



Panel discussion | opening of a new research focus

## »Democratic Vistas, Autocratic Specters: Must We Reinvent Democracy?«

Thursday, 18 February, 2021

17:00 (Central European Time), 11:00 (U.S. Eastern Standard Time)

Zoom meeting

Masha Gessen (New York)

Shalini Randeria (Vienna)

Sławomir Sierakowski (Warsaw)

Johannes Völz (Chair, Frankfurt am Main)

Since the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, there no longer can be any doubt that liberal democracy is under attack. For at least a decade, one liberal-democratic state after another has begun to face pushback – and in many cases take-over – by illiberal populists committed to authoritarian rule. The specter of autocracy is no longer a hazy apparition; increasingly it is the face of power. Yet at the same time, democracy continues to mobilize movements fighting for progressive change both inside and outside the parliamentary process. Nearly overlooked by Western media, Belarus has been witnessing a forceful struggle for democracy, tirelessly pushed ahead by the collective will of irrepressible women activists. Their struggle has inspired a related movement against the illiberal government in Poland. Even in the United States, the picture is not all bleak. After all, January 6, 2021, also marks a triumph of multiracial democracy, with an African American and a Jewish American candidate winning the senatorial runoffs in the state of Georgia, and Congress certifying the election of a black woman of color as Vice President. In the blink of an eye, the specter of autocracy gives way to what the American poet Walt Whitman called »democratic vistas.«

## Panelists

**Masha Gessen** Distinguished Writer in Residence, Bard College; Staff Writer, *The New Yorker*, author of *Surviving Autocracy* (Granta 2020)

**Shalini Randeria** Rector, Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna, Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Graduate Institute Geneva

**Śławomir Sierakowski** Founding Director of *Krytyka Polityczna*, Warsaw, and Director of the Institute for Advanced Study, Warsaw; author of numerous articles on the protest movement in Belarus, e.g. in *The New York Review of Books* and *Project Syndicate*

**Chair: Johannes Völz** Heisenberg-Professor of American Studies, Goethe University Frankfurt; Board Member, Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften Bad Homburg

## New research focus

The public panel discussion launches a new research focus of the Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften »**Democratic Vistas: Reflections on the Atlantic World.**« In the spirit of Walt Whitman, we approach the Atlantic World as a testing ground for democratic innovation and experimentation. We ask whether the current upheavals force us to reinvent democracy – and what such reinvention could look like.

For further information, please visit

[www.forschungskolleg-humanwissenschaften.de](http://www.forschungskolleg-humanwissenschaften.de)

## Registration | Opening event

Please register in advance at [anmeldung@forschungskolleg-humanwissenschaften.de](mailto:anmeldung@forschungskolleg-humanwissenschaften.de).

You will receive the link to the Zoom meeting a few days prior to the event.

## An event co-hosted by

Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften (Bad Homburg) and Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (Vienna)

**FORSCHUNGSKOLLEG** —  
**HUMANWISSENSCHAFTEN**  
der Goethe-Universität in Kooperation  
mit der Werner Reimers Stiftung



**Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen**  
**Institute for Human Sciences**

Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften  
der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt,  
Am Wingertsberg 4, 61348 Bad Homburg,  
[www.forschungskolleg-humanwissenschaften.de](http://www.forschungskolleg-humanwissenschaften.de)