



Hambach
Democracy
Dialogue
2023



Defending Democracy in Times Of Multiple Crises

Conference Programme

In recent years, overlapping crises have preoccupied Europe: the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the rise of the illiberal right, COVID-19, and the energy and cost-of-living crises are some of them. These multiple crises are challenging European democracies in different ways. At the Hambach Democracy Dialogue 2023, we will discuss how Social Democracy can be defended under these circumstances. Our distinguished speakers and experts will look from different angles at how democracies should respond to these developments.

15 June 2023

First Conference Day

14:30 GUIDED TOUR OF HAMBACH CASTLE AND THE »HAMBACH FESTIVAL« EXHIBITION

16:00 CONFERENCE OPENING & WELCOME
Reiner Hoffmann, Deputy Chairman of the FES

16:15 KEYNOTE SPEECH – SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ANSWERS ON HOW TO DEFEND OUR EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY IN TIMES OF POLYCRISIS

16:45 I. SESSION – ARE WE WITNESSING A STRUGGLE BETWEEN DEMOCRACIES AND AUTOCRACIES?

On the one hand, there are those who argue that Russian aggression against Ukraine has sharpened the divide between autocracies and democracies. Accordingly, the world has become torn between two opposing clusters along a clear ideological line: an alliance of democracies, led by the United States, is now facing an alliance of autocratic states, centered upon Russia and particularly China. Following this line of thought, autocracy vs. democracy thus forms a new global conflict line. On the other hand, many are contesting this binary view of the world. They find the warnings about the arrival of the new Cold War that pits autocracies against democracies to be a simplified explanation of much more nuanced processes. Just as we cannot talk about the global crisis of democracy as there is not one but many differently developed democracies, neither can we talk about the uniformity of interests of all global democracies that originate in ideology, or so the argument goes.

This panel will debate these two interpretations. It will also address the question of how democracy should be more effectively defended under the new circumstances marked by the change of the international context (weaker support for democracy in the global arena and a rising assertiveness of autocracies). A special emphasis will be put on new ideas to empower local political and civil society actors to fight for opening democratic spaces.

Speakers: Staffan Lindberg, Director of the V-Dem Institute; Sven Mikser, MEP and former Defence and Foreign Affairs Minister of Estonia; Kati Piri, Dutch MP (tb)

18:30 BREAK & GROUP PHOTO

19:00 DINNER AT HAMBACH CASTLE

21:00 END OF FIRST CONFERENCE DAY

09:15 WELCOME & RECAP OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE DAY

09:30 II. SESSION – THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC TURBULENCES ON DEMOCRACIES’ RESILIENCE

The crisis of the past year has strongly reinforced people’s existing fears about their economic future. Often, existing inequalities have been exacerbated. Inequality leads to a lack of representation of less privileged groups, the dwindling trust in democratic institutions, and the decreasing political participation of many citizens. These challenges are often exploited by illiberal forces for their particular interests at the expense of democracy. Surveys show that globally, people consider inequality to be one of the prime threats to democracy. This demonstrates people’s general perception: that the more affluent have different means of influencing democracy.

This session invites a discussion on how these perceptions are justified and – crucially – what can be done about it. It involves three aspects of how inequality affects democracy: (1) how inequality affects democratic participation; (2) how wealthy private actors disproportionately influence democratic decision making; and (3) whether new democratic innovations fare better in tackling inequality’s effect on democracy.

Speakers: Jens Geier, MEP; Lea Elsässer, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (tbc); Enrico Borghetto, Assistant Professor at the University of Florence (tbc); Kenneth Haar, Researcher at Corporate Europe Observatory (tbc); Maija Setälä, Professor at the University of Turku (tbc)

11:30 BREAK

12:00 III. SESSION: DEVELOPING PROGRESSIVE STRATEGIES AGAINST THE ILLIBERAL RIGHT

Electoral successes of the illiberal right are again becoming a reality in Europe. For the first time since the Second World War, a Western European country is now governed by the illiberal right, as the Italian parliamentary election brought Giorgia Meloni to power. Victor Orbán triumphed in the Hungarian parliamentary election, whereas the government of one of the world’s leading democracies (Sweden) now depends on support from the far-right Sweden Democrats. The illiberal right also recorded electoral successes in various regional elections (e.g. Spain and Austria), while in the second round of the presidential election in France, over 40% of the voters chose Marine Le Pen of the Rassemblement National. One of the reasons for the success of parties belonging to the illiberal right is their eagerness to learn from one another. Moreover, conservative forces are increasingly trying to forge alliances with right-wing populists and even right-wing extremists ahead of the upcoming European elections.

In light of this insight, can progressive forces develop strategies to counter the rise of the illiberal right that can be applicable beyond the national context? Bearing in mind the upcoming elections for European Parliament, what should the central pillars of such strategies be? Could the experience of progressive forces in countries governed by the illiberal right be useful to their counterparts from countries in which the illiberal right is on the march? The panel will also focus on the efficacy of the EU’s response to the violations of democratic principles, foremostly the rule of law, by member states governed by the illiberal right.

Speakers: Katarina Barley, Vice-President of the European Parliament; Kim Scheppelle, Professor at Princeton University (tbc)

13:30 LUNCH AT HAMBACH CASTLE

15:00 END OF THE CONFERENCE

The Hambach Festival of 1832 was an important milestone in the German and European democracy movement. It has also shaped the development of Social Democracy. Hambach Castle today is a symbol not only of the history of German democracy, but also of European integration as well as Europe's ideals and history.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is inviting politicians, experts in democracy, and representatives of European civil society, as well as young people and young professionals from all over Europe, to reflect on democracy in this historic location. The Hambach Democracy Dialogue (HDD) is a platform for exchanging progressive ideas and proposals for further developing European democracy.

In the run-up to the HDD, a workshop for about 25 young Europeans will take place. They will also attend the HDD and take part in the conference discussions.

Organisational Information

- Hambach Castle is only one hour away from Frankfurt International Airport.
- The FES will cover the costs for all invited guests of overnight accommodation on 15 June, including breakfast, in one of the hotels in Neustadt and the surrounding area that have been pre-reserved by the FES.
- For independent travel to the hotels in Neustadt an der Weinstraße (Rhineland-Palatinate), travel costs have to be covered by the participants and will not be reimbursed by the FES.
- Attendance at the conference is free of charge for invited guests, including food and drink at Hambach Castle.
- Please direct any further queries to hdd@fes.de.
- For more information, click here: [Hambach Democracy Dialogue](#).

→ **Please register here**



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The HDD Conference is jointly organised by the [FES EU Office Brussels](#), the [FES Vienna Office on Democracy of the Future](#) and the [FES Regional Office of Rhineland-Palatinate/Saarland](#).

#HDD23