Programme

Dresden Forum for International Politics 2019
Participation or Polarisation?
Social media and societal peace

Haus der Kirche - Dreikönigskirche, Dresden
19-20 March 2019

Conference languages
German/English (simultaneous interpretation)

Partner

This event is part-funded from tax revenue within the budgetary framework approved by the Saxon State Parliament.
THE TOPIC

For centuries, politics at both national and international level has been about communication. However, the digital revolution is steadily changing how politicians communicate – and which political messages are conveyed. Alongside the conventional media – traditionally the “fourth estate” – a new “fifth estate” has emerged in the form of social media. They create new opportunities for participation, but they also have a polarising effect. They raise awareness and add to the diversity of opinion, but they also lend themselves to abuse for propaganda purposes and manipulation, for example by facilitating the deliberate dissemination of misinformation. With these innovative tools, influence – internal and external – can be exerted on democratic processes, such as elections, in entirely new ways. Furthermore, inflammatory exchanges on social media can heat up and prolong conflicts, thus putting not only peace but also development at risk. In addition, digital media offer opportunities but also pose particular challenges for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16, defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

What does it mean for peace within and between societies if a single tweet can trigger a local, national or even an international crisis which then erupts into real-world violence? What might a constructive response to the deliberate dissemination of misinformation and the fomenting of hate against others via social networks look like? What action can the international community take to curb hidden political manipulation across borders in social networks? And which opportunities do social media offer to promote peace and democratic processes? These and other questions will be explored at the Dresden Forum for International Politics 2019.

THE DRESDEN FORUM SERIES

The annual Dresden Forum for International Politics, launched in 2018, offers a high-level platform for discussion of current challenges in international politics. The purpose of the series is to add to the body of knowledge of global processes and to raise awareness and understanding of the diversity of standpoints. The series encourages open-ended, solution-oriented debate about the options available to national and regional governments, Members of Parliament, civil society and the business sector in fostering peaceful and sustainable development worldwide.

The Dresden Forum consists of an international symposium and a public evening event with distinguished speakers, offering the opportunity for an interested public to gain insights into current international debates and learn more about how issues are viewed in other regions of the world.
Tuesday, 19 March 2019

10.00 hrs  Registration

Chair

Ute Lange
Moderator, trainer, communication coach
i3kommunikation, Bonn

10.30 hrs  Welcome

Renate Hendricks
Chairperson of the Executive Committee
Development and Peace Foundation (sef), Bonn

10.45 hrs  Trends - your opinion needed!

SESSION I – OPENING CONVERSATION
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR PEACE - AND CONFLICT

Around the world, social media offer new opportunities for information-sharing, networking and political participation. They support democratic progress, can open the way for peaceful revolutions and contribute to international understanding. And yet the overriding impression is often that social networks are being misused in various ways in order to fuel and escalate conflicts. It is not only the extremists who make use of these platforms; politicians and individual governments also rely on trolls and bots to influence public opinion and divide societies. Do social media endanger international and societal peace? And what is their potential, on the other hand, to foster peace and development worldwide?

11.00 hrs  Conversation between Ute Lange and

Nanjala Nyabola
Writer and political analyst, Nairobi

followed by  Q & A

12.00 hrs  Lunch
SESSION II – INTERVIEW

HIDDEN MANIPULATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS – HOW DOES IT WORK?

Some groups or governments are increasingly attempting to influence elections in their own or other countries or to fuel social conflicts. But precisely how do online manipulation and misinformation work?

13.15 hrs Interview

Olga Robinson
Journalist and Disinformation Specialist
BBC Monitoring, London

SESSION III – ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

REGULATING AGAINST HIDDEN MANIPULATION?
BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Political systems are coming under growing pressure from hidden manipulation, as well as from open attacks and dissemination of fake news. Those responsible operate globally, so national solutions quickly reach their limits. At the same time, laws and private sector regulations risk opening the way for censorship. To what extent is there scope for regulation at the national and global level, and what kind of approach is needed? Or does the solution lie in voluntary self-regulation by the platforms themselves? If so, how would this work in practice?

13.45 hrs Roundtable discussion

Renate Nikolay
Head of the Cabinet of Commissioner Vera Jourová
European Commission, Brussels

Dr Julia Pohle
Research Fellow of the Research Group Politics of Digitalisation
Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), Berlin

Raymond Serrato
Social Media Analyst
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva

14.45 hrs Plenary discussion

15.15 hrs Coffee break
SESSION IV – FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE
SOCIAL STRATEGIES AGAINST ONLINE HATE AND MISINFORMATION

Social media offers every individual or group – in theory – the opportunity to share information and promote their message to the world, and do so freely, unchecked and at virtually no cost. The social and economic potential of these media is immense. However, they can also be used freely to spread misinformation, fake news and hate, to defame other groups, foster a climate of fear and even actively promote violence (social media warfare). What opportunities exist at the societal and individual level to counter the abuse of online freedoms? What is the role of the conventional media here? How can peace within and between societies be preserved? And how can we strengthen the Internet/social media as a space for peaceful and constructive dialogue?

15.45 hrs  Online experiences - your opinion needed!
16.00 hrs  Practical solutions
            Dr Michael Kreutzer
            Project Manager DORIAN
            Fraunhofer-Institute for secure information technology, Darmstadt
            David Scheuing
            Coordinator
            LOVE-Storm: United against Hate Speech Online, Wendland
            Kate Wilkinson
            Acting chief deputy editor
            Africa Check, Johannesburg

16.45 hrs  Plenary discussion
17.15 hrs  Dinner
18.15 hrs  Group transfer (by coach) to the Frauenkirche Dresden
Free and fair elections are a constitutive element of any modern democracy and are essential for sustainable development. But what does “free and fair” mean in the social media age? Social networks are changing the way we communicate, facilitating new forms of dialogue and political participation. However, they also offer a largely unprotected platform via which to exert influence, internally and externally, on elections. As a result, the boundaries between freedom of expression and unacceptable influencing of elections are becoming more fluid. It takes just a few seconds to spread deliberate misinformation and half-truths—and this often happens anonymously, making fair and open discussion and analysis impossible.

What risks might this pose to democracies and peace within and between societies? How should state and society respond? What can we do to protect ourselves from manipulation while continuing to utilise the positive benefits of social media for political communication and information-sharing? And what might an ethically responsible social media strategy look like?

Chair
Alexandra Gerlach
Freelance Journalist, Meissen

19.00 hrs Musical prelude
19.10 hrs Welcome
Reverend Sebastian Feydt
Chair of the Managing Board, Frauenkirche Foundation, Dresden

Dr Maria Flachsbarth
Parliamentary State Secretary
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Bonn
Member of the Board of Trustees, Development and Peace Foundation (sef), Bonn

19.20 hrs Opening speech
Michael Kretschmer
Prime Minister of the Free State of Saxony, Dresden
Deputy Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef), Bonn

19.30 hrs Keynote
Laura Chinchilla
Chair of the Kofi Annan Commission on Elections and Democracy in the Digital Age
Vice-President of the Club of Madrid and former President of Costa Rica

19.50 hrs Panel discussion
Laura Chinchilla
Renate Nikolay
Head of the Cabinet of Commissioner Vera Jourová
European Commission, Brussels

Nanjala Nyabola
Writer and political analyst, Nairobi

20.45 hrs Musical farewell – Reception hosted by the Prime Minister of Saxony
Wednesday, 20 March 2019

09.00 hrs Registration

Chair

Ute Lange
Moderator, trainer, communication coach
i3kommunikation, Bonn

SESSION V: PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS
SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY AGAINST MANIPULATION – EDUCATION AS THE KEY

It is becoming apparent that in the interests of open and peaceful societies and sustainable development, the ability to evaluate information must take much higher priority. In light of the above, differentiating between entertainment, information or deliberate misinformation and manipulation is becoming increasingly important. Social media literacy should therefore feature prominently on the curriculum in school and non-school education worldwide. This session will look at practical examples of projects which support critical analysis of information. Which approaches currently exist at local, national and international level – and what can be done to create synergies between them?

9.15 hrs Interview

Uwe Schmidt
Director
Gerda-Taro-School, Leipzig

Jan Hünicke
Head of the Parents’ Council
Gerda-Taro-School, Leipzig

9.30 hrs Roundtable discussion

Dr Lutz Kinkel
Managing Director
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Leipzig

Tamar Kintsurashvili
Executive Director
Media Development Foundation, Tbilisi

Uwe Schmidt

XU Jing
Consultant
Section for Media Development and Society
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Paris

10:30 hrs Plenary discussion

11:00 hrs Coffee break with light refreshment
SESSION VI: INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION
SOCIAL MEDIA – A PEACEBUILDING TOOL?

Social media are being misused to an ever-increasing extent by radical groups in conflict and post-conflict settings. One aspect which is easily overlooked, however, is that they also offer great potential for peacebuilding. They are particularly suitable for reaching out to children and young people: here, social media can offer a fresh perspective and enable youth and marginalised groups to become actively engaged and draw attention to their concerns. This session will look at examples of how digital media can be used not only as a means of fuelling conflicts but also as a peacebuilding tool. How can social networks be used strategically to build peace?

11.45 hrs Interviews and discussion

Ronny Edry
Co-Founder
PeaceFactory, Tel Aviv

Stephen Kovats
Co-Founder and Project Manager
r0g_agency, Berlin

Eva Yayi Mawa Upele
Co-Founder and Executive Director
GoGirlsICT, Juba

12.30 hrs Plenary discussion

13.15 hrs Final trends - your opinion needed!

Farewell

Dr Michèle Roth
Director
Development and Peace Foundation (sef), Bonn