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Organized by the Digital Enlightenment Forum, introduced and moderated by
Dr Lieve Fransen

'We are living through a multitude of global crises that might be a turning point for society—and the choices that we make will deeply shape and transform our collective future.

'The way that we use, abuse or regulate our technologies in this process will indicate if we are to go further towards putting in place totalitarian regimes, or towards reinforcing our democratic processes.'

Keynote speaker:
Martin Wolf, Chief Economic Commentator, Financial Times
Democracy Will Fail If We Do Not Think Like Citizens

This crisis started way before COVID-19 and had created a *democratic depression*. What caused this are the inevitabilities of economic forces such as de-industrialisation and globalisation, but also some deliberate policy choices of rent extraction, creating a large population feeling abandoned (a precariat[1]). This is a poor basis of stable families and communities—who increasingly give their support to autocratic leaders. Decision makers did not deal with this at all, while during the financial crisis citizens experienced how banks were saved but not the people. The financial crisis and some policy choices left little room of manoeuvre to support the populations and confront the climate crisis.

What can be done about it? We need to widely support installing the Four Freedoms (1941) as articulated by the most influential democratic politician of the 20th century, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and to update and rectify them where needed. Until today, the global community has grossly failed to do so, but cannot fail doing this anymore.

We were very bad in not seeing this [democratic depression] coming, because we were not sufficiently aware of the fragility of the legitimacy of the underpinnings of our system.

If we make the same mistakes with the transition caused by the digital transformation of our economies and societies, as our great-grandparents did after the major transformation of the 19th century that was followed by a communist revolution and two world wars, it will be the end of our society. *We have to find another way.*

[We should be] very concerned about the powers of the [global technology] platforms and the meaning of national sovereignty as those companies now know so much more about citizens. *What does 'national sovereignty' mean in an era when firms yield more power over citizens then their elected governments?*

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[1] A social class formed by people suffering from precarity: a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological welfare.

Most important question for us now is how the world is to regulate the companies of two countries [USA and CHINA] operating globally? Only the Chinees have been able to do this, but we do not want to follow their methods. This is a major geopolitical problem *with major implications for sovereignty.*

Speaker:
Tom Gerald Daly
Democracy and COVID-19 Worldwide: Digital Threats and Solutions

The democratic and the digital are becoming ever more inextricable. This symbiosis can, and has, led to increase in citizen surveillance without consent, a rise in disinformation and the spread of conspiracy theories.

However, digital technologies are sometimes also used to reinforce the democratic process, putting power into the hands of the people, and allowing grassroots activist movements to grow and gain influence at an unprecedentedly fast pace. *Digital technologies are weaponised on both sides of the arguments.*

Elections, democratic institutions and media have been revolutionised by the heightened importance of digital communication. Digital activism could be one of the most promising outcomes of the technological shift that COVID-19 induced.

Two worlds have collided, *the totalitarian and the democratic.*

Social media companies cannot regulate themselves. Freedom is not the absence of regulation but the right kind of regulation.

Speaker:
Nuria Oliver
Lessons Learned About Participation, Privacy and Contact Tracing

In the spread of infectious disease, *human participation* is inevitable. Thus, we become both the agents and subjects of the pandemic. Yet, until today citizens have been given very little agency in contributing to its response.

Data and evidence are vital in understanding not simply how effective certain measures are in stopping the spread of COVID-19, but also how they are affecting different populations. Data and technologies are critical in a crisis; this will not happen automatically and must be guided.

As a result of the state of turmoil we are in, only 50% of people believe hospitals are safe environments, and only 32% of people believe this of schools; half of the population state they cannot self-isolate if they are to do so. Thus, the institutions that governments are trying so hard to support are becoming *less and less trusted by their citizens*.

Public administrations are not yet digital and need to be; they do not know what data are, nor how to capture data systematically while also understanding the limitations of the data. There is now a *narrow window* for public authorities to get it right and learn from this new reality. We need a Call to action for all citizens to contribute to social change that enable real progress, with the help of technologies. We also need better regulation and should invest in education and lifelong learning , we have to transform the education systems and public administrations.

Speaker:
Wieslaw Bartkowski
Towards Healthy Digital Technology

Technology is not ethically neutral. Ethics do not simply come into play depending on use: *technology carries the values of its creator*. These values are mostly driven by corporate capitalism. These values are then embedded into the technology's operating system and, as a result, heavily impact the decisions made with the help of such technology.

Every form of digitisation can be a form of reduction. Digitisation allows for a reduction of complexity, thereby allowing us to observe and analyse far more efficiently. However, this can also mean a reduction of people's thinking to numbers and calculations and fast thinking, while losing what it is that makes us inherently human. *What is really human about us is exactly what is <u>not</u> in technologies - and this is the value we need to protect.*

Democratise using a bottom-up approach to produce the technologies and bring artists and creative citizens on board in the process. [Give] *Power to the people that think differently.*

Speaker:
Seda F. Gürses
Privacy by Design as Infrastructural Power

Seda played a role in developing a privacy-preserving design for contact tracing technology, called DP3T. This is the design behind Google Apple Exposure Notification (GAEN). Initially, DP3T designers assumed that governments and civil societies would have a say in the app's deployment, and all that entails.

Google and Apple became key players in the process especially when the apps became integrated into the functionality of Apple's operating system and into a native Android app. This is where they leveraged their *power to build unprecedentedly direct relationships* with governments and health authorities across the world.

The dangers of *technological production* should be considered as important as its use. The phones are produced using raw materials that often cause both human and environmental harm. Factory working conditions and raw material extraction techniques contribute towards human and environmental exploitation. *Thus, whose health are we promoting?* What claims to democracy and citizenship can we make when this means our citizenship comes at the cost of others' lives?

Again, it is imperative that we do not allow tech companies to dictate democracy in terms of their corporate interests, and that we begin to reconsider the human cost of the infrastructure they propagate.