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Forum 2000: democracies must prove their determination to defend freedom

The twenty-eighth edition of the Forum 2000 international conference entitled *Proving Democracy's Resolve and Resilience*, which was attended by hundreds of prominent world personalities, ended today. Almost seven dozen discussions and workshops on the topic of democracy and human rights took place in the Prague Congress Center from October 13 to 15, 2024. The conference was attended by the Czech President **Petr Pavel**, the leader of the Russian opposition **Vladimir Kara-Murza**, the Speaker of the Czech Parliament **Markéta Pekarová Adamová**, First Deputy Chair of Verkhovna Rada **Oleksandr Korniyenko**, Ukrainian MP **Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze**, former Polish president and Solidarity leader **Lech Walesa**, foreign minister of the Czech Republic **Jan Lipavský** and more than 700 guests from 105 countries around the world.

The opening ceremony of the conference took place on Sunday evening. Taiwanese ex-president **Chai Jing-wen** arrived and was welcomed by Senate President **Miloš Vystrčil**. The first to speak was a critic of the Russian regime, **Vladimir Kara-Murza**, who received the [*Forum 2000 International Award for Courage and Responsibility*](#) last year. He could not accept the award at the time as he was in prison, like roughly 1,300 political opponents of Putin's regime. This year, the *Forum 2000 International Prize for Courage and Responsibility* was awarded to imprisoned Venezuelan lawyer **Rocío San Miguel**. The Venezuelan human rights activist **Tamara Suju** accepted the award on her behalf. "After eight months, this courageous woman is behind bars, which proves how dangerous the Venezuelan regime considers her thoughts and activities," said Miloš Vystrčil in the address of the laureate. American historian and columnist **Walter Russell Mead** also spoke during the evening and said, among other things, that: "Not since the 1940s has democracy been in this much threat – and not since the 1930s has the world been this close to world power conflict."

On Monday, the working part of the conference began and the opening panel discussion was opened by the director of the Forum 2000 Foundation **Jakub Klepal**, "For almost three decades, Forum 2000 has served as a platform for human rights defenders from around the world. Protecting democracy is not an easy task. We need strong institutions and strong government organization," declared Czech President **Petr Pavel** in his opening remarks and recalled that: „We still do not realize that the world had changed to a new phase where on the one hand we have countries that prefer rules and other countries which believe that right comes from might.“ Former Taiwanese President **Tsai Jing-wen** also spoke at the conference on Monday morning, expressing her belief that: „Yet there are people still on that difficult path to freedom. Now that I'm standing here with you all, I wish to tell you that I feel even more confident being united and keeping our belief in the values of democracy“.

On Monday afternoon and during Tuesday, the conference continued with dozens of other discussions devoted to, for example, the challenges and opportunities that AI and other technological advances represent for democracy; security tensions in the Indo-Pacific region; and the perspectives of democratic governance in Africa and Latin America. Discussions also focused on the current situation in Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Slovakia and Venezuela, as well as



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European perspectives in the Western Balkans. The topics of the conference also included disinformation campaigns, populism, radicalization, and the role of independent media in declining democracies.

During the final panel discussion dedicated to the current wave of populism and authoritarianism, the leader of the Venezuelan opposition, **María Corina Machado**, greeted the conference participants remotely. A member of the US House of Representatives, **Nancy Pelosi**, also sent her contribution: *“Each year this important Forum 2000 convenes many respected champions of freedom and human rights coming together in Prague to discuss the most pressing issues facing the world. When the history books are written, the central story of our time will be the battle between democracy and autocracy, and we must prove democracy’s resolve and resilience.”*

Recordings of selected panel discussions will be accessible to the public on the official website of the Forum 2000 Foundation, where "5 BIG IDEAS" summarizing the main topics of this year's conference will also be published.

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