

Political Imagination and Utopian Energies in Central and Eastern Europe

13th CEE Forum of Young
Legal, Political and
Social Theorists
Conference

Call for Papers

16th - 17th September
Prague
Faculty of Law
Charles University

European Space Operations Centre,
Darmstadt, May 1968 / Author photo: European Space Agency

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The usual attacks on utopian ideology focus on the “impracticable” or “preposterous” character of such visions. However, utopia is a state that is not intended to be realized; it is a goal, an abstract target. Utopia is a theoretical necessity, that neither practical politics nor political philosophy can proceed without. Why? First, utopia is capable of opening our minds to new possibilities. Second, it clarifies our social and political values. Third, utopias give us necessary directions that we need to move. This conference aims both to define the place and function of utopian thought in contemporary practical politics and theory (general focus), and to search for the past utopian thoughts/projects and the future utopian possibilities in Central and Eastern Europe (territorial focus).

Historically, especially the Stalinist period proved that a political project with a utopian ethos could end as a huge failure. However, the post-Stalinist era showed again that utopian energies could take different forms and directions. Starting in the late 1950s and continuing to the end of the 1960s, utopian technocratism and socialist humanism were particularly strong in the intellectual circles in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, geopolitical realism crushed these utopian energies once again when Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. From the ruins of the 1960s, new adversaries of utopianism were born, both of them sometimes called “last utopias”: the first is (apolitical) technocratism, which is expressed in the language of numbers, and second is the moral rhetoric (of human rights). They together framed the post-1989 world which set the tone to the post-89 transformations and helped to build the pillars which supported the European project and animated the accession of the post-socialist states into the structures and normative frameworks of the EU.

However, the enthusiasm for “return to Europe” faded away quickly and critics of the European project, which seems to be losing its position in the political imaginaries of many Europeans, emphasize paradoxically its excessive utopianism and “social engineering”. The empty ideological spaces are rapidly getting filled with both right-wing and left-wing populist political projects on the one hand and technocratic populism on the other.

Together, populist movements and particular forms of technocracy open up discussions about the reorganization and reorientation of the entire post-1989 European project. But how do we understand and analyze these emerging alternative projects through the lenses of the utopian projects of the past, upon which our institutions and imaginaries have been built? Are these movements reviving the legacy and energies of the utopian movements of the past into the present? Are they utopian in the true sense of the word? Or are they merely nostalgic without any forward-looking element? Or are they all-out anti-utopian?

In this context, the conference asks these questions: Can the Central and Eastern Europe region provide innovative and forward-looking political imaginaries? Where do we start the search for new utopias? Should we revive the spirit of 1989 and look into its forgotten and hidden legacies? Are there even some older and forgotten inspiring ideas/authors/initiatives? Or should we leave the past behind and start from the scratch?

We encourage contributions that investigate these questions through complex social manifestations:

**Call
for
Papers**

- Constitutional innovations on the national and European level
- Constitutional imagination
- Retrofuturism and utopias in the archives
- Central and Eastern European anti-utopian tradition
- Pop cultural and subcultural political imaginaries
- Central Europe as a political periphery: overloaded by culture
- Utopian energies of mass rallies and marches
- (Anti-)politics of protest: between opposition and dissidence
- Political imagination through identity construction
- Utopias vs. myths of identity

The conference is organized by the Faculty of Law, Charles University, in cooperation with the Institute of State and Law, Czech Academy of Science. The conference venue is in the building of the Faculty of Law located in the historical centre of Prague.

The conference language is English. Please send a 500-700 words abstract and the application form (which we will make available at www.cee-forum.org) to ceef2021prague@email.cz by 6 June 2021. We will communicate acceptance of papers by 30 June 2021. If you would like to participate without submitting a paper (but with meals and conference materials included), please also use the application form and send it to us until 6 June 2021.

The conference fee for all participants is 60 EUR and covers conference material, drinks and snacks during the breaks as well as lunch meals. We kindly ask participants to make arrangements and pay for their travel and accommodation individually. We will distribute information on lodging and directions as well as payment instructions for the accepted participants via email and through the conference website.

After the conference, we will invite selected participants to submit their papers for publication in a volume of the conference proceedings, our Central and Eastern European Forum for Legal, Political, and Social Theory Yearbook.

For updated information, please regularly visit the conference website: www.ceeforum.org/2021. In case of questions, do not hesitate to contact the convenors of the 2021 CEE Forum Conference, Petr Agha (petr.gha@centrum.cz) and Jan Géryk (gerykj@prf.cuni.cz).

...utopias are capable of opening our minds

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