



## **Democracy and International Security: Human Rights Defenders at the Frontline of Freedom**

### **Concept Note**

The Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy is an annual international forum organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland to promote democratic values, strengthen international solidarity and foster cooperation between governments, civil society, academia and human rights defenders.

Since its launch in 2012, the Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy has become a platform for the exchange of experiences and ideas on how to safeguard democracy and human rights in an increasingly complex global environment.

The 2025 edition of the Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy, entitled Democracy and International Security: Human Rights Defenders at the Frontline of Freedom, will highlight the crucial role of human rights defenders in sustaining democracy and ensuring international security.

Against the backdrop of political repression, digital threats and shrinking civic space, the conference will explore innovative strategies to protect those who stand at the forefront of the struggle for human dignity and freedom.

#### **Panel 1: Human rights defenders under pressure – protecting the voices of freedom**

Across the world, human rights defenders continue to face mounting pressure, including intimidation, arbitrary detention, exile and digital surveillance. Despite these challenges, they remain at the forefront of efforts to promote freedom, justice and accountability.

This panel will examine the evolving risks confronting defenders and discuss mechanisms that can offer meaningful protection and solidarity – ranging from emergency assistance and legal support to international advocacy and digital security.

Participants will reflect on how governments, international organisations and civil society can coordinate responses to ensure that defenders at risk are not isolated or silenced. By highlighting lessons learned and innovative practices, the discussion will reaffirm the indispensable role of human rights defenders as the guardians of democratic values and human dignity, and underscore the global responsibility to safeguard their voices.

#### **Panel 2: Democracy support in the age of disinformation and digital authoritarianism**

*Panel organised by the European Endowment for Democracy*

This panel examines how authoritarian leaders are weaponising information ecosystems to maintain power, creating what scholars call "informational autocracy", where regimes survive not through overt force but by manipulating narratives, censoring dissent, and co-opting elites

while maintaining democratic facades. The discussion addresses multifaceted challenges to digital democracy across diverse global contexts: foreign-sponsored disinformation campaigns, domestic manipulation by authoritarian-leaning populist leaders who employ surveillance and censorship techniques, and the erosion of institutional trust that undermines democratic resilience. As the distinction between domestic and foreign disinformation becomes increasingly obsolete, democracy supporters must develop more comprehensive responses that go beyond content regulation to address the root causes of public distrust. Civil society organisations and activists play a crucial role as frontline defenders of democratic values, developing innovative digital rights solutions, deploying creative technologies to circumvent censorship and surveillance, and building resilient networks that protect online freedoms and counter authoritarian control of information spaces.

### **Panel 3 Defending Human Rights from Exile in Post-Soviet States: Strategies of Belarusian and Russian Activists**

*Panel organised by the Centre for International Relations*

As repressions deepens in Russia and Belarus, many human rights defenders and civic activist have been forced into exile, continuing their work to promote democracy and protect fundamental freedoms from abroad. This panel will examine the strategies, challenges, and impact of activism in exile, focusing on how exiled Belarusians and Russians sustain advocacy efforts, engage with international institutions, and build cross-border solidarity.

The discussions will bring together experts, practitioners and representatives of European and Polish institutions to explore tools such as international sanctions, legal mechanisms and coordinated support for civil society operating under authoritarian regimes. By sharing experiences and best practices, the panel aims to highlight the crucial role of transnational cooperation in defending human rights and democratic values in the post-Soviet space.

Ultimately, it seeks to foster dialogue between academia, policymakers and NGOs on how to strengthen democratic resilience across borders.

### **Panel 4 Human rights and economic development in AI and energy transformation era**

*Panel organised by the University of Warsaw*

Sustainable economic development is a guarantee for the formation of liberal democracy in developing countries. The current model of economic development in developing countries based on the extraction of raw materials, traditional industries, agriculture and services will change under the current conditions of changes in the international environment. This will also bring significant changes to the labour market, creating new social risks. Considering human rights, particularly the right to work, what threats should we prepare for and what opportunities should we seize to ensure that economic transformation and technological progress improve the quality of human life and society?

Changes in the trade policy of highly developed countries along with new trends in the global economy, i.e. AI, automation, robotization and energy transformation, will create additional problems for less developed countries. At the same time, these threats can become opportunities. Many developing countries choose green energy sources. The panel will attempt to answer questions regarding the consequences of economic changes and dynamic technological development in the modern world for strengthening democracy in the context of human rights, with particular emphasis on the popularization of artificial intelligence and changes in the development of the energy sector based on renewable energy sources.