

# Interview with Daniela Haarhuis: “Security can’t be achieved through the violation of human rights”

*The growth of new technology is having an increasing impact on security policy, yet the pace of technological change also has important implications for human rights. In an interview with EUROPP’s Managing Editor, Daniela Haarhuis discusses how governments and citizens can seek to resolve the paradox between human rights and security politics.*

**Security and human rights issues are closely related, but there is occasionally a lack of clarity in how academics approach the two topics. How can we make better sense of the links between security and human rights?**

Security must aim to protect human rights. Security can’t be achieved through the violation of human rights. Does this claim reflect the political reality? Absolutely not. However, this should not prevent us as academics from looking at security challenges from exactly this perspective. If we talk about security politics in our lectures, we always have to discuss the human rights aspect of the taken measures. Are the measures protecting human rights? And: Are the measures itself violating human rights?

**Recent technological advances have had an important impact on security, with some observers talking of a ‘Digital Cold War’ developing between China and the United States. How concerned should we be about the potential for these developments to undermine our human rights?**

We should be concerned a lot about these developments concerning human rights. The race for digital supremacy is on. You can see this in the conflict between China and the United States over TikTok or 5G wireless technology by Huawei. Both states, or to be more precise, their intelligence agencies, use the information gained out of their respective technology products.

China has been even more assertive by using new technologies to spy on their own people. With the so-called Social Credit System, the social, moral and financial behaviour of China’s citizens and companies will be monitored followed by rewards and punishments. This is a massive undermining of human rights.

**In Europe, the use of encryption by services like Whatsapp has been criticised by some security services on the basis that it helps facilitate terrorism. Can the right to privacy be balanced against the need for security?**

There won’t be a ‘one size fits all’ solution, but we have to work on this. But what I can tell you from my experience in the German Federal Chancellery dealing with security politics is that security agencies always complain about data protection hindering their fight against terrorism. This is a mantra. What I can also tell you from this experience: terrorists are often not that sophisticated in hiding their plans. Solid police and intelligence work is a good protection, there is no need to give up the right to privacy. Otherwise the terrorists would have won in the end without committing an attack, just because democracies are attacking their fundamental rights themselves.

**Is there a danger that legal protections of human rights may be left behind by the pace of technological change?**

Definitely! Human rights were installed to protect citizens versus their state. Now a lot of human rights violations take place in the non-state sector, social media. A private firm is the platform, the new Agora, and everyone has the possibility to participate. On the one hand, this is a positive development, the democratisation of opinions, but on the other hand there is also space for abuse and in the end human rights violations.

You have to face the fact: Crowd intelligence is sometimes more crowd than intelligence. Are human rights still a tool for legal protection against violations like hate speech? In Germany we don’t have a problem where the state sets the legal framework and obliges tech firms like Facebook to investigate hate crimes – whether this is really effective would be another discussion. In other states like the United States or Great Britain there is substantial mistrust against state intervention.

Whether the solution is created by states or the tech firms themselves is all the same as long as it is effective, but the euphoria for the freedom of the internet concerning human rights violations should be over. We need rules for the game. This development has started, and the positive thing is: We can influence this with our own behaviour and engagement as part of civil society.

***On 22 October, Daniela Haarhuis will be speaking at an online public event, '[The Paradox Between Human Rights and Security Politics](#)', hosted by the LSE's European Institute.***

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*Note: This article gives the views of the interviewee, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [U.S. Mission Geneva / Eric Bridiers](#) (CC BY-ND 2.0)*

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