



**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

(13:00-19:10)

**Opening Remarks**

(13:00–13:10)

**Irina von Wiese** (ECPS Honorary President)

**Keynote Speech**

(13:10–14:00)

*“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**

(14:00–14:10)

**Panel 1**

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

(14:10–15:40)

**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**

(15:40–15:50)

### **Panel 2**

*Institutions Under Pressure: Rule of Law, Executive Power, and Democratic Defense*  
(15:50–17:20)

#### **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**  
(17:20–17:30)

**Panel 3**  
**Normalizing Authoritarian Populism: Institutions, Algorithms, and Fascist Drift**  
(17:30–19:00)

***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**  
(19:00–19:10)



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## Day Two

April 22, 2026  
(13:00-17:15)

### 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

(13:50–15:20)

#### *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)).

“*Populist Narratives and Democratic Backsliding: Perspectives from Latin America,*” by **María Esperanza Casullo** (Professor at the Institute of Political Science, Faculty of History, Geography and Political Science, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile).

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



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**Coffee Break**  
(15:20–15:30)

## **Panel 5**

***Democratic Resistance in a Hardening World: Civic Capacity, Strongmen, and Economic Coercion***  
(15:30–17:00)

### ***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**  
(17:00-17:15)

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



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