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DISCUSSION #5
MAY 13

COVID 19

LIBERAL VIEWS AND RESPONSES FROM DEMOCRACIES



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WEDNESDAY WEBINAR SERIES BY CIVIC IDEA
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FNF — SOUTH CAUCASUS

APRIL - MAY' 2020

May 13, 12:00 Tbilisi Local Time

Join our Zoom Webinar Live

COVID19: LIBERAL VIEWS AND RESPONSES WORLDWIDE HOW TO LIVE WITH A BIG NEIGHBOR



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Member of the Saeima, Latvia



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

South Caucasus



DISCUSSION #5

NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES BROUGHT BY COVID-19: HOW TO LIVE WITH A BIG NEIGHBOR?

SPEAKERS:

Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven -

Russia and Central Asia Programmes of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Russia

Giorgi Kanashvili-

Lelo for Georgia

Mr Ahmad Alili-

Head of Caucasus Policy Analysis Center (CPAC), Azerbaijan

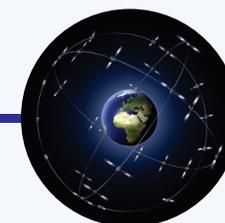
Inese Voika-

Member of the Saeima, Latvia

MODERATOR:

Tinatin Khidasheli

Chair, Civic IDEA, Former MP & MOD, Georgia



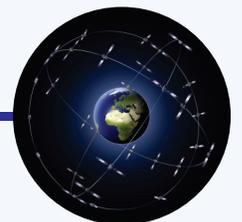
In today's webinar, we held the discussion about Russia and its neighborhood during and after the pandemic, whether the current situation changed the general geopolitical outlook of the region and whether Russia' foreign and domestic policies have transformed in this period of global crisis.

"The main idea of the panel is to understand how to live and how to cope with the big neighbor in times of crisis when we all know that the domestic affairs are becoming problematic, if the rating are falling down, then president Putin normally tries to influence domestic policies maintaining his international actions outside Russia"- asks panel moderator Tinatin Khidasheli, Chairperson of Civic IDEA.

Russia has been badly treating its internal healthcare crisis, while sending aid to foreign countries with the aim of its self-promotion just like China. Moreover, Russian government has kept influencing domestic policies of the post-soviet states. Therefore, it gets crucial for the countries neighboring Russia, to maintain their western-oriented foreign policies and to cope with the crisis alongside the strong support coming from their democratic allies. Hence, regional perspectives with the EU, as well as with the Eastern and South Eastern partners have to be preserved and strengthened.

HOW TO LIVE WITH A BIG NEIGHBOR?

Instead of moving directly to the discussion of Latvia-Russia relations, first, we will ana-

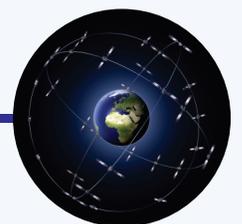


lyze the internal situation in the Baltic state and its crisis management successes. Meanwhile, Latvia is the member of the European Union, their policies are intertwined. Since the emergence of the COVID-19, Latvia was fortunate to form the right team of medical experts and the right strategies to tackle the crisis. Moreover, Latvian society has shown an exceptional sense of responsibility while obeying the rules enforced during the lockdown. Such a high sense of responsibility allowed for softer policies. Their model was similar to the Sweden where as discussed during our 15th of April Webinar they did not impose the heavy restrictions on businesses and travel.

Different from rest of the EU, in Latvia, most of the shopping was functional during the work-days, people were allowed to move across the country and their international borders remained open until.

“The strategy of Latvia was to test, detect and isolate the COVID-19 virus and to do it meticulously. The strategy of the government was to listen to medical experts. We are lucky to have very experienced experts with worldwide experience; our main epidemiologists have in fact worked in some African countries where there were the outbreaks of the different virus. They were looking at the countries that tackle the virus best, like Taiwan, Hong-Kong and South Korea and they were very strategic, since it all is about the strategic use of the tests”-

Says Inese Voika, Member of Latvian Seimas.



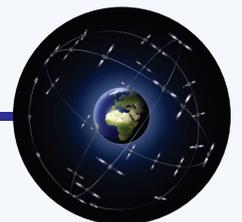
Along to addressing the health-care issues of the crisis, from the very early days of pandemic, government fully shifted its attention on setting the strategies for the reduction of post-pandemic economic challenges and for finding effective methods to further functioning of law enforcement and educational institutions.

As for the Latvian parliament, they have never stopped working. Committee work was mainly performed online, and their sessions in a semi-online format. Pandemics helped Latvia to speed up the process of moving to the e-parliament and e-voting system. "Our parliament is conservative, we are modern country, but parliament still has some very old procedures and likes to keep the tradition going. We have 100 years old constitution and it will take us at least 5 years to completely move to e-parliament"- explains Inese Voika. The COVID-19 crisis boosted digitalization process and evidently, certain e-services are already available in Latvia.

Regardless the crisis, Latvia has become the victim of the Kremlin-adopted hybrid tools and Russia kept constantly meddling around the EU airspace displaying that they still possess the power and retain to be a threat to the EU nations.

"Just a week ago, the NATO planes had to again be up in the air, because the Russian planes were flying very close to the border of the EU in the Baltic Sea"-

Inese Voika.

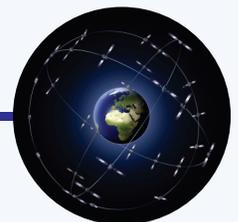


Another important issue is associated with the information warfare also becoming a dangerous tool in Russian hands. Several years ago, the European Union initiated a task force to bump in Russian disinformation. However, Brussels saw the real disinformation threat later than the Eastern European members of the Union since they were more experienced in relations with Moscow. NATO has also taken fake news containment measures and established the centers for excellence in the Baltic states.

Inese Voika tells us, that “the very interesting concept that goes deeper than the disinformation and that they are now working on is the “information-laundering” that how do you launder information that is fake into a real one... and how do you influence the societies with this”. Russian propaganda and disinformation mechanisms are exceptionally effective in Latvia, because of its Russian-speaking population and the Russian media (including their television) is freely broadcasted in here.

RUSSIA AND ITS CAUCASIAN NEIGHBORS

Newspapers, independent reporters and experts all over the world claim that there is a very high probability of numbers being hidden by Russian authorities. Based on the NY times investigation, there are up to 71% less reported infected cases in Russia, which reveals their data to be falsified.¹ The same goes with the number of death cases, since the emergence of the coronavirus, some people were classified as dying from different disease despite having the COVID-19. While pretending to be managing crisis effectively and sending the aid abroad, they have been facing many internal problems during the pandemic.



No miracle, that they have turned their propaganda apparatus to work against the Europe and the United States and henceforth respond the accusations coming from the west over the coronavirus outbreak.

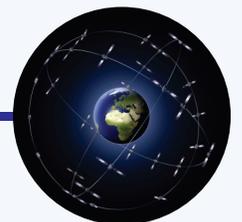
“Three weeks ago, in our second panel, we had a Russian participant, Andrey Pivovarov who was talking about the troubles with the hospitals, problems with delivering the services, delays in procedures... Is there any difference now? What is the actual mood in Moscow or the rest of it?”-

Tinatin Khidasheli.

Indeed, Kremlin has used the virus outbreak for its own PR campaign, while sending the planes with the medical equipment to Italy and the US, as well as providing limited number of tests to its neighbors. The ignorance of its internal healthcare crisis caused the spread of the COVID-19 within the Russian government.

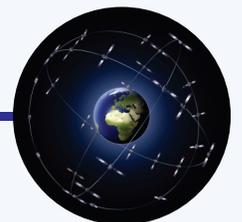
“The first reaction was not sealing off cities, but it was to send doctors to Italy, the second one was to send the relief plane to New York to help “poor New Yorkers” when at the same time the party went on in Moscow without any interruptions meaning while the half of the world was already in full lockdown, in Moscow all restaurant were open and that of course let the spread of it. Now it really looks like Russia is again trying to be in the race with the US, which has more infected. Nevertheless, this already went to the government, as prime minister and several ministers already got COVID-19 in Russia”-

Says Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven, Head of Moscow office of the FNF.



The political agenda of the Russian government was fully focused on the celebration of the 9th of May, which is a soviet style "Victory Day" commemorating the surrender of Nazi Germany by the soviet army putting the less emphasis on the current sanitary battlefield. Together with that, Putin has already announced the release of the first phase of the pandemic in Russia, while the data shows the totally opposite. Hereby, as mentioned above, the real statistics hidden by the country might illustrate even worse results. Nonetheless, he puts the blame on the governors for all the negligence. "The foreign policy agenda was more focused on the end of the WW2 and how the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact might be reinterpreted in certain places, while in reality it is interpreted in Russia...Nevertheless on Monday, Vladimir Putin announced the end of the enforced holidays and now he introduced some sort of federalism he has crushed over the recent years, where he basically makes the governance responsible for the irresponsibility on COVID-19 responses. So he announces the positive news, while the negative news what is to deal with the lockdown and so on, is left to governance"- explains Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven.

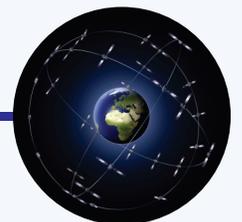
The president Putin was not happy himself about the virus, since his plans concerning the referendum associated with the constitutional changes to prolong his term have been delayed. Furthermore, it is easily predictable that the economic problems will hit Russia hardly. "The economic problems that Russia already had even before the Crimea, but more visibly over the last years are of course even worse now. There are still some reserves in the state budget that allow them to release on funds to help small and medium-size enterprises, but it is also clear that it is only to keep the unemployment low and not to help structurally the



economy"- explains Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven. "The prices on oil and gas are dropping down and the economic situation in Russia is not very good obviously"- added Giorgi Kanashvili.

The economic situation in Russia will automatically affect its neighbors and other economies nearby, depending on the level of their dependency on Russian products and trade. Overall, the misconduct of the policies within Russia, causes a real discontent among its population, especially those who are left without any income during the coronavirus crisis. "Last week, there was the voting held in "Novaya Gazeta" and its readers had to vote, which of the opposition civil society activists nominated by different organizations would get in the top 5 to awarded with Boris Nemtsov's award and it was very clear that there was big manipulation linked to the nervousity in internal politics, because one of the people who were voted high was a lady who was a political prisoner for being involved in the demonstrations in Ingushetia. The voting up seems to be from Chechen sources...The same problem is that many webinars and online conferences these days, specifically when they are organized by independent people, by liberal politicians or parties (i.e. it happened to labloko) are hacked by hackers"- informed us Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven. These endeavors are demonstrating the big alarm and anxiety planted both within the Russian population and government institutions, as the political situation is being generally destabilized.

Actually, president Putin's ratings are going down and during the current chaotic pande-



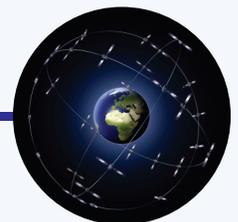
mic situation, his ratings are the lowest.² We can notice it also in his speeches, as he does not seem as confident as he was before the crisis. “For 20 years, it is now, during COVID-19 responses, that his rating is the lowest. So, he is derogating his power to the regions in search for escape goats. At the same time not giving any financial resources or other means for tackling the problems there, basically his move is determined for governors ultimate failure. One could say that he is looking for the scapegoats to put the blame on and come out of this crisis as the one who finally found the solution and saved the country”-
-essed Tinatin Khidasheli, analyzing data from Russian pollster agency Levanda Center.

“Last peak of his popularity was during the Syrian adventure, then during Crimea there was another peak, but after that it is going down... Oil prices, Gas prices will have economic impacts, plus the COVID...”-

says Giorgi Kanashvili, lead researcher at Civic IDEA.

The main question here is whether his approach and the decline in ratings will affect its neighbors and whether he is going to compensate his internal failures with external actions directed against the post-soviet sphere. Below we will review the cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia and the methods used by Kremlin to interfere in their domestic politics.

Ahmad Alili, Head of Caucasus Policy Analysis Center in Azerbaijan, says that COVID-19 crisis coincided with the serious changes in Azerbaijan. In February 2020 they held the parliamentary elections the result of which has triggered protests in the society and the pandemic emerged right during these tensions between the executive officials and the

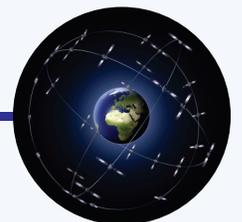


population. Azerbaijan has treated the virus the same way as Georgians and Armenians. Considering the fact that the first infected citizens imported the virus from Iran, the government had to think about how to close border with the latter, but keep it open with Nakhichevan autonomous exclave which could have been easily isolated in case Iran would have also locked the border. Civil society acted responsible also in Azerbaijan and no protests against stay home policies were introduced. However, they have been heavily affected by the Russian disinformation campaigns claiming that in reality there is no coronavirus and all is done on purpose, creating certain difficulties to the government and it's functioning.

"Everybody agreed that they had to stay home and follow the rules imposed by the government. But there were rules enforced by the parliament blocking certain rumors in social networks. Sometimes, there was some disinformation coming especially from Russian sources that there is no virus, it is all fake and that there will be spread of disinfections in the air by helicopters, so this kind of news in the social media created a lot of problems for the government"

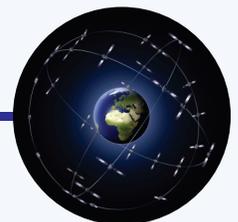
-says Ahmad Alili.

These circumstances pushed the authorities to impose certain restrictions on media. In overall, the internal challenges, like the arrest of the officials, public protests and state security service operations outweighed the coronavirus outbreak and henceforth, Azerbaijan is currently experiencing the second wave of the pandemic.



As for Georgia, willing for normalization of relations with Kremlin especially in a post-Saakashvili period, the challenges did not minimize. All the issues of the occupation, coupled with cyberattacks and information warfare from Russia are still present. "We are still living in a context of "prolong normalization" which means that the normalization of Russia-Georgia relations has been announced with the coming of Georgian Dream party into power... The notion of post-Saakashvili period was linked to the high demand of the Georgian society to normalize those relations"- explains Giorgi Kanashvili. Nowadays, Georgia's main foreign policy goal is to maintain peace, thus avoid war with Russia while simultaneously engaging with the occupied regions. The latter will be difficult though, because Russia keeps blocking all the contact between Georgians and the people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Besides, the vision of its national project is directed towards its integration to the West.

Despite the current global challenges, Russia carried on the illegal borderization of Tskhinvali region, putting pressure on Georgia. "I would say that is one of the very good instruments of hybrid war with Georgia, all the time underlining that nobody will help you and we will do whatever we like to do, and this feeling of not having enough power or international support to somehow stop the process"- Giorgi Kanashvili. In spite of these unlawful processes, the economic relations between these two countries have been actively increased, making Russia as a 2nd trade partner of Georgia and it is becoming dependent on Russian economy.



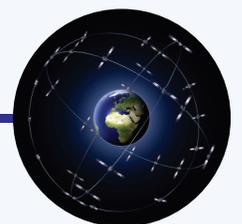
“The virus is entering in aggressive phase in South Ossetia... Now they have couple of dozens of cases starting from the last week...The problem is that South Ossetia refuses to give the full picture to disclose the entire information, we do not really know what is going on...If the outbreak will be big in South Ossetia, there is a chance that it might spread in the neighboring villages and then from there to the rest of Georgia... So that is another problem we are facing together with borderization, kidnapping people as it was happening always for all this time and also, we are experiencing cyberattacks during the COVID-19 on the territory of Georgia”-

-adds Tinatin Khidasheli.

From everything listed above, we can deduce that despite all the domestic troubles that Russia currently faces, it still has time for its illegal activities across the region, creating problems to its neighbors just the same way as it did before the coronavirus outbreak.

RUSSIA'S REPUTATION GAME

Russia is using the pandemic to play a big reputational game on the international arena. Through the self-promotional strategies, while showing the sentiments to other countries, Kremlin might be trying to resuscitate the old idea of the renewed Soviet Union. Another matter of concern is Moscow's humanitarian aid delivered to Central Asia and the Caucasus, which is sometimes delivered indirectly by Russian-based individuals. “Last month

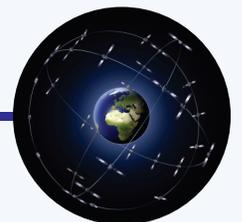


there were small number of test kits sent to all of the countries to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Few days ago, there was information about Azeri-origin Russian millionaire sending ambulance cars to Baku. It might have seemed quite normal if those people who were silent before are quite active and are sending medical equipment now... So, we should take a deep look at it and hope that there is no political cost attached to it"- Ahmad Alili. We have seen the same thing happening also in Central Asia- Usmanov contributed to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Therefore, we need to keep an eye on Russian humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries since they might carry no "good will" in a long term.

RUSSO - CHINESE SUPER POWER GAME DURING PANDEMICS

Nowadays, with the emergence of the pandemic, all the attention has been concentrated on China and its actions.

"Especially in terms of the COVID-19 disinformation and propaganda war, the World talks more about China rather than about Russia and president Putin could have got the feeling that they are climbing down on this international agenda of information warfare. European Union, the United States, the European leaders talk more and more about China spreading disinformation, China fighting the information war, China not being transparent and you do not really hear much about Russia anymore. Is there any truth to that? Or is it just me who got this feeling?"
-Tinatin Khidasheli.

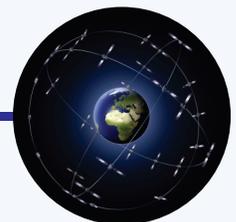


It is Putin's first priority to keep power within Russia through taking all measures of disinformation and control of media internally. Thus, the majority of the money goes into Russia itself. The second priority is to create a clear sphere of Russian influence that nobody would interfere in, as we have already mentioned above, the so-called second Soviet Union.

"It is like a clinging to the power in the direct neighborhood... We have to balance, not to follow the logic that we are just in an information war "we against them" and we spread our information, they spread theirs and we have to stop them. But actually, we struggle for an open society, for the truth that can come through a variety of media that is not... In a way we have to tolerate even some conspiracy theory that has been developed by some people who want to spread disinformation, in order to keep our society strong and open"-

Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven.

Some experts believe that the coronavirus outbreak has negatively reflected on the reputation of populists. "This crisis has actually turned off the populists, because you can see the reality in so many different ways even if you try to hide the real numbers. It has happened in local politics, because if the things are done then the populists do not really have a voice..." - Inese Voika. However, there have been some innovations introduced in Russian propaganda that still keep the mechanism working. In order to strengthen the argument, we can refer to the case, when Lithuania received a fake letter from the NATO.



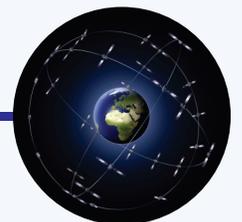
"Few weeks ago, the Lithuanian prime minister got a message, a fake letter from the head of NATO stating that the NATO will be moving out their battalions that are in Lithuania led by Germany. Of course, it is very easy to confirm that the NATO has never sent that letter, but the way this happened is a new way... So, they are exploring this and never let us forget that they are just here and the crisis will not stop them"-

Inese Voika.

The talks about China have been earlier triggered by the advancement of its digital technologies (i.e. HUAWEI and its 5G tools). Nevertheless, the crisis only contributed to this situation, as we realize China's own system of operating. This is also illustrated by the fact, that they have already contained the virus through effectively applying the necessary and well-designed strategies. While Russia did not have any attempts to seemingly act. Therefore, we can conclude that the world is more concentrated on China, in order to understand their policies and decide whether to cooperate with the emerging power or not.

"Now it is already clear that is somebody is the loser of the momentum, one of them is Russia and if we are looking at who will be weaker after the pandemic, we can already observe that it is Russia, as this situation will weaken it in economic sense, in political sense, in soft power sense. It cannot show many success stories of how to cope with the virus, while China is very effectively selling it worldwide. So, in the foreseeable future, maybe we will see rapprochement between Russia and the EU, in a context of rising China"-

Giorgi Kanashvili.



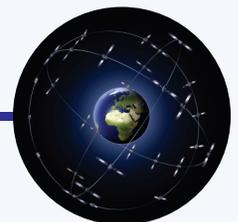
If this cooperation is implemented, then Russia's neighboring countries will be obliged to overlook their foreign policy agendas.

Currently, Russia is in a very weak situation because of the mismanagement of the crisis and Putin is aware of his falling polling which makes him even more dangerous and unpredictable. There is a high possibility, Kremlin will eager to broaden cooperation with Beijing.

“When it comes to China, I think exactly in this situation Russia has all interests to make a stronger bond with China, because in a way they already copy a number of things from the Chinese experience...When we look what Russian government is doing nowadays, it is very much going in that direction, how to be able to maintain the balance of the current political power without any changes, but having mild reforms... And the only big player in world politics that really likes that is China and for a good reason, because China also has the theory in Chinese political thinking that they are surrounded by the enemies... China is surrounded by the countries that the allies of the Unites States and the only big open side is Russia”-

Julius Von Freytag Loringhoven.

Indeed, they are the rivals and the biggest systems craving for straightening authoritarian and totalitarian ruling systems. Even in the international institutions like the UN, we notice how they cooperatively want to undermine the universality of human rights adopted by the international system. Hence, this systemic rivalry with liberal democratic systems will stay in global politics.



WEBINAR #1



MR. TEDO JAPARIDZE
FORMER MFA OF GEORGIA



MR. EDVINAS KERZA
VICE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE OF LITHUANIA



MR. ROMAN JANC
FORMER MOD OF SLOVENIA



MR. SEBASTIAN VAGT
PNF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS MANAGER



HEAD OF CIVIC IDEA
FORMER MOD OF GEORGIA

NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES BROUGHT BY COVID-19 AND RESPONSES BY DEMOCRACIES



15 TH OF APRIL
10:00-11:30



ALEXANDR VONDRA
MEP, FORMER MINISTER OF DEFENSE
OF CZECH REPUBLIC

WEBINAR #2



IVANNA KLYMUSH-TSINTSADE
CHAIR, PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON
UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU



KEIT PENTUS-ROSIMANNUS
MEMBER OF ESTONIAN PARLIAMENT,
FORMER ESTONIAN MFA



KERSTIN LUNDGREN
DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE RIKSDAG



GIORGI KANKASHVILI
SENIOR POLICY ADVISER AT CIVIC IDEA

ARE RUSSIA AND CHINA CAPITALIZING ON COVID 19 CRISIS ?

22 APRIL, TBILISI 12:00 LOCAL TIME

LANGUAGE - ENGLISH



EMIL KIRIAS
FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF
LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL



TINATIN KHIDASHELI
HEAD OF CIVIC IDEA
FORMER GEORGIAN MOD



ANDREY PIVOVAROV,
OPEN RUSSIA

WEBINAR #3



FILIP LIRAN
SINOLOGIST, RESEARCHER AT SINOOPSIS,
PRAGUE



EKA AKBAR
DEAN OF SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE
AT CAUCASUS UNIVERSITY, GEORGIA



MARTIN HOLC
DIRECTOR OF SINOOPSIS.CZ



FRANK-JOACHIM RÖDELEMENT,
EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
DIRECTOR, ASIA AND CHINA PROGRAMME

WEBINAR #3

COVID 19 - Responses from Democracies
France, Germany. What about China?

29TH OF APRIL,
AT 12:00 TBILISI TIME



TINATIN KHIDASHELI
HEAD OF CIVIC IDEA
FORMER MOD OF GEORGIA



INA KRISTEN TATLOU
SENIOR FELLOW, BERLIN COUNCIL
ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, BERLIN

WEBINAR #4

May 6, 18:00 Tbilisi Local Time

Join our Zoom Webinar Live

COVID19: LIBERAL VIEWS AND RESPONSES WORLDWIDE UK / US RESPONSES



TINATIN KHIDASHELI

Chair, CIVIC IDEA, Former MP
& MOD, Georgia



AMBASSADOR
TEDO JAFARIDZE

Former MP & MFA, Georgia



AMBASSADOR
JOHN HERBST

Eurasia Center Director, at
Atlantic Council



LIEUTENANT GENERAL
BEN HODGES

Former Commander of US Army Europe,
Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at
CEPA



DR. NEIL MELVIN

Director of International
Security Studies at RUSI



JAMIE KIRCHICK

Visiting fellow in the Center
on the United States and
Europe, at Brookings



HEATHER CONLEY

Senior Vice President for
Europe, Eurasia, and the
Arctic, at CSIS



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION For Freedom.
South Caucasus



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HELD ON 15TH, 22ND AND 29TH
OF APRIL AND 6TH OF MAY. FOR FULL
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TUNE IN ON A MAY 20TH AT 12:00, FOR THE III WEBINAR ON RESPONSES FROM DEMOCRACIES, WITH MORE SPEAKERS AND INTERESTING DISCUSSION

May 20, 12:00 Tbilisi Local Time

Join our Zoom Webinar Live

COVID19: LIBERAL VIEWS AND RESPONSES WORLDWIDE RESPONSES FROM EUROPEAN UNION



TINATIN KHIDASHELI

Chair, Civic IDEA, Former MP
& MOD, Georgia



DAVID USUPASHVILI

Lelo Georgia; former
Chapman of the Parliament
of Georgia



TORSTEN HERBST

member of the German
Federal
Parliament (Bundestag), FDP



NAD'A KOVALCIKOVA

Program Manager at the Alliance for Securing
Democracy (ASD), at GMF, Brussels.



DR. MIKA AALTOLA

Director of the Finnish Institute
of International Affairs



FATMA CAREN YAZGAN

Ambassador of Turkey to
Georgia



HANS VAN BALEN

former president of ALDE



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