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**Information about Speakers and Panelists  
of the International Day of Democracy  
Conference**

Media and Democracy:  
collecting tools and options for action

11 September 2024

*Moderated dialogue: 09:25 – 09:55*

## **Discussion with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA**

**Staffan I. Lindberg** is the Director of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at University of Gothenburg and one of five Principal Investigators for V-Dem. He holds a PhD from Lund University. His dissertation won the American Political Science Association's Juan Linz Award for best dissertation 2005. He was assistant professor at Kent State University, assistant/associate professor at University of Florida and has been with University of Gothenburg since 2010, full professor since 2013.



**Christine Löw** has been the Deputy Head of the Peace and Human Rights Division at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) since August 2021. She is responsible for the Swiss human rights diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, foreign policy on migration and the deployment of Swiss civilian experts. She holds a law degree and a master's degree in European Political and Administrative Studies. Before her current position, she held leadership positions at UN Women. She has worked extensively with the Swiss government, including roles at the FDFA and the Permanent Mission to the UN. Her career also encompasses legal advisory positions and diplomatic work at the Swiss Embassy in London.



Panel discussion: 09:55 – 11:15

## What role does the media play in democratising and promoting democracy?

**Vesna Nikodinoska** is a Senior Program Manager at the Macedonian Institute for Media, has over 20 years of experience in the media sphere as a journalist, NGO project manager and researcher. In the past three years, she has been involved in managing and implementing activities which are part of USAID Media Literacy Project «YouThink», that aims at development of media literacy and critical thinking skills among youth. She has also been working as a researcher in the media field, on national and regional level (media literacy, disinformation and hate speech, regulatory and self-regulatory framework and mechanisms). She has been actively involved in media development' and MIL initiatives since 2010.



**Firas Shamsan** is a Yemeni media professional and filmmaker, as well as a social media content producer focusing on peace culture. He serves as a board member of the French-speaking PEN Center in Switzerland and is a delegate at the Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International. As a guest writer in Bern, he is a specialist in cultural development with extensive experience in culture and media in Arab and international channels. He is an accomplished writer and filmmaker, having co-authored literary works and received multiple awards for his short documentaries. He also founded «fan-time.net», a platform for cultural development.



**Konrad Siemaszko** is a lawyer at the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) with 8 years of experience in the field of media freedom, head of the Freedom of Expression Programme at the HFHR and a member of the Warsaw Bar Association. He has extensive experience in supporting journalists in national and international proceedings and is author and co-author of several reports and analyses on human rights matters.



**Daniela Vancic** has been the European Program Manager at Democracy International e.V. since 2017 where she advocates and campaigns for stronger citizens engagement in EU decision making. She is vice-chair of Democrats Abroad Germany in the Cologne-Bonn region. Her focus is on European democracy developments and methods for transnational citizen participation with particular expertise in the European Citizens' Initiative. Previously she has served as a campaign manager with the US Michigan Democratic Party.



*World Caf  in two parts: 11:45 – 13:00 & 14:30 – 15:45*

## **Discussion and analysis on the four topics in practice**

**Ruslan Mihalevschi** is a journalist, editor and board member of the Audiovisual Council of Moldova. After finishing a master’s degree in history, including numerous internships in different countries, he first started his career as a reporter in the regional press. As a media researcher, trainer and consultant, he collaborated with the Independent Journalism Center of Moldova, Media Center Transnistria, the Center for Journalistic Investigations of Moldova, the Independent Press Association of Moldova and the Thomson Foundation. For several years he worked as a media manager, including in the position of editor-in-chief.



**Markus Spillmann** manages the UseTheNews office. He is the owner of SPILLMANN Publizistik-Strategie Management GmbH and a partner at KMES Partner Zurich. He held various positions at the Neue Z rcher Zeitung Media Group, most recently as Head of Journalism and Editor-in-Chief.



**Daniel Vogler** is the Head of Research at the Research Centre for the Public Sphere and Society at the University of Zurich and Senior Assistant at the Institute for Communication and Media Research at the University of Zurich. His research focuses on journalism, public relations, online communication, and computational social science. Daniel Vogler is co-editor of the Yearbook Quality of the Media and specialises in the development of the media landscape in Switzerland and the interactions between media, communication, and democracy.



**Sophia Wistehube** works as Legal Counsel at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), focussing on issues of democracy and human rights. She holds a juris doctor from Columbia Law School and studied political philosophy at Oxford, Frankfurt and the University of Arizona. Prior to joining the EBU, she worked for the Venice Commission and the European Court of Human Rights.



## Moderators

**Tom Berger** is the director of the Polit-Forum Bern. He is deeply interested in how a democracy can be further developed, how people can be inspired by political processes and how social cohesion can be strengthened. He has a master's degree in business administration and previously worked in a political agency, where he managed the offices of various NGOs.



**Stefanie Bosshard** is the director of the Swiss Democracy Foundation. Her focal points are the connections between education, participation and democracy, the engagement of young people in direct democracy and the promotion of a culture of democratic discussion. In previous positions, the educational scientist (MSc in Education, University of Bern) was director of the Federation of Swiss Youth Parliaments and worked in education policy, among others for the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research.



**Bruno Kaufmann** is a broadcast journalist based in Sweden. He is a member of the board at the Swiss Democracy Foundation and Democracy International. He obtained his master's degree from the University of Gothenburg on the issue of transnational democracy and has authored many articles and books including local, national, and international «Democracy Passports». In the past he was co-president of the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy.



**Jérémy Schmid** joined the Swiss Democracy Foundation (SDF) in October 2023 and is mainly contributing to the SDF's national projects, communication, and organisational tasks. He holds a bachelor's degree in business psychology and is currently studying for a master's degree in European Studies and Politics & Society at the University of Fribourg.



**Stefanie Schuepbach** is the deputy director of the Polit-Forum Bern and the curator of the Democracy Tower with changing exhibitions and discussions on current political topics. She has a strong interest in connecting arts and democratic dialogues to foster participation and social cohesion. Previously the business economist and art historian worked as the managing director of the Solothurn Film Festival, cultural coordinator/project manager at the Embassy of Switzerland in Washington D.C. and in art galleries.



**Benjamin Von Wyl** is a reporter specializing in democracy-related topics and an editor at swissinfo.ch. In 2020, he was named one of the «Top 30 Under 30» by the magazine Schweizer Journalist. He received the Media Award from the Association of Catholic Journalists in 2019. As a novelist, he was also honored with the Swiss Literature Prize in 2021.



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