

Conference Call for Papers

on

“Eastern Europe’s New Conservatives: Varieties and Explanations from Poland to Russia”

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News about post-communist Europe have been dominated, ever since the 2000s, by the coming to power of political forces rejecting the “consensus” surrounding market reforms, democratization, and rule of law that has — at least normatively — paved the way for politics moving towards an “open society” in the 1990s. These political forces — from the “Law and Justice” party in Poland, through “Fidesz” in Hungary, to Vladimir Putin’s “United Russia” — have been described in various terms, ranging from right-wing “populism” and “backsliding” regimes (to describe the dominant trend in Central Eastern Europe), to “authoritarianism”, “dictatorship”, and “one-man regime” in the case of Russia. From Poland to Hungary and Russia, these actors prefer to call themselves “conservatives”. They locate themselves within their countries’ conservative traditions and at the very same time as part of a global political, social and intellectual movement against a globalization driven by financial markets. In the case of Russia, even a takeover of the leading role in this movement is envisioned (Bluhm 2016).

Various authors have tried to explain the rise of illiberal politicians in post-communist Europe. Some connect their rise to the lacking institutionalization of political party systems (Ucen, 2007; Kriesi, 2014). Other contributions trace the deterioration of democracies back to the ways in which economic reforms were carried out in the 1990s (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015); to “hollow core” democracies (that is, political parties with evaporating membership and embeddedness in civil society; Greskovits, 2015; Bohle and Greskovits, 2012); and to the “elite-focused, incentive-driven democratization and reform in ECE implemented under the oversight of the EU” (Hanley and Dawson, 2016). Scholars who situate the phenomenon in a wider context usually point to the rise of “populism” in response to the liberal integration project in Europe and the technocratic handling of the Eurocrisis in particular (Müller, 2014a; 2014b); or as a reaction to “cosmopolitan capitalism” and the plummeting living conditions it brought, first in the 1990s, and again in the late 2000s, following the World Economic Crisis (Kalb, 2015).

However, there have been few endeavors so far that systematically investigate the new conservatism in Eastern Europe and Russia in this wider context. As a “positional ideology” (Huntington 1984), modern conservatism emerges as a countermovement to the modern “progressive” ideologies (communism and liberalism) (Freeden 1996). It is not a coherent theory but an amalgam of socio-economic, political and cultural schemes. Hence, what conservatism means varies greatly over time and space.

The major goal of the planned conference is to explore the communalities and varieties in the new conservatism of Eastern Europe and Russia. We argue that in spite of the increasing global and European attractiveness of the new nationally-oriented *social* conservatism, the post-communist realm still presents a specific bundle of ideas, political recipes, drivers and causes that needs to be better understood precisely because it is an influential part of a greater development. We ask about what conservatism here means, under what circumstances conservatism becomes (and under which ones it doesn't) a front for illiberal thinking and policies, about how conservative ideologies translate into politics, and why it has become mainstream ideology in some countries, while in others, not. And, to what extent historic path dependencies and the transition paths towards market economy and democracy matter.

Within this conceptual framework we seek papers helping to clarify the following questions in particular:

- What is new in the present conservative thinking, what traditions do conservatives reconstruct, and in what relation of tension with, or opposition to, what sorts of political programs, ideas, or traditions do they stand? What are the communalities and differences in the socio-economic, political and cultural programs of East-European conservatives? How are conservatism and illiberalism related? What is their socio-economic agenda? What symbolic heritage do they use, and how is this appropriation influenced by socialist legacies?
- To what extent do the particular party cleavages explain variation in the composition of the conservatives across countries?
- What are the milieus that promote the new conservatism and how they are organized? What are the underlying shifts in elite composition and what resonance do conservative programs find in the population? What role do the church and trade unions play in promoting conservative programs?
- If the socio-economic outcomes of the transition towards market economy matter, to what extent can we explain the differences between the countries in terms of theories of the “varieties of capitalism” (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012); and, how can we explain differences between countries that have adopted similar transition paths?
- While some authors document “contagion”-effects between countries, what are the limits of the contagion and how can it be explained that, even if Hungary has “led the trend” of illiberal conservatism (Müller 2014: b), many other countries have not followed the trend? How do East-European conservative political leaders and milieus position themselves towards Russia’s offer to join a conservative alliance, and to what extent are ideas and program elements adopted/exchanged?
- What are the systematic similarities and differences to West-European developments? To what extent can the paradigmatic rise of the Front National in France (Boltanski and Esquerre 2014, who depict the Front as the “legitimate heir” to the legacy of the traditional Left) inspire our analyses of Eastern European illiberalism?

Please send us abstracts of up to 600 words to Katharina.Bluhm@fu-berlin.de or Mihai.Varga@fu-berlin.de by **July 15**, 2016. The paper-based conference will be scheduled for two days on February 9 and 10, 2017 at the Institute for East European Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin. The conference language will be English. Travel and accommodation costs for invited speakers will be covered on the usual academic terms by the organizers of the conference. A collection of the papers will be published by a renowned publishing house.

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