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Press Release Salzburg Festival

Anne Applebaum: Keynote Speaker at the 2025 Salzburg Festival



Anne Applebaum, www.anneapplebaum.com

The Polish-American historian and journalist Anne Applebaum, one of the leading public intellectuals of our time, will deliver the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 2025 Salzburg Festival.

In 2025, the Salzburg Festival will not only reflect on various centres of power that have shaped – and scarred – history, but also engage with pressing contemporary issues. Eighty years after Austria's liberation from the Nazis and thirty years after it joined the European Union, the world is undergoing a profound crisis and heading toward a radically different geopolitical order.

The keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 2025 Salzburg Festival will be given by the Polish-American historian and journalist Anne Applebaum, who covered the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and has since established herself as a prominent public intellectual. Her address, titled 'Democracy and the Music Festival', will respond to sweeping ideological realignment, apparent democratic decline, and the rise of authoritarian alliances by defending civil society and artistic freedom as the core values of human civilization.

'Anne Applebaum is one of the most incisive commentators on the rise of autocratic governance in the East and West, as well as a powerful and compelling voice against the

erosion of Western democratic norms,' says artistic director Markus Hinterhäuser. 'Her brilliant writing tackles the critical questions surrounding this complex and troubling global trend, providing sharp insight into what is at stake for the world today.'

Anne Applebaum was born into a Jewish family in Washington, D.C. in 1964. After studying Russian history and literature at Yale and international relations at the London School of Economics, she began her journalistic career in 1988 as a foreign correspondent for *The Economist* in Poland. She was present as the Iron Curtain came down a year later and reported on the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Anne Applebaum, recipient of the Pulitzer Prize (2004) and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (2024), is widely known as an influential and trenchant critic of authoritarian regimes. In numerous books, she has explored the brutal legacy of the Soviet Union (*Gulag: A History*), the alarming popularity of anti-democratic political rule, and the rightward shift of political culture (*Twilight of Democracy*). In her most recent publication *Autocracy, Inc.*, she analyzes the inner workings of authoritarian alliances that seek to undermine democratic forces. This book aligns with themes addressed in *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe* (2013), in which she examined how countries in central and eastern Europe fell behind the Iron Curtain after the end of the Second World War and shed light on the early years of Stalinism up to the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 – a defining historical period for Austria as well, and its journey as a democratic nation. 'Before a nation can be rebuilt, its citizens need to understand how it was destroyed in the first place: how its institutions were undermined, how its language was twisted, how its people were manipulated,' she wrote in *Iron Curtain*.

Anne Applebaum is married to Radosław Sikorski, who served as the Polish foreign minister from 2007 to 2014 and again since 2023.

The opening ceremony takes place at 11 a.m. on 26 July 2025 at the Felsenreitschule.

Official Biography

Pulitzer Prize winning historian, journalist, commentator on geopolitics and acclaimed keynote, Anne Applebaum examines the challenges and opportunities of global political and economic change through the lenses of world history and the contemporary political landscape. Informed by her expertise in Europe and her years of international reporting, Applebaum shares perspectives on, and the far-reaching implications of, today's volatile world events. And as technology allows a new scale of media manipulation to authoritarian governments and changes the tenor of political discourse, she scrutinizes the misinformation, propaganda, and criminal exploitation that influence global affairs, as well. From Syrian refugees to Putin's disinformation narratives, from the EU and the European financial crises to responding to terrorism, from solutions to transition-government corruption to political populists' game-changing campaign language, Applebaum provides both background and up-to-the-minute insights that are vital to understanding the risks and opportunities of today's world political and economic climate.

Anne's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gulag: A History* is about the Soviet concentration camps. Her book *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* is the winner of her second Duff Cooper Prize and the 28th Lionel Gelber Prize 2018. In it, Anne proves what many suspected: Stalin set out to destroy the Ukrainian peasantry. Anne is the only author to win the Duff Cooper Prize twice. Her other books include *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944–1956*, which won a Cundill Prize for Historical Literature, and *Between East and West: Across the Borderlands of Europe* (updated edition published in 2023). In 2024, she was awarded the prestigious 'Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels' (Peace Prize of the German Book Trade) – previous winners include Salman Rushdie and Amartya Sen.

In 2021, Anne was awarded the ICFJ's Excellence in International Reporting Award. Also in 2021, Anne was presented with the 38th 'Francisco Cerecedo' journalism award by King Felipe VI of Spain. In July 2024, her new book *Autocracy, Inc: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World* was published by Penguin. Penguin also published *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* in 2020. In this book, she outlines with great eloquence why elites in democracies around the world are turning towards nationalism and authoritarianism. The book became an immediate NYT best-seller in the non-fiction section. Barack Obama listed this book as one of his favourite reads of the year.

She is a Senior Fellow of International Affairs and Agora Fellow in Residence at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. Director of the Transitions Forum at the Legatum Institute from 2011–2015, an international think tank, Applebaum is the co-founder of the institute's Democracy Lab, an online partnership between the institute and *Foreign Policy* magazine. An adjunct fellow of the Center for European Policy Analysis, she is former Philippe Roman Chair in History and International Affairs at the London School of Economics.

For many years, Applebaum wrote a biweekly foreign affairs column for *The Washington Post* which is syndicated internationally. She is now a staff writer at *The Atlantic*. She has been a contributor to *Foreign Affairs*, the *New Republic* and *The New York Review of Books*. She was formerly a member of *The Washington Post's* editorial board; foreign and deputy editor of the *Spectator* magazine; and political editor of the *Evening Standard*. From 1988 to 1991 she covered the collapse of communism as Warsaw correspondent for *The Economist*.

Anne attended Yale University and was a Marshall Scholar at the London School of Economics and St Antony's College, Oxford.