

ROLLING BACK AUTHORITARIANISM

22-23/06/2023

International Conference

The conference 'Rolling Back Authoritarianism' in Gdansk, will bring together African democrats with those who have managed against tremendous odds to bring about progressive reforms in their societies in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. We are opening the discussion how to entrench democratic institutions, ensure free elections and build inclusive economic growth essential to progress.

Late last year, The Brenthurst Foundation released *'In The Name of The People: How Populism is Rewiring the World'*. The book examined the rise of populism, a political style which hollows out democracy and perverts open democratic competition by simplifying politics into an 'us and them' fight to the death.

Instead of engaging in healthy political competition which strengthens democracy and accountability, populists want to own and control political power in perpetuity. They label their citizens who disagree with them as 'enemies of the people' and they weaken judicial and financial oversight. Finally, when their policies result in financial disaster, they subvert democratic electoral processes in an effort to stay in power.

The end state of populism is a form of authoritarian rule, with or without the fig leaf of "elections", the outcome of which is rigged in one or another way.

This is the path followed by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, who took power in a system which was on the path to accountable democracy. He proceeded to follow the populist playbook and has managed to perpetuate his stay in office - directly or through proxies - for over three decades.

The crushing - frequently violent - of opposition within Russia and the hollowing out of democracy has been completed as opposition leaders are jailed on trumped up charges. However, Putin has not stopped there. By invading Ukraine, a sovereign, independent country with internationally recognised borders, he has doubled down on violence, attempting to enlarge his sphere of control.

Ukraine is now involved in a life-or-death struggle with Russia for its survival as a nation.

There are many countries around the world that now fear that such a fate awaits them. But such a trajectory can be avoided if democratic values and institutions of accountability are entrenched and populists are not permitted to take over states before mutating into dangerous authoritarians.

The European Solidarity Centre

The European Solidarity Centre Gdansk is a cultural institution with its aim to promote knowledge about the peaceful victory of Solidarity. Since the opening of its building in August 2014, the ECS has welcomed 6.5 million visitors from all over the world. The ECS is also the only cultural institution in Poland honoured with THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MUSEUM PRIZE (2016), awarded annually for over 40 years to museums that have made a significant contribution to the understanding of Europe's cultural heritage.

The ECS exhibition is dedicated to the history of Solidarity and the changes it triggered in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2021 it was awarded with THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE AWARD / EUROPA NOSTRA AWARD as it highlights the value of activism for human rights, labour and political rights, and shows the importance of civic engagement in the advancement of these causes. The ECS is also an education centre, a research centre, an archive, a library and a media center.



organisers



partner



ROLLING BACK AUTHORITARIANISM

The Brenthurst Foundation and The European Solidarity Centre
Gdansk, 21–23 June 2023

Thursday, 22 June

/ ECS library (1st floor)

9.00

Opening Address: Getting the Politics Right

Olusegun Obasanjo, Fmr President, Nigeria
Bogdan Lis, Chairman of the ECS Council,
signatory of the Gdansk Agreement in 1980

10.30

Using the Political Opportunity to Reform:

What Poland Did

Janusz Lewandowski, Member of the European Parliament, fmr privatisation minister
response | **Marcos Peña**, Former Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers, Argentina
Artis Pabriks, Former Deputy Prime Minister, Latvia
Arkadiusz Modrzejewski, Professor & Director of the Institute of Political Sciences,
University of Gdansk, Poland

12.30

Lunch

/ AmberSide restaurant (ground floor)

13.30

How Oppositions Might Work Together

on Elections

Tundu Lissu, Leader, Chadema, Tanzania
John Steenhuisen, Leader, Democratic Alliance,
Official Opposition, South Africa
response | **Bobi Wine**, Leader, National Unity Platform, Uganda

14.30

How Outsiders Might Help

Luis Franceschi, Asst Secretary General, Commonwealth
Alfonso de Prat Gay, Former Minister of the Economy,
Argentina
response | **Omer Ismail**, Fmr Foreign Minister, Sudan
Jawar Mohammed, Oromia Media Network, Ethiopia

16.00

Building Domestic Alliances

Kizza Besigye, President, Forum for Democratic Change, Uganda
Zitto Kabwe, Leader, Alliance for Change and Transparency, Tanzania
response | **Atupele Muluzi**, President, United Democratic Front, Malawi
Roelf Meyer, CEO, In Transformation, South Africa

19.00

Dinner, Gdansk Shipyard
Mielżyński Restaurant, Narzędziowców 31,
Gdansk Shipyard

Friday, 23 June

/ ECS library (1st floor)

9.00

Lessons from Solidarity's Struggle for Freedom

Lech Wałęsa, Fmr President, Poland
response | **Yulia Tymoshenko**, former Prime Minister, Ukraine

9.30

How to Protect your Vote

Adalberto Costa Junior, Leader, UNITA, Angola
Raila Odinga, Fmr Prime Minister, Kenya
response | **Moeketsi Majoro**, former Prime Minister, Lesotho
John Githongo, CEO Inuka, Kenya

10.30

Key Takeaways and Adoption of Gdansk Declaration

VF Hlabisa, Leader, Inkatha Freedom Party, South Africa
Ian Khama, Fmr President, Botswana
Greg Mills, Director, The Brenthurst Foundation
Magdalena Charkin-Jaszczka, ECS Director's Representative for International Relations,
The European Solidarity Centre

11.00

Meeting concludes



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