THE EURO-CRISIS AND THE POST-COMMUNIST “RETURN TO EUROPE”: WILL EUROPE FINALLY UNITE?

In 1990 Václav Havel ushered the hopes shared by many in Central Europe: that the region ‘could approach a rich Western Europe not as a poor dissident or a helpless, amnestied prisoner, but as someone who also brings something with him: namely spiritual and moral incentives, bold peace initiatives, untapped creative potential, the ethos of freshly gained freedom, and the inspiration for brave and swift solutions’.

Contrary to what Václav Havel hoped, a belief that there was nothing to learn from post-communist countries prevailed in the West, which took 1989 as ‘a restatement of the value of what [it] already [had], of old truths and tested models’. The people in post-communist Europe swiftly accepted it. The only way to freedom and prosperity seemed to be by way of liberal democracy and market economy. 1989 marked the ‘end of history’.

Today Europe finds itself in a deep crisis: economic, political, but most of all, spiritual. The pressure of ‘a new global race of nations’, as the British Prime Minister put it in his recent EU Speech, determines how Europeans should live today. China, not America, seems to be the relevant “Other”, against which Europe is going to define itself. As a result, its citizens are ‘sidelined and numbed by the repetitive talk of austerity and economic stability, financial leverage and institutional reforms’. Imaginative political language is rare; instead, economists and economism occupy public discourse. To add to these problems, many post-communist countries seem to be ‘sliding back to authoritarianism’ and the Union is uncertain about how to react. Thinking that
these developments reflect ‘a deep-seated nationalism’ or ‘a feeling of resentment and victimization’ is however only partly true. After all, the state of democratic politics in some ‘old’ EU Member States is equally worrying and the EU’s approach to its crisis is far from democratic.

The conference aims at putting these different ways of understanding the crisis in Europe together; in particular we will discuss possible connections between the crisis of the EU as whole and the problems that the post-communist Europe faces today.

PROGRAMME:

I. “Sliding back to authoritarianism” in Europe: (only) the problem of post-communism?

9:00-12:00
Chair: Damian Chalmers (LSE, Department of Law)

Paul Blokker (Department of Sociology, University of Trento, Italy): New Democracies in Crisis?

Pal Sonnevend (Eötvös Lórant Universität ELTE in Budapest): Hungary (TBC)

Coffee Break

Radosław Markowski (Comparative Politics Department at the Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Center for the Study of Democracy at the Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities: Poland (TBC)

Jan Komárek (LSE, Department of Law and European Institute): The “return to Europe”: 1989 and today

12:00-14:00 lunch
II. Beyond liberal democracy?
14:00-17:00
Chair: Petr Agha (CeLAPA-Institute of State and Law, AS CR and Faculty of Law, Charles University in Prague)

Zsuzsa Gille (Department of Sociology, University of Illinois): Is there a Global Postsocialist Condition? The Case of the Hungarian New Right

Damian Chalmers (LSE, Department of Law): The Diminishing Returns of EU Democratic Agency

Coffee Break

Michael Wilkinson (LSE, Department of Law): Political Union or Functionalist Dystopia? Reflections on the Constitutional Future of the European Union

Mark Dawson (Hertie School of Governance) and Floris de Witte (LSE, Department of Law): The despondent constitution: Rewriting Europe after the crisis

SPEAKERS AND CHAIRS:

Petr Agha holds a Master’s Degree in International Law from Masaryk University in Brno and a LLM in Human Rights Law from the Queen’s University Belfast (funded by Chevening scholarship) and a PhD from the University of Antwerp. Petr works as a researcher at the Institute of State and Law, Academy of Science, Czech Republic and a lecturer at Charles University Prague.

Paul Blokker holds a Ph.D. from the European University Institute. Currently, he is principle investigator in the research unit ‘Constitutional Politics in post-Westphalian Europe’ (CoPolis) in the department of Sociology, University of Trento, Italy (financed by the Provincia Autonoma di Trento). The project aims at an interdisciplinary analysis of constitutional change in four European countries, analysing constitutional reform, and constitutional claims-making as well as the constitutional discourses and critique as endorsed and articulated
by a variety of actors (legal, political, and civil society). He is a member of the International Editorial Board of the European Journal of Social Theory, a board member of the Research Network 32 European Political Sociology, European Sociological Association, member of Editorial Collective of the new journal Social Imaginaries, member of the International Editorial Board for Partecipazione e Conflitto/Participation and Conflict (FrancoAngeli). His research interests include: Social, Political and Legal Theory, the Constitutionalism-Democracy Nexus, Constitutional Change, Varieties of Modernity, European integration, the Constitutionalization of Europe, Diversity in Europe, Romanian and Eastern European modernities.

Damian Chalmers is Professor and Jean Monnet Chair in EU law at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Until August 2010 he was Head of the European Institute as well as of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He was formerly editor of the European Law Review and EU Jurist. He has held visiting appointments at, inter alia, the College of Europe, Fundacao Getulio Vargas and the Instituto de Empresa.

Mark Dawson teaches courses on European law and governance at the Hertie School of Governance. He holds degrees from the Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen as well as a PhD from the European University Institute in Florence. He has been a visiting scholar at the Institute for Global Legal Studies of the University of Wisconsin and a Visiting Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School. Before joining the Hertie School, Mark Dawson taught at Maastricht University; he remains a scholar within the Maastricht Centre for European Law. His research has focused on the relationship in the EU between law and policy-making – he recently published a book on ‘New Governance and the Transformation of European Law’ (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and is preparing with two colleagues a book on Judicial Activism at the European Court of Justice (Edward Elgar, 2012). He is currently researching on EU economic governance; on the enforcement of fundamental rights in the EU; and on the ‘constitutional dialogue’ between the European Court of Justice and policy-makers.

Floris de Witte holds a PhD from London School of Economics and Political Science, an LL.M from Cambridge and LL.B from the University of Maastricht. His PhD was entitled 'EU Law and the Question of Justice' and dealt with the transnational articulation of concepts of justice and solidarity.
Zsusza Gille is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is author of From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary (Indiana University Press 2007—recipient of honorable mention of the AAASS Davis Prize), co-editor of Post-Communist Nostalgia with Maria Todorova (Berghahn Press 2010), and co-author of Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections and Imaginations in a Postmodern World (University of California Press, 2000). She was the special guest editor of Slavic Review’s thematic cluster on Nature, Culture, Power (2009). She has published on issues of qualitative methodology as it relates to globalization and new concepts of space, on environmental politics and on the sociology of food.

Jan Komárek is an Assistant Professor at the LSE. Jan studied law at Charles University in Prague (Mgr. 2001, JUDr. 2002), Stockholm University (LL.M. 2004) and University of Oxford (M. St. 2007, D. Phil. 2011). Jan worked with the Czech Government Agent before the European Court of Justice at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of EC Law (2004-2006) and was a legal secretary to the President of the Czech Constitutional Court (2009-2010).

Radosław Markowski is Head of the Comparative Politics Department at the Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences and Chair of the Center for the Study of Democracy at the Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities. A political scientist who specializes in comparative politics and electoral studies, he has been Director of the Polish National Election Study since 1995 and a member of the Planning Committee of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems since 1997. Markowski has been a visiting professor at Duke, Wisconsin-Madison, Rutgers and the Central European University. He is the author or editor of six books and numerous articles, including Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-party Cooperation (Cambridge University Press, 1999), and is on the editorial boards of the European Journal of Political Research, European Union Politics, Perspectives on European Politics and Society and the Journal of Political Science Education.

Michael Wilkinson is Associate Professor of Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He studied law at University College London, the College of Europe, Bruges, and completed a PhD at the European University Institute, Florence, on ‘The Idea of Postnational Constitutionalism’. Prior to taking up his post at LSE, Mike was lecturer at Manchester University, EU-US Fulbright Research Fellow at Columbia and NYU and was called to the Bar
(Lincoln’s Inn) in 2000. He has also been a visiting professor at Cornell University and Université Panthéon-Assas (Paris II).