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Ms. Heidi Hautala**, *Vice-President of the European Parliament*

09.30 - 11.30

### SESSION 1: POPULAR ASPIRATIONS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

#### Presentation of International IDEA's 2019 Global State of Democracy Report and Indices

At the outset of the session, the most recent trends identified in the International IDEA's [Global State of Democracy \(GSoD\) report](#) and indices will be presented for the East-Central European region, and will be contrasted with developments across other regions. The GSoD report provides evidence-based data and analysis on the global and regional state of democracy. It contributes to public debate on democracy, informs policy interventions and identifies possible solutions to trends affecting the quality of democracy. The indices include data for 158 countries and are updated annually. The database is publicly available at [www.idea.int/gsod](http://www.idea.int/gsod).

**Mr. Sam van der Staak**, *Head of Regional Europe Programme, International IDEA*

#### High-Level Panel Discussion: Popular aspirations, achievements and current challenges

This panel discussion will provide a forum for those who pushed the levers of change thirty years ago to analyse initial successes and comment on the causes of current challenges. Examples of questions to be addressed include: What are the greatest achievements of the democratisation processes in the region and what factors determined their success? What early signs of discontent with transition reforms were overlooked? What are the key current challenges for democracies in the region and what responses are needed to build more resilient democratic systems?

#### Panellists:

- **Mr. Jan Fischer**, *Former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (2009 - 2010)*
- **Ms. Heidi Hautala**, *Vice-President of the European Parliament*
- **Amb. Raul Mälik**, *Former Foreign Minister of Estonia (1998-1999)*
- **Mr. Petre Roman**, *Former Prime Minister of Romania (1989 - 1991)*

**Moderator: Mr. Rikard Jozwiak**, *Brussels Correspondent, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

11.30 - 12.00

### BREAK

12.00 - 13:30

### SESSION 2: OVERCOMING DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING – REVIVING THE PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY

This session will analyse the region's key democratic gains obtained to date together with democracies' current challenges. Panellists will explore the evolution of public sentiments towards the functioning of political systems. Key questions to be addressed include: how can governments build a better social contract with their citizens and deliver on it? How can the fundamentals of representative democracy such as popular control of citizens over decision making and the equality of citizens in the exercise of this control be upheld and strengthened? How can the basic tenets of democracy such as effective checks and balances, the independence of judicial institutions, and the freedom of the media and expression be strengthened?

**Keynote Address:** **Dr. Adam Bodnar**, *Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland*

#### Panellists:

- **Mr. Richard Wike**, *Director of Global Attitudes Research, Pew Research Center*
- **Ms. Zsuzsanna Szelényi**, *former MP, Hungary (1990-1994; and 2014-2018), Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow of the Robert Bosch Academy*
- **Mr. Jan Macháček**, *Chair of the Board of Trustees, Institute for Politics and Society, Czechia*
- **Ms. Jessica Fortin-Rittberger**, *Prof. of Comparative Politics, University of Salzburg*

**Moderator:** **Ms. Magdalena Jakubowska**, *Vicepresident, Res Publica Foundation, Visegrad Insight, Poland*

13:30 - 14:30

### LUNCH

14:30 - 16:00

### SESSION 3: LEVERAGING MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

The session will serve to outline key achievements in promoting multi-level governance in the region and its contribution to democratic governance and public participation in decision making over the past three decades. Furthermore, the discussion will serve to outline what opportunities multi-level governance and effective decentralization offers for strengthening democratic resilience and protections against democratic backsliding, including in the areas of accountability, rule of law, anti-corruption and citizen engagement.

#### Panellists:

- **Ms. Kata Tuttö**, *Deputy Mayor of Budapest, Hungary*
- **Ms. Randel Länts**, *Rapporteur of the European Committee of the Regions Opinion on the Action Plan against disinformation, Member of Viljandi City Council, Estonia*
- **Ms. Jasna Gabric**, *Member of the European Committee of the Regions; Mayor of Trbovlje, Slovenia*
- **Mr. Vytautas Grubliauskas**, *Member of the European Committee of the Regions, Mayor of Klaipėda, Lithuania*

**Moderator:** **Mr. Laurent Thieule**, *Director of Directorate for Legislative Works I, European Committee of the Regions*

16:00 - 16:15

**BREAK**

16:15 - 17:45

## **CLOSING SESSION: LEARNING FROM THE PAST, LOOKING FORWARD**

The session will explore approaches that could be used to strengthen the resilience of democracies in the region. Representatives of leading institutions and organizations which help shape and promote the implementation of democratic commitments across Europe will be invited to provide concluding reflections.

### **Address on behalf of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

**H.E. Ms. Hanna Lehtinen**, *Ambassador of Finland to the Political and Security Committee of the EU*

### **Reflections from the panellists:**

- **Dr. Marcin Walecki**, *Head of Democratization Department, OSCE/ODIHR*
- **Dr. Ruslana Vovk**, *Regional Manager, Democracy Reporting International*
- **Mr. Daniel Mitov**, *National Democratic Institute (NDI), former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria*
- **Mr. Sam van der Staak**, *Head of Regional Europe Programme, International IDEA*

**Moderator: Mr. Massimo Tommasoli**, *Permanent Observer for International IDEA to the United Nations*

## **CLOSING KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**Dr. Kevin Casas-Zamora**, *Secretary-General, International IDEA*



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