

**Democracy and Information Warfare –
An International Law Perspective**

Open Call for Papers

Thomas Burri (University of St. Gallen) and Antje von Ungern-Sternberg (University of Trier) announce an international conference to be held at the University of Trier 20-21 May 2021.

Background: Democracy is increasingly under strain. Disinformation, manipulation, and leaks are chipping away at the political process and thus eroding its very foundations. Liberal democratic regimes face informational pressure from abroad. As but one example, in the 2016 US presidential elections, bots, fake news, leaks, and trolls, affected its very outcome. Many of these undertakings had been steered by Russia. The picture is yet expected to darken in times to come.

Propaganda is not new. Radio and loudspeakers shaped the Cold War. Neither would this be the first time that the prohibition to interfere in domestic affairs clashes with reality. However, what we witness today is different. The granularity is higher: Artificial intelligence fueled by big data predicts individual voters' behaviour, opening the door to targeted manipulation. Unlike before, the conduits for information to flow are private. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, though publicly accessible and transnational, are in private hands – hands not bound by public standards of fundamental rights, impartiality, fairness, and due process. Though self-commitment may be plentiful, scrutiny is sparse; 'ethics' is the talk of the town, not law. In this new private and microscopic universe, influence is wielded in the twilight. Detection and attribution are all but straightforward. Hackers leave no traces, algorithms are secret, the origins of ads obscure.

Conference: The informational influence on democracy has so far only been the subject of a domestic discourse. An international conference, to be convened at the University of Trier in Germany, from May 20 through 21, 2021, aims to broaden the discussion and bring international law into the picture. The conference focuses on informational pressure and its influence on democratic processes.

The following speakers have already committed to speak at the conference:

- Eyal Benvenisti, University of Cambridge
- Heike Krieger, Freie Universität Berlin
- Silja Vöneky, University of Freiburg

Call for papers: We now call upon scholars to consider contributing a paper to the conference. We aim to attract established scholars as well as researchers whose work on the topic is not yet out in print. Scholars may contribute a full paper or a talk. Limited travel grants are available. We are aiming for a journal special issue for the best contributions.

In answer to this call, you may wish to treat one of the following topics or any other suitably related topic:

- The principle of non-intervention and the protection of democratic opinion making
- Protection of confidential information in public international law
- Free-speech rights, disinformation, and manipulation
- Attribution of private informational influence and coercion to state actors
- Regulation of information platforms and artificial intelligence in public international law
- White and black hat hacking through the lens of public international law
- Informational warfare and the laws of conventional warfare
- Countermeasures in reaction to informational pressure.

Schedule:

1 May 2021: Final papers due. Final papers will be circulated among participants only.

20-21 May 2021: Conference in Trier.

Information required from authors: one-page abstract, one-page CV, including affiliations and main publications, indication whether full paper or talk is intended; indication of need for travel support.

Costs: no conference fees. The conference is financed by public funds. We cover accommodation and board for all participants.

Contact: Please answer the call by way of e-mail to the organizers stating the subject "Call for papers", c/o Prof. Dr. Antje von Ungern-Sternberg, lsvonungern@uni-trier.de. Please do not hesitate to contact us in case you have questions. The call is also available at <http://www.digital-law-institute.de>.