



»»» Our Freedom
& Yours
EURO-ATLANTIC FORUM
ON DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY

Institute for Strategic Studies in Krakow

30 years of history



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Euro-Atlantic Forum on Democracy and Security: Our Freedom and Yours

Krakow, September 10-11th, 2023

The Euro-Atlantic Forum on Democracy and Security, the flagship event by the Institute for Strategic Studies in Krakow, Poland, in 2023 was held under the motto 'Our Freedom and Yours'. The forum also celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Institute for Strategic Studies Foundation (ISSF).

The issues addressed at the Forum concerned the identification and analysis of trends and changes affecting political systems in the Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Eurasian regions. Many of the developments are direct threat to the democratic constitutional order of states and the rules-based international order. The catalogue of threats is broad and includes authoritarian and populist tendencies, armed aggression, trade wars or aggressive disinformation, as well as sabotage and cognitive warfare by authoritarian states. The year 2022 was a turning point for the region – first and foremost, for the people of Ukraine attacked by

Russia, but also for European politics. The long-term effects of the war on Ukraine and the rest of the world are still unknown, but the war is undoubtedly affecting the international balance of power. The international order of the late post-Cold War era as we have known it is being redefined.

The Euro-Atlantic Forum on Democracy and Security: “Our Freedom and Yours” had two parts. The first part was a two-day international conference held on 10 and 11 September at the Auditorium Maximum of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. The second part was the School for Young Leaders, during which civil society representatives took part in seminars, workshops and study visits organised by the ISSF.

The Forum featured 11 panels focused on various developments that concern the condition of democracy in Poland, the region and the world. The first day focused on the issues of democracy. Anna Szymańska-Klich, Chairwoman of the ISSF, opened this part of the Forum with a keynote emphasizing how important it has been for the Institute to reflect on democracy in its various manifestations and civic education, addressed both to the citizens of Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the thirty years of the Institute’s history. The Chairwoman emphasised the ISSF’s long-standing commitment to projects supporting the formation of Ukrainian and Belarusian civil society.

The first panel concerned political leadership in times of unrest, featuring: Hans-Gert Pöttering, former President of the European Parliament and former Head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation; Agnieszka Turska-Kawa, who heads the Institute of Political Sciences at the University of Silesia; and Jerzy Baczyński – editor-in-chief of the *Polityka* weekly. Their discussion was moderated by Dorota Wysocka-Schnepf, a journalist from *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The moderator drew attention to the problem of political instability and the related crisis of trust in

authority. Hans-Gert Pöttering emphasised the importance of the concurrence of two aspects, political institutions and the credibility of politicians:

We, as Europeans, are not foreigners – we belong to the same political family, and the Lisbon Treaty is the basis of our beliefs, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which I had the honour of signing, is the basis of our values; everyone in the European Union has the right to criticise someone from outside their own country. I firmly believe that in the end the truth will prevail and we must resist campaigns based on fake news. You lose your conscience and credibility, and credibility is ultimately crucial in politics; it is credibility that ultimately wins¹.

A slightly different root of instability was identified by Jerzy Baczyński. His emphasis was on the radically changing information ecosystem over the past decade:

We live in a world of social media, which involves a proliferation of news that has never been seen before, but also emotions and knee-jerk judgements. It also provides politicians with opportunities they did not have before; to reach voters directly, bypassing any filter or selection mechanism. We are seeing the effects of this in different countries, with varying degrees. What is perhaps the greatest challenge for leaders today is confronting populism, or the populist contagion that is sweeping across virtually all democratic systems.

Populism was precisely the topic of the second panel of the conference, chaired by Tok FM's editor Agnieszka Lichnerowicz.

¹ The quotes referred to in the body are excerpts from speakers recorded during the Forum; courtesy: ISS.



Ed. Jerzy
Baczyński,
prof.
Agnieszka
Turska-Kawa

The panellists reflected on defining and understanding populism, cited among the most important contemporary challenges that are facing liberal democracies. The discussion on the long-term effects of populist political narratives was held among: Marjorie Castle of the University of Utah, Jarosław Kurski of Gazeta Wyborcza and Łukasz Fyderek of the Institute of Middle and Far East, Head of the Euro-Atlantic Forum on Democracy and Security: “Our Freedom and Yours” project. Łukasz Fyderek pointed out that populism, despite its negative connotations, is important for the evolution of political systems:

Populism is a mechanism for the replacement of the power elite. If it works, it ceases to be populism – the new elite phases out populist themes. We see this in Venezuela or in Turkey – the discourse of power is becoming less populist and more authoritarian.



Authoritarianism is different from populism. Populism can lead to authoritarianism, but authoritarianism is about building the authority of the new government, whereas populism is based on undermining trust in authority.

Prof. Agnieszka Tursocka-Kawa, Hans-Gert Pötinger, ed. Dorota Wysocka-Schnepf

The panellists agreed that populism takes different forms, depending on the cultural and institutional context. It has a different face in the US, under a rigid two-party system, and a different face in Europe. Jarosław Kurski analysed the European variant of populism:

The best example is the attempted takeover of the European Union by populist parties. Using all the democratic instruments it provides, with all its values, the EU could fall under the weight of European populism. [...] Firstly, we talk about the will of the people, as if

populists were legitimised to represent this will of the people. [...] This is pure sophism and usurpation and it must be made clear to us that they are not legitimised (to represent the people). The second caveat is that populism, as long as it operates within a democratic framework, always has existed and will exist.

The panel on the international consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a discussion. It was attended by General Ben Hodges, former US Army Europe Commander and NATO advisor, Camille Grand, former assistant Secretary General for NATO Defence Investments, General Jarosław Stróżyk, former Deputy Director of the NATO International Military Staff Intelligence Board, and Olena Tsybukh, Secretary General of the Ukrainian Embassy in Poland. The panel was moderated by Robert Pszczel, diplomat, analyst and former director of the NATO Information Office in Moscow. The moderator forwarded a thesis that "(...) 2022 was a turning point, first and foremost for the people of Ukraine invaded by Russia, but also for global politics. The long-term effects of the war on Ukraine and the rest of the world are still unknown, but the balance of power and the international order as we have known it are being redefined." The panellists proceeded on to analyse particular aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war. General Ben Hodges drew attention to issues of military operations:

Ukraine is doing what NATO is doing, which is our doctrine, which is multi-domain operations. Land, air, sea, special forces, cyber, sabotage, and commando operations; all of these things are happening at the same time. I am reluctant to predict when they will finally break through the defences, but it is happening in a way that we would never ask a Polish, French or American soldier to do without total air superiority, and Ukraine is still making progress. Crimea is a decisive area – the Ukrainians intend to suppress the Russian



forces stationed there, make the area indefensible, then liberate it, and then it's over.

Camille Grand emphasised the international dimension of events and the effects of Russian aggression on the whole of Europe:

The argument that the world has changed needs to be repeated again and again. Depending on where you are in Europe, you can focus on a particular facet of this change. To assume that there is a 'return to the normal' scenario is misleading and wrong. Putin decided to literally destroy the European security architecture and it was a huge transformation. The violence of war, which is unprecedented since 1945, the war crimes – all this creates a new environment, and it is new that we cannot say, 'Ok, let's sign Minsk 3 or 4 to solve this issue'. There are other aspects besides Ukraine itself – the collapse

Dr. hab. Łukasz Fyderek,
prof. Marjorie Castle,
ed. Jarosław Kurski,
ed. Agnieszka Lichnerowicz

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This publication is both a summary and testimony of the last 30 years of activity of the Institute for Strategic Studies, founded in 1993 under the name of the “International Center for the Development of Democracy” Foundation.

We would like to recall the most important events from the Institute’s activity to date – the goals and aspirations of the Foundation, the projects and actions that contributed to their achievement.

This publication is also an expression of gratitude to all those who have worked with the Institute, without whose contribution the fulfillment of our mission would not be possible.



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