

## European & Eurasian Studies Program

### Democratic Backsliding in Russia: Ramifications for Europe

Florida International University | Modesto A. Maidique Campus  
11200 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Miami, FL 33186 – Graham Center- Room GC 355

*Thursday, March 5, 2026 | 2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.*

#### Roundtable Participants: Biographical Notes



#### **Ambassador Kurt Volker**

*Distinguished Fellow*

*Center for European Policy Analysis*

*Washington D.C.*

Ambassador Kurt Volker is a Distinguished Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA).

Ambassador Volker is a leading expert in US foreign and national security policy with over 35 years of experience in a variety of government, academic, and private sector capacities. He served as US Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations from 2017 to 2019 and as US Ambassador to NATO from 2008-2009. Ambassador Volker is President and Founder of Alliance Strategic Advisors, LLC, which provides strategic advice and services to a diverse range of business clients with interest in Central and Eastern Europe. He has previously served as a Director of CG Funds Trust and the Wall Street Fund. He also serves as Senior International Advisor at BGR Group, which provides government relations, public relations, and business advisory services to a wide array of clients.

In June 2020, Amb. Volker was named a Distinguished Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). From 2012-2019, Ambassador Volker was the founding Executive Director of The McCain Institute for International Leadership, a part of Arizona State University based in Washington, DC. He remains a Senior Advisor at the Atlantic Council; a Trustee of the American College of the Mediterranean in Aix-en-Provence, France; a Founding Partner of the American University of Kyiv; a Trustee of the Hungary Initiatives Foundation; a member of the GLOBSEC International Advisory Board; and a member of the International Advisory Board of the US Institute for Peace. He has taught Transatlantic Relations at The George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs and is a member of that School's Board of Advisors. He contributes regularly to public policy debates, through op-eds, articles, speeches, and television appearances for a wide variety of outlets.



**Lenka Bustikova, Ph.D.**

*Director, Center for European Studies*

*Professor, Department of Political Science*

*University of Florida*

*Editor of East European Politics*

*Editor of Cambridge Elements Series on the Politics and Society from Central Europe to Central Asia*

Lenka Buščíková grew up in Prague. Before coming to the University of Florida, she taught at the University of Oxford and at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on polarization, party politics and democratic erosion. Her book, *Extreme Reactions: Radical Right Mobilization in Eastern Europe*, received the Davis Center Book Prize in political and social studies. She currently serves as editor of the journal *East European Politics*. She is also an editor of *Cambridge Elements on Politics and Society from Central Europe to Central Asia* and *Routledge Studies on Political Parties and Party Systems*.

Dr. Buščíková grew up in Prague and comes to UF from the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on illiberalism, polarization, and democratic erosion. She is part of the East European Politics Group in the Department of Political Science. Her book, *Extreme Reactions: Radical Right Mobilization in Eastern Europe*, received Harvard University's Davis Center Book Prize in political and social studies. She is also a recipient of the Best Article Prize from the European Politics and Society Section and Best Paper Prize from the Comparative Democratization Section of the American Political Science Association. Dr. Buščíková currently serves as editor of the journal *East European Politics*. She is also an editor of *Cambridge Elements on Politics and Society from Central Europe to Central Asia* and *Routledge Studies on Political Parties and Party Systems*. She serves as Head of the Advisory Board for the Czech National Institute for the Study of Socioeconomic Impacts of Risks.



**Ruslan Stefanov**

*Program Director*

*Chief Economist*

*Center of the Study of Democracy, Sofia, Bulgaria*

Ruslan joined CSD in 2002. He has 20 years of experience in managing and delivering high quality projects in civil society, research and consulting on anticorruption, informal economy, energy, and innovation in Europe.

Ruslan is co-director and co-author of the Kremlin Playbook a joint project of the Center for the Study of Democracy and the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Russia's economic footprint and influence in Europe. He is the knowledge and development coordinator of the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI.net), the largest regional civil society anticorruption network in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and the Eastern Neighborhood. Ruslan is an advisor on increasing knowledge for the European Platform Tackling Undeclared Work. He is the editor of *Innovation.bg*, the foremost monitoring and assessment tool of research and innovation policy in Bulgaria and is an expert on smart specialization for the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission.

Ruslan is a member of the Free Enterprise and Democracy Network and the Development Institute of the Center for International Private Enterprise, Washington, D.C., of the Advisory Board of the Cluster for Research on the Informal Sector and Policy at the University of Sheffield Management School, and of the International Association for Energy Economics.

Master's degree in Economics and Business Administration, University of National and World Economy, Sofia

### **Research Focus**

Anti-Corruption, Informal Economy, Energy Governance and Energy Security, Innovation and Smart Specialization, European Integration, Southeast Europe, Russia



**Tatiana Kostadinova, Ph.D.**

*Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations  
Director, European & Eurasian Studies Program  
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs  
Florida International University*

Tatiana Kostadinova is a professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations and the director of the European & Eurasian Studies Program at FIU. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Florida State University. Her research and teaching interests include elections, institutions, democratization, political corruption, and populism. She has been the recipient of several grants, among which the American Political Science Small Research Grant (2002) and a Fellowship Program Award from the German Marshall Fund of the United States (2003-2004). Kostadinova is the author of two books. In *Bulgaria 1879-1946: The Challenge of Choice* (East European Monographs/Columbia University Press, 1995) she explored institutional arrangements, party competition, and voting patterns in Bulgarian parliamentary elections. The second book, *Political Corruption in Eastern Europe: Politics After Communism* (Lynne Rienner, 2012) analyzed the emergence of corruption as a major obstacle to successful democratic transition. Her findings turn the attention to the eroding impact of malfeasance on citizen trust in institutions and the role of the European Union for promoting integrity in public life. Other publications include journal articles in *American Journal of Political Science*, *Electoral Studies*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Party Politics*, and *Europe-Asia Studies*.

Professor Kostadinova's primary teaching area is comparative politics. At the undergraduate level, she teaches courses on Russian and Eastern European politics, electoral behavior, and research methods. Her graduate level courses include seminars on democratic transitions, political parties, political corruption, and advanced research.