

Programme

Dahrendorf Conference 2019

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A. Reason and objectives

Today, Ralf Dahrendorf's critical observations are needed more than ever. His thoughts and analyses concerning the development of the European Union and the role of the nation state continue to be relevant. His studies on democracy in Western and Eastern Europe are of special importance at a time when democracy is faced with rising challenges. Likewise, his speeches, writings, and warnings on the relevance of the civil society and current forms of inequality in educational and life opportunities allow for in-depth reflections on social trends.

Occasioned by the tenth anniversary of Ralf Dahrendorf's death, the Dahrendorf symposium aims to honour his legacy but also to facilitate critical discussions about the problems of our age. Organized by institutions at which he worked, the symposium will provide a space for coming together and negotiating present-day challenges in society—an effort that Ralf Dahrendorf surely would have endorsed. Selected experts from academia and politics will explore the following questions:

- What is the relevance of Ralf Dahrendorf's work for the social sciences?
- Which of his contributions have stood the test of time and continue to be relevant today?
- What were the objectives of those who built on his work after his death?

In five panels on key issues, participants will revisit Ralf Dahrendorf's work with these questions in mind.

B. Schedule

4 December 2019

11 a.m. – 1 p.m.	<i>Arrival and snack</i>
1 p.m. – 1.05 p.m.	Welcome speech: Jutta Allmendinger for WZB, Oxford, Dahrendorf Forum
1.05 p.m. – 1.10 p.m.	Welcome speech: Wolfgang Rohe, Stiftung Mercator
1.10 p.m.– 1.40 p.m.	Keynote ‘Ralf Dahrendorf and the crisis of liberalism today’ Timothy Garton Ash
1.40 p.m.– 2 p.m.	Questions from the plenum
2 p.m.– 3.45 p.m.	Panel ‘Crisis of democracy and the role of the nation state’ (Convenor: Sascha Kneip) Panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daniel Ziblatt (Harvard/WZB)• Cornelia Koppetsch (Technische Universität Darmstadt) Discussant: Wolfgang Merkel (WZB)
3.45 p.m.– 4.15 p.m.	<i>Coffee break</i>
4.15 p.m.– 6 p.m.	Panel ‘Civil society: today’ (Convenor: Norbert Sendzik) Panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Keane (Sydney/WZB)• Krisztina Arató (Budapest) Discussant: Helmut K. Anheier (Hertie School of Governance)
6 p.m. – 6.30 p.m.	Transfer to Max Liebermann Haus
6.45 p.m.	<i>Dinner</i>
7 p.m. – 7.15 p.m.	Dinner Speech: Norbert Lammert
10.30 p.m.	Transfer

5 December 2019

- 9.30 a.m. – 11.15 a.m. Panel ‘Eastern Europe – a new illiberal “Sonderweg”?’
(Convenor: Reinhard Blomert)
Panellists:
• Ivan Krastev (IWM, Wien)
• Katharina Bluhm (FU Berlin)
Discussant: Radek Markowski (Warsaw)
- 11.15 a.m.– 11.30 a.m. *Coffee break*
- 11.30 a.m.– 1.15 p.m. Panel ‘European integration and democracy’ (Convenor:
Christian Rauh)
Panellists:
• Iain Begg (LSE) and Helmut K. Anheier (Hertie School of
Governance)
• Kalypso Nicolaïdis (University of Oxford)
Discussant: Michael Zürn (WZB)
- 1.15 p.m. – 2.15 p.m. *Lunch break*
- 2.15 p.m. – 4 p.m. Panel ‘Education as a civil right’ (Convenor: Michael Wrase)
Panellists:
• Claudia Buchmann (The Ohio State University)
• Barbara Ischinger (OECD)
Discussant: Jutta Allmendinger (WZB)

C. Panel descriptions

Crisis of democracy and the role of the nation state

In the early 2000s, Ralf Dahrendorf's view of liberal democracy was marked by realistic scepticism. On the one hand, he was not prone to general alarmism; on the other hand, he did begin to speak early on challenges to and crisis of democratic governance. Dahrendorf never shared the (naïve) hopes for a triumph of democracy after 1989; however, as a "vehement defender" of liberal democracy and its institutions, he did feel concern about the future of democracy. To Dahrendorf, the crisis of democracy was primarily a crisis of democratic *control* and a crisis of democratic *legitimacy*.

In Dahrendorf's thinking, the manifestations of crisis are closely linked to the (actual or alleged) crisis of the nation state and the (non-)adaptability of the national democratic institutions:

- Democratic elections have lost at least some of their function to ensure the control and removal of those in power.
- Citizens are included in the political process in a socially selective or asymmetrical manner: the globalized middle classes determine the direction of policy, whereas the lower classes are excluded or exclude themselves.
- Citizens have become volatile in their political preferences and electoral decisions, making it difficult for political parties to aggregate interests and to govern.
- Globalization limits the scope for national decision-making or moves decisions to spaces with only little (or no) democratic control and legitimacy.

Dahrendorf believed these phenomena of democratic crisis were more likely to be reduced by extending the rule of law to the inter- and supranational levels rather than by expanding forms of participatory democracy at the supranational level—and by pursuing reforms at the national level.

Building on Dahrendorf's thinking the panel aims to explore the following thematic areas and topics:

- Nation-state democracy, supranationalization of democracy, or constitutionalism beyond the nation state? How much does the cosmopolitan vs. communitarian cleavage contribute to the crisis of democracy?
- The function of democratic elections: Are they doing what they are supposed to do?
- What is the role of parliaments today as places of deliberation and decision? Dahrendorf: Parliaments as “places of informed and reasonable debate about the big questions”?
- Demise of the mainstream political parties: How does the fact that they are no longer rooted in mainstream society affect democracy? Which other intermediary organizations might take their place?
- How real is the danger of a “democracy without democrats?”
- How can the decision-making elites be made more responsive to citizens’ needs?

Civil society: today

Current populist movements indicate growing divisions in Western democracies: those at the top against those at the bottom, Brexiteers against remainers, yellow jackets against Macron, country people against city people, East Germans against West Germans, critics against defenders of Chancellor Merkel's dictum "Wir schaffen das!" ("we can do it"), and so forth. These tensions give rise to the suspicion that civil society is losing its integrative power. The reasons are manifold. But going back to Dahrendorf, we also have to ask: Has the idea of individual freedom and self-fulfilment been pushed too far? Are we now reaping the fruit of a supposedly fair competition for life chances and promising positions in society, which are becoming increasingly scarce? Do Dahrendorf's ligatures, in the sense of involuntary communities of fate, regain importance? Participants of this panel will critically engage with these and other questions based on the following guiding question: How legitimate is the protest of today's (angry) citizens? Is there a new divide between liberal cosmopolitans and nationalist communitarians?

Eastern Europe – an illiberal “Sonderweg”?

Dahrendorf's response to the end of the Cold War was very positive. In his opinion, a path towards modernization, which had already begun in the years following World War II, had been suppressed by the Soviet Union's desire for hegemony. As a consequence, certain developments were blocked; instead, Central European societies were forced to accept a specific form of modernization. In contrast to what Marxist interpretations said, socialism, according to Dahrendorf, was not a phase in human history that succeeds capitalism but rather an independent development towards modernity. The rule of a military power on a path towards authoritarianism was laid over an existing Eastern European civil society (fixed targets instead of constant adjustment to real needs; stagnation of science at the universities; culture and the economy defined in political terms).

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, these societies had multiple options on their path towards freedom, “they have chosen the open society in which there are a hundred different ways forward to freedom, and a handful on offer at any one time” (Dahrendorf 2005, p. 117)*. However, Dahrendorf predicted that they would have to pass through a “valley of tears” before reaching a stable situation. Almost fifteen years after Dahrendorf's writing some, some – if not the majority – of the new East European Democracies seem to have chosen a path that leads to illiberal democracies.

Which were the reasons for such an illiberal path? Which are the consequences for liberalism and democracy in the region? And which impact will it have on the future of European integration?

European integration and democracy

Lord Dahrendorf described himself as a “Europeanist, albeit a cautious one”.¹ While he acknowledged that many contemporary societal challenges require political cooperation across national borders, he publicly criticized the highly bureaucratic and often non-transparent decision making of European institutions already during his term as a European Commissioner. As a liberal sociologist, he furthermore raised profound doubts on whether democratic will formation is possible in a supranational entity that appears as too distant from its citizens which he saw characterised by very heterogeneous political preferences and different national backgrounds.

Dahrendorf’s criticisms and doubts about European integration have hardly lost in political salience. To the contrary, the Euro and Schengen crises as well as Brexit created very controversial public debates and were accompanied by the surge of Euroscepticism in both public opinion and partisan competition. Starting from Dahrendorf’s critical thoughts on supranational democracy the panel thus asks whether and how the current institutions of the European Union are able to accommodate the tensions within and across European societies that were uncovered by the recent waves of politicisation. It brings together highly esteemed scholars who have shaped academic and political debates on the relationships between the EU and its citizens from very diverse angles.

1 See especially Dahrendorf (2003): Making sense of the EU: The challenge for Democracy, *Journal of Democracy* 14(4), pp. 101-114.

Education as a civil right

Dahrendorf's "Education as a Civil Right" is arguably among his best-known and most influential writings in Germany. First published as a six-part essay series in the German weekly DIE ZEIT beginning in November 1965, the 150-page "plea for an active educational policy" was eventually released as a book in 1966. At that time, the Federal Republic of Germany was on the verge of an educational expansion that was advocated by conservative politicians and intellectuals primarily on the grounds that more academically trained workers were needed to keep up the country's economic growth and new-found prosperity.

To counter this idea of "activating existing reserves of talent" primarily for economic reasons, Dahrendorf proposes his concept of education "as a civil right". He thinks of this civil right as a "social fundamental right of all citizens" and an essential prerequisite for their autonomous and equal participation in social and political life. To him, this proposition leads to a second premise, namely that of "equality of opportunity". This, in turn, leads him to conclude that to realize this civil right, it is the government's responsibility to create real education and participation opportunities for all citizens by means of active educational policies: "Equality of opportunity by law remains a fiction as long as people, owing to their social relations and commitments, are unable to make use of their rights." As a consequence, Dahrendorf thinks of educational policy as policy to enhance participation in the sense of "material equality of opportunity". His utopian vision is "to design schools for all" replacing the highly selective educational institutions for the few.

We believe that Dahrendorf's 1965 book provides an excellent foundation for discussing the urgent questions of today's education system. The principal questions, which should be addressed in the panel, could be the following:

- More than half a century later, to what extent have Dahrendorf's assumptions and predictions been confirmed – or not confirmed?
- Is the idea of "education as a civil right" still valid, and if so, how does it have to be conceptualized and implemented in the 21st century?

- Who are the educationally disadvantaged groups of today?
- How must schools and education in the 21st century be designed to make Dahrendorf's "utopian vision" a reality?