

# BLACK SEA SECURITY CONFERENCE

14th November – 16th November 2025 (Sofia, Bulgaria)

The Black Sea Security Conference is a two-day forum discussing the political and security environment in the Black Sea region. It seeks to bring more attention to the region's geostrategic importance within the broader context of European security. As such, it provides a platform to discuss the role and interests of key regional and international actors, while emphasising the Black Sea's role as a vital energy corridor and transit hub connecting Europe with the South Caucasus, Central Asia and beyond.

## BLACK SEA SECURITY CONFERENCE

Sveta Nedelya Square 5, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

## BLACK SEA SECURITY CONFERENCE

### Day 1

15 November 2025, 09:30 – 16:30 (EET)

## Programme

### 09:30 Registration & Coffee

### 10:30 Welcome & Keynote

**Opening:** Martin Kothé Regional Director East and Southeast Europe, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

**Welcome address:** Alva Finn Executive Director, European Liberal Forum (ELF)

**Keynote:** H.E. Irene Maria Plank German Ambassador to Bulgaria

### 11:00 Panel 1 – Trade & Connectivity

**Speaker:** Dr Agha Bayramov Assistant Professor, University of Groningen, Co-Founder, The Hague Research Institute

**Speaker:** Areg Kochinyan President, Research Centre on Security Policy (RCSP)

**Speaker:** Dr Mihai Sebe Head of European Studies Department, European Institute of Romania

**Speaker:** Ricardo Silvestre Senior Political Researcher and International Officer, Movimento Liberal Social

**Speaker:** Dr Teona Giuashvili Research Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE)

**Moderated by:** Maria Simeonova Head of Sofia Office, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

### 12:30 Lunch

### **13:30 Panel 2 – Migration**

**Speaker:** [Cristian David](#) Chair, Institute for Migration Policies of Romania

**Speaker:** [Dr Irina Bondarevska](#) Founder and Head, Centre for Personal and Social Transformations (CPST)

**Speaker:** [Mireia Faro Sarrats](#) Communication Officer, European Council on Foreign Relations

**Speaker:** [Prof Murat Erdogan](#) Director Mülkiye Migration Research Centre, Ankara University

**Moderated by:** [Fjona Merkaj](#) Project Officer, European Liberal Forum (ELF)

### **15:00 Coffee Break**

### **15:30 Fireside Chat– EU Enlargement**

**Speaker:** [Alva Finn](#) Executive Director, European Liberal Forum (ELF)

**Speaker:** [Julian Popov](#) Senior Fellow, Strategic Perspectives

**Moderated by:** [Amb. Gigi Gigiadze](#) Senior Fellow, Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)

### **16:30 Day 1 Closing Remarks**

## **BLACK SEA SECURITY CONFERENCE**

### **Day 2**

**16 November 2025, 09:30 – 16:30 (EET)**

## **Programme**

### **09:30 Registration & Coffee**

### **10:30 Welcome & Keynote**

**Opening:** [Shamil Shugaev](#) Policy Advisor and Senior Program Manager, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

**Welcome address:** [Oleksandra Matviichuk](#) Chairwoman, Centre for Civil Liberties (CCL)

### **11:00 Panel 1 – Security & Defence**

**Speaker:** [Amb. Batu Kutelia](#) Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute

**Speaker:** [Markus Iven](#) Strategic Analyst, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies

**Speaker:** [Prof Todor Tagarev](#) Head, Centre for Security and Defence Management

**Moderated by:** [Johanna Hans](#) Head of Unit Europe, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

### **12:30 Lunch**

### **13:30 Panel 2 – NATO & Europe's Strategic Autonomy**

**Speaker:** [Dr Hürcan Aslı Aksoy](#) Head of Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS), German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)

**Speaker:** [Dr Khrystyna Holynska](#) Policy Researcher, RAND

**Speaker:** [Lorin Stan](#) Consultant, Berlin Global Advisors

**Speaker:** [Yordan Bozhilov](#) Founder and President, Sofia Security Forum

**Moderated by:** [Shamil Shugaev](#) Policy Advisor and Senior Program Manager, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

### **15:00 Coffee Break**

### **15:30 Fireside Chat– Democracy & After Putin Era**

**Speaker:** [Alina Kharysava](#) Strategy and Analytics Expert, Office of Sviatlana Tskikhanouskaya

**Speaker:** [Henrik Bach Mortensen](#) Vice-President, Liberal International (LI)

**Moderated by:** [Zaza Bibilashvili](#) Founder, Ilia Chavchavadze Centre for European Studies and Civic Education

### **16:30 Day 2 Closing Remarks**

**Speaker:** [Shamil Shugaev](#) Policy Advisor and Senior Program Manager, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

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The event is organised by the European Liberal Forum. The event received financial support from the European Parliament. The sole liability remains with the organiser. The European Parliament is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.  
\*The full list of participants is to be confirmed

# BLACK SEA SECURITY CONFERENCE

15 November – 16 November 2025 **Sofia, Bulgaria**

## **Martin Kothé**



Martin Kothé is the Regional Director for East and Southeast Europe and Project Director for Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Greece at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF), positions he has held since 2020.

He joined FNF after ten years as Managing Director at FTI Consulting in Berlin, a US-based strategic communications consultancy. From 2004 to 2010, he served as Spokesperson to the President of Germany, Horst Köhler, and from 1999 to 2004 as Communications Director and Spokesperson for the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which is affiliated with the FNF.

## **Alva Finn**



Ailbhe (Alva) Finn is the Executive Director of the European Liberal Forum (ELF). Originally from Ireland, she is a passionate leader with more than twelve years of experience in policy and advocacy at the EU, UN, and national levels. Before joining ELF, Alva was Secretary General of Social Platform.

She has also held roles with Save the Children, Mental Health Europe, and the Irish Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, and has worked as a consultant to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health.

## H.E. Irene Maria Plank



H.E. Irene Maria Plank is the Ambassador of Germany to Bulgaria. She began her career as a lawyer in Frankfurt and as a consultant at the Federal Cartel Office in 1985, joining the Foreign Service in 1989. She has held demanding postings at the Embassy in Rabat, Morocco (1991–1994), the Consulate General in Seattle (1996–1999), and the Embassy in Kinshasa, Congo (2001–2002), and has worked in Afghanistan on police reconstruction and in Lebanon as Deputy Head of Mission and Chargée d’Affaires (2006–2009).

Her NATO experience includes the German Permanent Mission in Brussels (2009) and Deputy Director of the Private Office of the NATO Secretary General (2012–2016). At the Federal Foreign Office, she oversaw humanitarian aid policy (2016–2017), business and human rights (2017–2020), and strategic communication (2020–2022). She became Germany’s Ambassador to Bulgaria in 2023.

## Dr Agha Bayramov



Dr Agha Bayramov is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations and International Organization at the University of Groningen, where he teaches courses on Energy Security and Climate Change, Political Science, History of International Relations, and International Organisation. He is also co-founder of the The Hague Research Institute for Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia (THRI).

He was a Research Fellow at the Centre for Eastern European Studies at the University of Zurich in 2022 and has delivered guest lectures at Harvard University’s Davis Center (2023) and the University of Zurich (2022).

Beyond teaching and research, he co-organised the Groningen Energy Summer School (GESS) in 2015 and 2016. Dr Bayramov's research interests include energy security, geopolitics, the Caspian Sea region, the Middle Corridor, and climate change. He has conducted extensive field research across the Caspian Sea region.

He earned his PhD and MA from the University of Groningen, and his BA from the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Turkey.

## Areg Kochinyan



Since 2022, Areg Kochinyan has served as the President of the Research Center on Security Policy (RCSP) NGO, where he leads research and policy analysis on national and regional security issues. Prior to this position, he was the Spokesperson for the Security Council of the Republic of Armenia, contributing to the development and communication of Armenia's security policy.

Mr. Kochinyan holds an academic background in History, Political Science, and Diplomacy, combining scholarly insight with practical experience in governance. He is the author of numerous articles, analytical papers, and research studies addressing international relations, security challenges, and policy development.

## Dr Mihai Sebe



Dr Mihai Sebe is a lecturer at the University of Bucharest. Head of the European Affairs Department, European Institute of Romania. Author, co-author and coordinator of numerous publications, Sebe has focused mainly on: European integration, European enlargement, regional cooperation, the impact and role that Romania has in the EU, European affairs; the history of the European idea; the impact of new technologies on politics and society, etc.

Recently, he has been very active within the Three Seas Initiative publishing academic works related to this Initiative.

He has an extensive European experience in working with various think-tanks across the EU and the candidate countries. Passionate about the shape of things to come.

## Ricardo Silvestre



Ricardo Silvestre holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Science and a Master's degree in International Relations. He is a political scientist whose work explores the intersection of democratic theory, European integration, and strategic foresight. His research primarily examines the long-term resilience of the European Union's democratic project in the context of global political and technological transformations. He has published and presented work across Europe and contributes regular opinion editorials to a leading Portuguese newspaper.

Ricardo is an Associate Fellow at the European Liberal Forum and at the European Policy Innovation Council, both Brussels-based think tanks committed to strengthening liberal democracy and innovative policymaking within the European public sphere.

## Dr Teona Giuashvili



Teona Giuashvili is David Davies of Llandinam Research Fellow in the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is a former Georgian diplomat with over eleven years of experience in multilateral diplomacy and conflict resolution, Georgia's European integration and bilateral relations with France. She served as chargée d'affaires and deputy ambassador of Georgia to France and as deputy head of the mission of Georgia to the EU.

## Maria Simeonova



Maria Simeonova is the Head of the Sofia Office at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and a PhD candidate at Sofia University, where her dissertation focuses on the EU's external action in the Black Sea region.

At ECFR, Maria works on EU foreign policy, Bulgaria's role within the EU, and developments in the Black Sea and Western Balkans.

She holds a BA in International Relations from Sofia University and an MA in European Studies: Transnational and Global Perspectives from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium. Her master's thesis examined coherence issues in the EU's external energy policy and its relations with Russia.

## Cristian David



Cristian David has an extensive experience in international affairs and security, with a focused knowledge in the Black Sea and Balkan region. He holds a PhD in Economics and he completed Postgraduate Studies in National Security.

At present he coordinates the Center for Innovation and Digital Transformation at the Romanian National Institute for Research and Development in Informatics. He also serves as adviser at the European Parliament and he acts as member of the Consultative Council related to the Department for Sustainable Development within the Romanian Government. In the non-governmental field he acts as chairman of the Board of the Romanian Institute for Migration Policies and as founding president of the Institute for Freedom and Democracy - member of the European Liberal Forum and Liberal International.

## Dr Irina Bondarevska



Dr Irina Bondarevska is an Associate Professor of Social Psychology and Psychology of Management, and a solution-focused coach. She is the Founder and Head of the NGO *Centre for Personal and Social Transformations* (Kyiv, Ukraine).

Dr Bondarevska is a Member of the Board of the 29th Research Committee (Political Psychology) of the International Political Science Association (IPSA). She is also the Founder and Coordinator of the annual conference and seminar *Political and Economic Self-Constitution* (2013–2024), and serves as Editor-in-Chief of its proceedings.

Since 2018, she has been a Member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Bulletin of Postgraduate Education: Social and Behavioural Sciences* (Ukraine). She has also served as an expert for the European Commission, evaluating MSCA projects (2020, 2021) and Horizon Europe (2025).

Dr Bondarevska is the author and co-author of numerous scientific publications in the fields of social psychology, economic psychology, organisational psychology, gender psychology, and media psychology. Her research interests include citizenship identity, citizenship activity, citizenship education, non-discriminative values, migration, and the internal and external displacement of Ukrainians.

## Mireia Faro Sarrats



Mireia Faro Sarrats is the communications officer at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Previously, she worked as a communications officer at the European Institute of the Mediterranean, a public affairs officer at the United States Consulate General in Barcelona, and in the communications department of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights in Vienna. Faro was also an intern at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna and at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.

She conducts research mainly in the areas of human rights and migration.

She holds a BA degree in journalism from the Universitat Ramon Llull – Blanquerna and an MA in human rights, democracy and globalisation, from the Open University of Catalunya.

## Prof M. Murat Erdoan



Professor M. Murat Erdoan is Director of the Mulkiye Migration Research Centre at Ankara University's Faculty of Political Science. He is a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Turkey Communication Committee, board member of Metropolis International's International Steering Committee, and President of the Research Centre on Asylum and Migration–IGAM-Academy. Previously, he held positions at the Turkish-German University in Istanbul (2017–22) and Hacettepe University in Ankara (1987–2017). He founded and headed the Migration Research Centre at both universities.

Dr. Erdoan's research interests include voluntary and forced migration, refugees, people of Turkish origin living abroad, the European Union, political cartoons, political behavior, and Turkish foreign policy. He conducts comprehensive public opinion research and has published widely. He has also carried out studies as a visiting researcher at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Humboldt University in Berlin, University of Oxford, Johns Hopkins University's American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, and the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin.

## Fjona Merkaj



Fjona Merkaj is a Project Officer at the European Liberal Forum (ELF) in Brussels, specializing in Migration. At ELF, she manages projects on EU integration and migration, provides policy support, and coordinates international conferences and events. Her expertise in migration and human rights is central to the security topics at this conference. Previously, Fjona was a Research Fellow at the University of Bologna - Ordinary Court, where she developed policy recommendations on international protection and migration issues by analyzing EU best practices. Fjona's unique background bridges EU policy analysis with the legal and human rights aspects of migration.

## Julian Popov



Julian Popov is a Senior Fellow of Strategic Perspectives. He is former Minister of the Environment of Bulgaria (2013 and 2023-24). He is a member of the European Council of Foreign Relations and member of the Advisory Board of the Energy Policy Group. Julian was the goodwill Bulgarian Ambassador for energy and climate policy, energy security adviser to the President of Bulgaria, Chairman of the Building Performance Institute Europe, Senior Fellow of the European Climate Foundation. He is the founding Vice Chancellor of the New Bulgarian University and co-founder of the Tunisian School of Politics. Julian was voted as one of the 40 most influential voices on European energy policies (N24) and also as one of the 40 most influential voices in European energy efficiency policies (N25) by EurActiv. His articles on foreign affairs and energy policy have been published by Financial Times, Project Syndicate, NS Energy Monitor, The Independent, Al Jazeera, Huffington Post, EurActive and others. He is the author of two books and co-author of the books "The European Supergrid" and "Energy and Climate Diplomacy".

## Amb Gigi Gigiadze



Ambassador Gigi Gigiadze is currently a Senior Fellow at the Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) in Tbilisi, Georgia. A career diplomat with more than 24 years of experience in foreign affairs, he has played an important role in shaping Georgia's relations with its European and regional partners. From 2014 to 2016, he served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, overseeing bilateral relations with neighbouring and European countries and cooperation with the European Union. During this period, he acted as Chief Negotiator with the EU on the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP), a key stage in Georgia's European integration process. Throughout his diplomatic career, Ambassador Gigiadze held senior positions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Head of the European Affairs Department, and served in Georgian diplomatic missions in Athens and Berlin, managing both political and consular affairs. Until March 2021, he was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Iceland, based in Copenhagen. He holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and pursued further studies in Germany, including an academic year at the University of Hamburg as a recipient of the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S. scholarship. His areas of expertise include European integration, foreign policy and diplomacy, regional cooperation, and Black Sea security.



## Shamil Shugaev

Shamil Shugaev is a Senior Program Manager and Policy Advisor at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) in the South Caucasus region. He has organised and moderated discussions focusing on security, civil society, and liberal democratic values, particularly in relation to the Black Sea region and European defense.

Shamil's work includes facilitating dialogue on the impact of civil society in promoting liberal governance and addressing emerging geopolitical threats in Europe, such as the war in Ukraine. Shamil Shugaev plays a key role in supporting liberal political movements and civil society in the region. In addition to his role in fostering civil society's influence, Shamil collaborates closely with liberal political parties and networks across Europe to build stronger frameworks for governance, ensuring the growth of liberal democratic principles in emerging democracies. He has studied Economics and Law at Georgian Technical University and the University of Trier, Germany.

## Oleksandra Matviichuk



Oleksandra Matviichuk is a human rights lawyer, head of the Center for Civil Liberties that works to defend freedom and human dignity in Ukraine and the OSCE region. She has experience in creating horizontal structures for massive involvement of people in human rights activities against attacks on rights and freedoms, as well as a multi-year practice of documenting violations during armed conflict. She is the author of a number of reports to various UN bodies, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the OSCE and the International Criminal Court.

After the beginning of Russian full-scale invasion, Matviichuk together with other partners created the 'Tribunal for Putin' initiative in order to document international crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in all regions of Ukraine, including the occupied territories.

In 2016 she received the Democracy Defender Award for "Exclusive Contribution to Promoting Democracy and Human Rights" from OSCE. In 2017 she became the first woman to participate in the Ukrainian Emerging Leaders Program of Stanford University. In 2022 Oleksandra Matviichuk was awarded with the Right Livelihood Award, the Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament and

recognized as one of the 25th influential women in the world by Financial Times. In 2022 she received the Nobel Peace Prize for the work of her organization the Center for Civil Liberties. In 2025 she received the Dutch Auschwitz Award.

## Amb Batu Kutelia



Ambassador Batu Kutelia is a Senior Fellow at the Delphi Global Research Center. He is a former Ambassador to the USA and former Head of Georgia's Foreign Intelligence Service. He is a member of the board at the Atlantic Council of Georgia and Professor at the Alte University, Tbilisi, Georgia. He was co-author and TV co-host of the Foreign Affairs talk show at the Mtavari TV in 2020-2021. He is frequent contributor to the major national and international TV, printed and online media on the issues of national and international security, Russian hybrid warfare, defense and security sector reform and policies. He was Draper Hills Summer Fellow at the Stanford University in 2022, the Next Generation Leader Fellow at the McCain Institute for International Leadership, ASU, Washington DC in 2013-14, and NATO Defense College Research Fellow in 2001, Rome, Italy.

During his 17 years of public service from 1996 to 2013, he served in numerous senior diplomatic and national security positions, including Undersecretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States of America, Canada and Mexico, First Deputy Minister of Defense (*in 2008 during the war with Russia*), Deputy Minister and other political-military positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has received awards from two Presidents of Georgia for conducting important negotiations and exceptional public service. He has been recognized by the US 111<sup>th</sup> Congress for reinforcing and advancing US-Georgia strategic partnership.

Before turning to his diplomatic and political career Mr. Kutelia studied physics and holds a PhD in physics. However, he also holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration.

## Markus Iven



Markus Iven is a Strategic Analyst at HCSS, working on grand strategy, transatlantic security and defence.

He also serves as a reserve officer at the German Military Delegation to NATO in the Strategy, Plans and Policy Branch. He spent 14 years in the German Armed Forces, most recently as an exchange officer with the Royal Netherlands Army, for which he received the Bundeswehr Silver Cross of Honour. Earlier, he deployed to Mali and Niger as an embedded war correspondent.

Markus holds an MA in Military Strategic Studies from the Netherlands Defence Academy. His thesis on US and Russian grand strategy received the Dwight D. Eisenhower Prize from the Netherlands Atlantic Association. He is an alumnus of the Clingendael Institute and Atlantik-Brücke. In 2025 he was selected as a Young Leader by the American Council on Germany and as a New Security Leader of the Warsaw Security Forum.

## Prof Todor Tagarev



Professor Todor Tagarev is a Bulgarian military expert and a long-standing member of the country's defence community. He is Head of the Centre for Security and Defence Management and Professor at the Institute of Information and Communication Technologies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where he is also a member of the Scientific Board.

His work covers cybernetics, complexity, cybersecurity, cyber defence, and crisis management, viewed mainly from an organisational and strategic perspective. He has

contributed to many national and international research projects.

Professor Tagarev served as Bulgaria's Minister of Defence in the Caretaker Government in 2013 and from 6 June 2023 to 4 April 2024 in the government of Nikolay Denkov.

## **Johanna Hans**



Johanna Hans is Head of the Unit Europe at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, where she oversees the foundation's European programmes. Previously, she gained experience as an editorial assistant at the German news agency SPIEGEL ONLINE and Manager Magazin Online and completed internships at the German Embassy in Costa Rica and the European Parliament. Johanna holds a master's degree in International Relations and International Law from the University of Kent and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the Free University of Berlin.

## **Dr Hürcan Aslı Aksoy**



Dr Hürcan Aslı Aksoy is Head of the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin. Her research focuses on Turkish domestic politics and Turkey's foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. She has a special interest on processes of democratisation and autocratisation, shifting state-society relations and gender issues in Turkey as well as the country's role as a middle power in changing geopolitical landscape. Before joining CATS, she was a research associate at the Chair of Middle Eastern Politics and Society at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. She holds a PhD and MA in Political Science from the University of Tübingen, and a BA from Bosphorus University in Istanbul.

## Dr Khrystyna Holynska



Dr Khrystyna Holynska is a policy researcher at RAND. Her research interests include foreign, defense, and security policy; Ukraine; Russia; and Eastern Europe.

Khrystyna Holynska is a policy researcher at RAND. She has a Ph.D. in policy analysis (defense and security sciences) from the RAND School of Public Policy and a Ph.D. in political science from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. She also has an M.B.A.+M.B.A.I. (business and management in artificial intelligence and data analytics) from the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE). Prior to joining RAND, she headed the defense and security policy research startup KSE StratBase and was an assistant professor of public policy and governance at KSE. Holynska was also a strategic analyst at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, where she focused on Russia's coercive behavior, nonproliferation, deterrence, the future of NATO, and geodynamics. From October 2022 to February 2023, she was a Research Associate at the Center for Global Security Research (CGSR) of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. In October 2023, she participated in the New Security Leaders Program of the Warsaw Security Forum. Khrystyna is also an Associate Professor at Kyiv School of Economics, Ukraine.

## Lorin Stan



Lorin Stan is a Consultant at Berlin Global Advisors, where he is responsible for Government Affairs and Business Diplomacy. Before joining Berlin Global Advisors, he worked for four and a half years as an Advisor for various Members of Parliament from the Free Democratic Party (FDP) in the German Bundestag, focusing in particular on Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and the EU's Eastern Partnership countries. He is a member of the board of trustees of the German-Romanian Forum in Berlin and is responsible for organizing events.

He obtained first professional experiences through internships in the German Embassy in the Republic of Moldova, the Friedrich-Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Sofia, the European Parliament in Brussels as well as the German Bundestag. He holds an MA in European Interdisciplinary Studies from the College of Europe in Natolin, as well as a joint Bachelor's degree in Public Governance across Borders from the University of Münster and the University of Twente (Enschede).

### **Yordan Bozhilov**



Yordan Bozhilov is the founder and President of the Sofia Security Forum. He is former Deputy Minister of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria. He has been a career government official in the Ministry of Defence, holding various positions in the period between 1992 – 2013, including Head of the International Organisations and Arms Control Department, Director for International Cooperation, Deputy Director for Security and Defence Policy, and Head of the Political Cabinet of the Minister of Defence. He also served as a defense and security adviser to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Yordan Bozhilov is a lecturer at Sofia University. His papers on European defence, Black Sea security and other topics have been published in Bulgaria and abroad.

### **Alina Kharysava**



Alina Kharysava is a Political Scientist and Consultant specializing in political technologies, strategic communication and the impact of new-age media and artificial intelligence on politics. Based in Germany, she works in the Strategy and Analytics Department of the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, where she develops data-driven political strategies, narrative frameworks, and analytical tools for democratic transformation and EU–Belarus relations. Alina is a member of the European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC) and serves as the

International Secretary of the Belarusian Students' Association (BSA). Her professional interests include political campaigning, disinformation tracking, and cybersecurity as part of modern political infrastructure. She has collaborated with the German Bundestag, NATO, the Council of Europe, the European Students' Union etc.

## Henrik Bach Mortensen



Henrik Bach Mortensen has been actively engaged in international political affairs for many years. He currently serves as Vice President of Liberal International, having been elected at the organisation's 75th Anniversary Congress in Sofia in 2022. He previously served as Vice President of ALDE, where he also chaired the policy committee on EU–China relations, and was a member of the RENEW Task Force for the 2024 European Parliament elections.

He was the Chairman of the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), through which he has contributed to democracy support projects and political partnerships in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Asia, and across Europe. He also sits on the board of the Danish-Taiwanese Society.

Over the course of his career, Henrik Bach Mortensen has served as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly, participated in policy committees within the OECD, and held board-level positions in EU institutions related to education and the labour market. He has also taken part in political processes in the United States, including national conventions and primary elections.

A long-standing member of Denmark's Liberal Party (Venstre), he has held various roles including member of the party's national board, Head of the parliamentary party staff, and local councillor. He holds an MA in Economics from the University of Copenhagen and an M.Phil. in Economics from the University of Cambridge.

## Zaza Bibilashvili



Zaza Bibilashvili is the founder of the Ilia Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education, Georgia's first civil society organization modeled after European political foundations and the first non-EU member of ENoP. Recognized as one of Georgia's leading international lawyers, Zaza has extensive experience in complex cross-cultural negotiations and major regional transactions. He founded BGI, Georgia's leading law firm, and previously directed E&Y Legal in Georgia. During 2016-2018, Zaza was a Deputy Head of UNM, Georgia's largest opposition party, which he left to set up the Chavchavadze Center and work on youth engagement, disinformation and intra-party democracy. A founding member of Georgian Bar Association, Zaza has held leadership roles in various legal and business organizations, including ICC Georgia. His public service includes membership in the State Constitutional Commission and the introduction of Georgia's first Pro Bono legal initiative. Zaza is the editor-in-chief of the quarterly New Iveria magazine. Under his leadership, the Chavchavadze Center has produced documentaries on Georgia's post-Soviet history as well as on disinformation narratives linked to Soviet nostalgia. He is the author of several books and multiple publications. A frequent speaker at national and international fora, Zaza has lectured widely on memory & identity, political parties, and the art of debate. His broad expertise and leadership make him a key figure in Georgia's legal, political, and civic landscape.