



Future Affairs Kick-Off in Berlin: German Federal Foreign Office and re:publica Discussed Current Questions About the Digital Transformation

+++ Germany's Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas and President Carlos Alvarado Quesada of the Republic of Costa Rica opened the event in the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin +++ 25 international speakers outlined the opportunities and challenges of the digital revolution +++

Berlin, 31 May 2019 – On Wednesday, May 29, 2019, the German Federal Foreign Office and re:publica, the organisers of Europe's largest internet and digital society conference, hosted their first joint event, *Future Affairs*, in Berlin. The topic of this year's kick-off event was "Digital Revolution: Resetting Global Power Politics?" More than 800 invited guests from politics, science, academia, art and civil society and around 25 speakers from 16 different countries discussed the meaning of the digital revolution for democracies and how it affects foreign and security policies. Germany's Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas and President Carlos Alvarado Quesada of the Republic of Costa Rica opened the conference.

"When we talk about digitisation today, then we're always talking about opportunities and risks," Foreign Minister Maas said in his opening speech. "And how we can develop ideas and answers to the question of how our values can be maintained in the digital world. In view of digitisation, we must learn new ways of doing politics and communicating policies. We've brought re:publica on board, Europe's largest digital conference, because one thing is crystal clear: Central future topics such as climate change and digitisation cannot be tackled without civil society, without businesses and without NGOs. We need your creativity, your expertise and sometimes also a bit of provocation to find the right path in the digital world."

Future Affairs Initiated Trans-Disciplinary Dialogue and Promoted Networking

The discussion on the stage of the packed Weltsaal (World Hall) in the Federal Foreign Ministry was opened by State Secretary Andreas Michaelis of the Federal Foreign Ministry, Director Laura Rosenberger of the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, political activist Nanjala Nyabola from Kenya, the former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Uri Rosenthal, and Oliver della Costa Stuenkel, professor for international relationships at the FGV in São Paulo, Brazil.

In the panel on "Democracy & Digitisation", filmmaker and author Hito Steyerl (UdK Berlin), the Brazilian professor Marisa von Bülow (University of Brasília), the Ukrainian project manager Marina Weisband (projekt-digital e.V.), and Chinese researcher Xiao Qiang (China Digital Times) discussed "emotional AI" using the current example of China. What happens when machines soon know us better than we know ourselves – will digital total-surveillance tools become established in totalitarian states?

The avant-garde artist and world's first woman cyborg activist Moon Ribas was inspired by *Future Affairs* after her panel on "New Philosophies": "It's important that we have those conversations because technology is part of our daily lives. We need to build a new type of political system, a new type of society. Technology is bringing up all these urgent questions that we debate here today."

Additional renowned speakers including Spaniard Lorena Jaume-Palasi (Ethical Tech Society), Briton Stephanie Hankey (Tactical Technology Collective), and German re:publica co-founder Markus Beckedahl (netzpolitik.org) used the break-out sessions to debate current questions posed by the digital transformation. *Future Affairs* presented a comprehensive picture of the digital revolution, outlined new approaches and future scenarios, and

described the effects of the digital transformation on geopolitical balances of power. An exhibition area with art installations by Ada Marvey (USA/Germany), Dr Pinar Yoldağ (Turkey/USA), Kate Crawford (Australia/USA), Vladan Joler (Serbia), and Bernd Mintermann (Germany) rounded out the conference.

The goal of the event, jointly organized by the Federal Foreign Office and re:publica, was to initiate a global debate on internet politics, digital culture, and digital society in one location. Along with the open and trans-disciplinary dialogue as part of the onstage panel discussions, the event also focused on international networking opportunities. Latin America and the Caribbean were partner regions for this year's event.

Andreas Gebhard, republica GmbH co-founder and CEO: "We've been dealing with the issues of digital society at re:publica for more than a decade. With events like *Future Affairs*, and working together with strong partners like the Federal Foreign Office, we work to create places where discussions and dialogue can take place on a level playing field. This is how we are helping to develop a dialogue for shaping the politics of tomorrow. The great success of today's conference shows us that we want to continue pursuing this endeavour into the future."

Pictures to download can be found [here](#). Please contact us for more information or to answer any questions:

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