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Athenian Democracy and Direct Democracy in Switzerland

On Saturday, April 6, 2019, Hellenic Link–Midwest presents Professor Robert Wallace, in a presentation on *The Rise and Elite Defamation of Ancient Greek Democracy, and its Consequences for the American Republic, and Bruno Kaufmann, Director for International Cooperation at the Swiss Democracy Foundation, in a presentation on *Modern Direct Democracy. The Untold Story About Switzerland And How it Became a Global Trend.* The event, funded by [Hellenic Foundation, Chicago](#), will take place at 3 pm at the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, 10249 West Irving Park Road at Schiller Park (southeast corner of Irving Park Road and Mannheim Road). Admission is free.*

Ancient Athens is the mother of Democracy and the mother of the purest form of Democracy, Direct Democracy. Today democratic governments are a form of Representative Democracy, but there are many such democracies with some features of Direct Democracy. In the U.S., a number of State governments have some features of Direct Democracy, with California having the most of them—making of laws by ballot propositions, referendum, and recall. Switzerland has a representative government system with strong direct democratic features both at the national level and at the state (canton) and local levels.

Professor Wallace and Bruno Kaufmann will discuss the practice of Direct Democracy in Ancient Athens and Switzerland. This discussion is of special interest these days—politicians have greatly polarized politics, and democratic discourse and democratic government are greatly suffering.

Professor Wallace will discuss the origins, ideals and principal qualities, and the success of democratic city-state governments across the ancient Greek world, mostly in the teeth of upper-class opposition. He will outline some basic qualities of ancient Greek democracy, in contrast to modern Western governments, and he will comment on the “reception” of Athens’ democracy by the Founders of the US government. During the Peloponnesian War with Sparta after 429, Athens’ elite finally refused to participate in democratic government, withdrawing into conspiratorial political clubs and anti-democratic philosophical schools where they published vitriol against Athens’ democracy, which by contrast had steadily improved. The Founders of the US government

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read the vitriol, but did not know Athens' history. They believed Plato, Thucydides, and other anti-democratic aristocrats that direct democracy was a disaster, and so they fashioned a representative government far removed from the people. We live with the consequences.

After a short break, *Bruno Kaufmann* will offer a historic background into the making of the modern direct democracy system in Switzerland. It was in fact not Switzerland, which invented the initiative and referendum process, but Switzerland was invented by it. The lecture will give insight into the processes, conflicts and solutions of a conversational-orientated political system on three political levels, the local, the cantonal (state) and federal. He will describe the key mechanisms of Swiss democracy, their functionalities and effects in the Swiss context and offer an insight into the main take-aways from it for other societies and jurisdictions. He will conclude by linking the Swiss modern direct democracy practice with the ongoing worldwide trend to transform paternalistic representative government systems (like the federal one in the US) into forward looking participatory representative democracies.

Robert Wallace is a Greek historian and Professor of Classics at Northwestern University. He received a B.A. in ancient Greek from Columbia, a B.A. and M.A. in Classics from Oxford, and a Ph.D. in Classical Philology from Harvard. He has been a visiting professor at the American School in Athens, and at Pisa, Siena, Trento, Urbino, and Siracusa. He is the author of some ninety-five articles on various aspects of Greek history, government, and law. His books include *The Areopagos Council, to 307 BC*, which was awarded the Gustave O. Arlt Award in the Humanities by the Council of Graduate Schools, and *Reconstructing Damon: Music, Wisdom Teaching, and Politics in Perikles' Athens*. He co-authored *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* with Josiah Ober and Kurt Raaflaub, and *Aristotle's Constitution of the Athenians* with Chloe Balla. His current projects include books on Sophokles, Thucydides, and Plato and the historical Sokrates.

Bruno Kaufmann is a Swiss-Swedish broadcast journalist born in Switzerland and living in Sweden. He studied Eastern European History, Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies at Zurich, Hawaii, Uppsala and Gothenburg University, from where he holds an MA in Social Sciences. He has been reporting on democratic issues globally for the Swiss daily newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger* and the German weekly *DIE ZEIT*, before taking the position of Global Democracy Correspondent for the Swiss Broadcasting Company. In his Swedish home town of Falun he was a member of the City Executive government branch for many years and chaired the Department of Democracy and Elections. Bruno has published many books on and around Modern Direct Democracy including the *Guidebook to Modern Direct Democracy in Switzerland and beyond* and the *Global Passport to Modern Direct Democracy*. He is the Co-president of the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy as well as the Director for International Cooperation at the Swiss Democracy Foundation. He is a research fellow at the Center for Social Cohesion of the Arizona State University and International Advisor to the Korea Democracy Foundation.