



ECPS
EUROPEAN CENTER for
POPULISM STUDIES

Fifth Annual International Symposium
***Reforming and Safeguarding Liberal Democracy: Systemic Crises,
Populism, and Democratic Resilience***

Date: April 21–22, 2026

Online Event | All Sessions in Brussels Time (CEST, UTC+2)

Day One

April 21, 2026
(13:00-18:35)

Opening Remarks

(13:00–13:10)

Irina von Wiese (ECPS Honorary President)

Keynote Speech

(13:10–13:55)

“*The Chicken-and-Egg Dilemma: Systemic Crises and the Rise of Populism,*” by
Staffan I. Lindberg (Professor of Political Science, University of Gothenburg,
Founding Director (2012–2025) of V-Dem Institute).

Coffee Break

(13:55–14:10)

Panel 1

***From Grievance to Radicalization: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the International Politics of
Populism***

(14:10–15:25)

Moderator

Emilia Zankina (Professor, Dean of Temple University Rome, Vice Provost for Global
Engagement, Temple University).

Speakers

“*Driving On the Right’: Analyzing Far-Right Rhetoric,*” by **Ruth Wodak**
(Distinguished Professor and Chair in Discourse Studies, Lancaster University;
University of Vienna).


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“The Theocratic Blueprint of Christian Nationalism, Reconstructionism, the New Apostolic Reformation, and Catholic Integralism Behind Trump’s Agenda,” by **Julie Ingersoll** (Professor of Philosophy & Religious Studies and Religious Studies Program Coordinator at the University of North Florida).

“International Organizations in Times of Populism,” by **Stephan Klingebiel** (Head of the Department of Inter- and Transnational Cooperation at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)).

“Humiliation, Elite Impunity, and the Anti-System Gamble: Weimar-Type Mechanisms in Contemporary Grievance Politics,” by **Benjamin Carter Hett** (Professor of History, Hunter College & The Graduate Center, CUNY).

Break

(15:25–15:40)

Panel 2

Institutions Under Pressure: Rule of Law, Executive Power, and Democratic Defense
(15:40–16:55)

Moderator

Malgorzata Bonikowska (Professor of European Studies, University of Warsaw).

Speakers

“Democratic Resilience Under Pressure: Institutions, Accountability, and the Return to Robust Democracy,” by **Susan C. Stokes** (Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor and Director of the Chicago Center on Democracy at the University of Chicago).

“To Resist a Coordinated Attack, We Need a Coordinated Defense,” by **Robert Benson** (Associate Director for National Security & International Policy, Center for American Progress (CAP)).

“The Law and Politics of Fear: Executive Power in 2026,” by **Barry Sullivan** (The Raymond and Mary Simon Chair in Constitutional Law and the George Anastaplo Professor of Constitutional Law and History at Loyola University).



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"Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Regime Change: An Evolutionary Perspective," by **Stephen E. Hanson** (Lettie Pate Evans Professor of Government, William & Mary (USA)).

Coffee Break
(16:55–17:10)

Panel 3
Normalizing Authoritarian Populism: Institutions, Algorithms, and Fascist Drift
(17:10–18:25)

Moderator

Werner Pascha (Emeritus Professor of Economics, Duisburg-Essen University, Institute of East Asian Studies (IN-EAST)).

Speakers

"The Arc of Authoritarian Populism in the US under Donald Trump, How Far It Has Progressed, and the Prospects of Reversing It," by **Larry Diamond** (William L. Clayton Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution; Mosbacher Senior Fellow in Global Democracy, Freeman Spogli Institute (FSI); Bass University Fellow).

"The Institutional Enablement of American Populism," by **Bruce Cain** (Professor of Political Science, Stanford University; Director, Bill Lane Center).

"Algorithmic Populism in the Age of the Deep-Fake," by **Ibrahim Al-Marashi** (Assoc. Prof. at The American College of the Mediterranean, and the Department of International Relations at Central European University).

"Populism Paves the Way for Fascism," by **Douglas Holmes** (Professor of Anthropology, University of Binghamton).

Wrap-up
(18:25–18:35)



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Day Two

April 22, 2026
(13:00-16:50)

Opening

(13:00–13:05)

Keynote Speech

(13:05–13:50)

“Democratic Resilience in Europe: Can It Be Effective?” by **Richard Youngs** (Professor, Senior Fellow at Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program at Carnegie Europe).

Panel 4

Comparative Regional Pathways of Democratic Backsliding and Far-Right Mobilization

(13:50–15:05)

Moderator

Reinhard Heinisch (Professor of Comparative Austrian Politics, University of Salzburg).

Speakers

“Building an Authoritarian Edifice Step-By-Step,” by **Henri J. Barkey** (Cohen Professor of International Relations (Emeritus), Department of International Relations, Lehigh University).

“Populism and transnational ties of the far right in East Asia: Recent developments in South Korea,” by **Hannes B. Mosler** (Professor, Universität Duisburg-Essen, Institut für Politikwissenschaft (IfP), Institute of East Asian Studies (IN-EAST)).

“Trumpism, Culture Wars, and the Reinvention of Europe’s Far Right,” by **Pawel Zerka** (Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations).

Coffee Break

(15:05–15:20)



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Panel 5

Democratic Resistance in a Hardening World: Civic Capacity, Strongmen, and Economic Coercion

(15:20–16:35)

Moderator

Marianne Riddervold (Professor of International Relations, University of Oslo).

Speakers

“Changing Democracy’s Address,” by **Steven Friedman** (Research Professor of Politics, University of Johannesburg; former Director, Centre for the Study of Democracy).

“The Return of the Strong Men,” by **John Pratt** (Emeritus Professor of Criminology, Victoria University of Wellington).

“Weaponized Trade Policy: Tariffs, Industrial Policy, and the Future of Global Economic Governance,” by **Kent Jones** (Professor Emeritus of International Economics, Babson College).

“The Geopolitics of Right-wing Populism in a Post-hegemonic World Order,” by **Edward Knudsen** (A doctoral researcher in international relations at the University of Oxford and an Affiliate Policy Fellow in European political economy at the Jacques Delors Centre in Berlin).

Closing Remarks

(16:35-16:50)

İbrahim Öztürk (ECPS, Senior Economic researcher, Professor of Economics, Duisburg-Essen University, Institute of East Asian Studies (IN-EAST)).



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