

Europe with a View to the Future

XI International Forum Gdańsk

European Solidarity Centre & National Centre for Culture

Gdańsk invites you to engage in a dialogue about democracy, solidarity, Europe, and our responsibility for peace in the world. We will meet in a symbolic place, on the historic grounds of the former Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, where the independent civic movement Solidarity was born 45 years ago. The fate of Gdańsk reflects both the dark and bright sides of world history. World War II began in Gdańsk, completely destroying the city. In Gdańsk, Solidarity initiated a peaceful revolution of human rights defenders in the 1980s, which led to the fall of the Iron Curtain. In Gdańsk, one can read the bloody consequences of totalitarian regimes. The history of Gdańsk obliges us, Polish Europeans, to think responsibly about the future of our continent and to act courageously.

June 3 and 4, 2025, during the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we invite you to Gdańsk. June 4th is one of those symbolic dates that are particularly important for our destiny. On this day in 1989, two processes began that are still crucial for the world. In Poland, in partially free elections, Solidarity won, and the communists definitively lost their legitimacy of power. It was a political earthquake in the Soviet bloc. A wave of democratization began, leading to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In China, on June 4, 1989, the communist party suppressed a peaceful social protest with bloody violence. The communists not only strengthened the authoritarian political system but also expanded its foundations with a capitalist system. A new global empire emerged: political, economic, and technological.

The civic revolutions of 1989–1991 did not bring democracy and peace to all of Europe. Russia's imperial tradition proved strong. Together with its authoritarian allies, including China, Moscow seeks to destroy democracy. Using its resources and military power, it defends the power of autocrats around the world and imposes its rules of international politics. Unfortunately, countries with a centuries-old democratic tradition are also succumbing to the dangerous allure of indivisible, autocratic power.

1989 was also the beginning of the communication revolution, the "World Wide Web." Technological transformation has changed all areas of our lives. The digital revolution has a Janus-faced quality for democracy; it can strengthen democracy through participation, but at the same time, it has also become a tool for its enemies.

We Europeans must once again make a choice about the direction our civic civilization should take. Do we want to barricade ourselves against global challenges in nationalist egoism? Or will we undertake the defense of the practice of solidarity among nations and respect for human rights?

In recent years, democracies have lost their luster and authority for many citizens. Dictatorships, on the other hand, have shown how brutally they are capable of defending their existence, murdering and instigating wars. At the same time, they can effectively build international alliances. The authoritarian world uses new technological and communication possibilities to weaken the solidarity of democrats and to expand its influence. War is once again becoming a method of achieving political goals, as is happening in Ukraine and the Middle East.

In democracies, the promises of social justice and the protection of human rights are not consistently fulfilled today. At the same time, globalization, climate change, and wars have increased the pressure for modifications in every area of public life. This creates a political atmosphere in which fear of revolutionary change, of losing what is known, is growing. This atmosphere of fear reinforces the fear of the other. The idea of universal human rights is on the defensive, as shown by the migration policies of many democratic countries.

We want to use the time of the Polish Presidency of the European Union to undertake a civic discussion among people of free speech, people of culture and science, to talk about the state of Europe. Are we still faithful to the idea of solidarity based on human rights, which is so fundamental to our democracies? What choices must we make so that our values are credible and implemented?

We invite you to a dialogue at the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk – a cultural institution that is faithful to the idea of universal solidarity – solidarity not limited to religious or cultural community, skin color, gender, or nation.

"There is no freedom without solidarity!" – this slogan of the Polish Solidarity revolution of 1980 is still relevant today. This slogan gives us civic strength.

Basil Kerski with the team of the European Solidarity Centre
Robert Piaskowski with the team of the National Centre for Culture

June 4, 2025, Wednesday

Parliament of Words

9.30-10.15

- **Inauguration of the Parliament of Words debates Basil Kerski | introduction Robert Piaskowski | introduction**

10.15–11.45, Auditorium

A World Torn by Wars. Does the Culture of Dialogue Have a Future?

Democracies are weakened by the negative effects of globalization and the lack of a vision for modern social justice policy. Social tensions and digital media, which favor emotionalization, have changed the climate of public debate. Polarization increasingly eliminates dialogue, both within countries and internationally.

Will we continue down a path that threatens human rights? Or will we manage to renew the culture of dialogue and social consensus to strengthen democracy and translate the ideas of social justice into the reality of the 21st century?

Aleksandra Matwijczuk, ECS

Leopoldo Lopez, ECS

Paweł Łatuszka, ECS

Ece Temelkuran, Turkish writer / ECS

Masih Alinejad, World Liberty Congress, Iran

Prof. Susan Neiman, philosopher, director of the Einstein Forum / ECS

Basil Kerski

Jerzy Pomianowski, ECS

moderation | Katarzyna Kasia tbc

scenography | Portraits of human rights defenders

12.00–13.00, Solidarity Square

CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM AND CIVIC RIGHTS

June 4, 1989, is the day of the victory of the Solidarity revolution in the parliamentary elections. It is the beginning of Polish democracy and the wave of democratization in Europe. We meet in Gdańsk, the birthplace of Solidarity, in Solidarity Square, in front of Gate No. 2, under the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers of 1970.

Solemn raising of the flags of Poland, the European Union, Pomerania, Gdańsk, and Solidarity on the mast with military assistance, singing the anthems of the Republic of Poland and the European Union

Short anniversary speeches:

Lech Wałęsa

Aleksandra Dulciewicz, Mayor of Gdańsk

Mieczysław Struk, Marshal of Pomerania

Basil Kerski, Director of ECS

Hosts | Adam Alekszejuk, Laura Haras

13.00–14.00, ECS

Lunch

14.00–16.00

(parallel debates at ECS)

Imagined Communities. Emotions That Change the World

The world of politics is increasingly saturated with feelings. The debate serves to search for those emotions that unlock the potential to transform the culture of fear and threat into a space for civic cooperation for the renewal of democracy.

- Prof. Michał Bilewicz, social psychologist, sociologist, publicist, head of the Centre for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw / ECS

- Prof. Ruth Wodak, linguist, a world-renowned authority in the field of historical and political discourse research / ECS

- Leopoldo Lopez, former Mayor of Caracas, human rights activist / ECS

- Tomasz Różycki, Polish poet, translator, Romanist / ECS

moderation | Dr. Jacek Kołtan, ECS

Economy at the Heart of Democratic Politics. What Kind of Economy Will Contribute to Building a Just Society?

In the post-growth era, we face the challenge of redefining the economy to better cope with sustainable development. We face the question of an economy of sharing the existing surplus, which questions the modern dogma based on the imperative of "more" and has the courage to think in a broad perspective of justice for all.

- Prof. Henrik Müller, journalist, economist / ECS
- Prof. Harold James, economist, Princeton / ECS
- Dariusz Filar, economist, writer / ECS

moderation | Maciej Głogowski, deputy editor-in-chief of TOK FM / ECS

16.30–18.30

(parallel debates at ECS)

Violence, Populism, Authoritarianism. What Should Contemporary Crises Teach Us?

Crisis not only reveals systemic weaknesses but can also surprise with opportunities for change. How to overcome the omnipresent violence, populisms, and the wave of authoritarianism in the very heart of the crisis moments that define today's world of wars and conflicts?

- Prof. Shalini Randeria, cultural anthropologist, Central European University in Vienna / ECS
- Prof. Elżbieta Korolczuk, sociologist, University of Warsaw / ECS
- Leszek Jażdżewski, editor-in-chief of Liberte / ECS
- Paolo Morawski, historian, journalist, publicist / ECS / M.Charkin-Jaszcz

moderation | Dr. Mateusz Burzyk, editor-in-chief of the monthly ZNAK / ECS

Digital Democracy. Will There Be Room for Civic Freedoms in the World of Artificial Intelligence?

Enthusiasm for the internet is disappearing, replaced by a sense of digital surveillance. How can civic politics reclaim cyberspace and build a new shape of democracy based on digital tools?

- Katarzyna Szymielewicz, president of the Panoptykon Foundation / ECS
- Edwin Bendyk, journalist, president of the Stefan Batory Foundation / ECS
- Prof. Aleksandra Przeglasińska, philosopher, Kozminski University / ECS
- Anna Streżyńska – lawyer, former Minister of Digital Affairs / ECS

moderation | Dr. Grzegorz Piotrowski, ECS

19.30–21.00, ECS Winter Garden

FORUM FINALE AT THE ROUND TABLE:

Freedom, Justice, Solidarity. Promises of Democracy.

The Round Table Talks in the spring of 1989 between the communist regime and Solidarity opened Poland's path to peaceful democratization. The Polish Round Table then became a model for the transformation of Hungary, Germany, and Bulgaria. In 2019, on the 30th anniversary of the victory of the Solidarity revolution, the ECS created a Round Table for dialogue in new times of change. At this table, we want to talk about contemporary challenges to democracy – about solidarity, the attitude towards the other, fundamental human rights, and the fear of revolutionary change. What choices must we make to defend the world of values?

2 conversation blocks | television debates

First conversation block:

- Prof. Andrii Portnov, Ukrainian historian and essayist from Dnipro, professor at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) / ECS
- Prof. Agata Bielik, philosopher, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences / ECS
- Samuel Chu, human rights defender, formerly Hong Kong, now USA / ECS
- Vesna Marjanovic, ECS

Moderator | Olga Brzezińska, Deputy Director of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute / ECS

Second conversation block:

- Prof. Andrzej Leder, philosopher, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences / ECS
- Taciana Nadbaj, poet, president of the Belarusian PEN Club / ECS

- Ece Temelkuran, Turkish writer / ECS
- Basil Kerski, European Solidarity Centre

moderator | Olga Brzezińska, Deputy Director of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute / ECS

21.00 Auditorium

Concert: "Sounding Europe. From Bach to Pärt" by Marcin Masecki and Marcin Markowicz | Concert