



Mail	student-forum@gedg.org
Tel	+49 (0) 3643 / 211 46 81
Post	Graben 1, 99423 Weimar

Weimar, 15.07.24

POLARISATION AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

*2nd International Student Forum on Future Democracy at
Wartburg Castle in Eisenach/Thuringia from 14-19 October 2024*

WHAT IS THE CONCERN?

Conflicts are not a stress test for the political in modern democracies, but its elixir of life. This position is prominent in political science and philosophy. It does not focus on finding consensus and common ground, but on difference and debate. However, if conflicts turn into unbridgeable rifts or enmities, then political organisation and democracy are threatened.

The '**polarised society**' has become a common phrase that indicates that such unbridgeable divides have formed in Europe and globally. In times of global crises (Russian attack on Ukraine, the gas and food crisis, the Gaza war, the coronavirus pandemic, the climate crisis, increasing migration, etc.), it seems that not only suffering and dissatisfaction are accumulating, but political polarisation is also developing. Fake News and echo chambers in social media further reinforce these tendencies.

But when has the point been reached where polarisation can no longer be coped by democratic means?

When does productive political conflict turn into destructive enmity?

And how much agreement does a pluralistic society need in order to be capable of democracy?

WHAT TO DO?

In global history, democracies have been fought for, established, shaped, reformed, defended, lost and fought for again. From a theoretical perspective democracy is the form of coexistence whose formation never comes to an end. For this reason, democracy is predestined to recognise and correct its own deficiencies – it is an open project. However, due to its changeability, it is also incapable of safeguarding itself against anti-democratic tendencies – which is why it is also a project at risk.



We at the Society for the Study of the History of Democracy (GEDG) believe that the **participation** of as many citizens as possible in the political process is the best way to continuously shape democracies and thus make them fit for future.

We believe that **young people** in particular should be more involved in political debate and shaping process.

Furthermore, politics already takes place in many transnational institutions today; the future of democracy must therefore be thought of and shaped at least on a **European**, if not global, scale.

And it must be conceived and practised in **democratic forums** from the outset.

THE FORUM

We have created such an International Forum, which takes place every year in October at Wartburg Castle in Eisenach/Thuringia. Last year, ten young people from all over the world met in Eisenach to discuss the future of democracies in Europe and globally, identify scopes for action and capture their ideas in a joint declaration.

An **alumni network** has emerged from the Student Forum 2023, which is involved in organising the content of this year's Student Forum. This network will grow from year to year and will also be active outside of the annual Forum.

This year, the **2nd International Student Forum** will take place in Eisenach with 25 students. Intensive discussions on the status and future of democracies in Europe and globally will be held under the overarching theme of polarisation chosen by the alumni.

What does the term polarisation mean and is it useful as a tool for analysing politics and society?

How and where do you experience polarisation in your home countries and places?

How can and should democracies respond appropriately to this phenomenon?



ARE YOU INTERESTED?

You are studying at a European university (permanent or as a semester abroad)? You are concerned about how our societies will organise coexistence in the future? Human dignity, freedom and equal participation of all people in politics are important to you and you enjoy getting together with people from other countries? You are willing to learn about the history and present of democracy in your country and share your insights and knowledge with the other participants?

WHAT WE OFFER...

We offer you a Forum in which you can discuss your experiences and thoughts on the future of democracy with other young people. Together with experts, you have the opportunity to study specific phenomena of polarisation in different regions of the world and discuss the capability of different democratic instruments. At the end of the Forum, you have the chance to contribute to the drafting of the joint declaration. And when the Forum is over, you can start to get involved in the long-term alumni network.

We will cover your travel costs, accommodation and daily meals.

AND NOW?

Send a one-page letter of motivation in English and a short CV to student-forum@gedg.org. The deadline for applications is **31 August**. We look forward to hearing from you!

The Student Forum for Future Democracy is a project of the Society for the Study of the History of Democracy (GEDG), in cooperation with the city of Eisenach, the Wartburg Foundation Eisenach and the Friedrich Schiller University Jena.