

Dilemmas in European Democracy: Is the Community Heading Towards Political Nightfall and Technological Anomy?

Societal and political perception of recent developments – many of them Europe-wide and broader still - from within Central Europe hinge on the pivotal notion of crisis or a series of *crises*. Processes of liberal democratic transitions and consolidations that were to produce – in accordance with the popular tropes of the 1990s - a single European deliberative space have turned into empty Western emulation at best and following the active sliding towards autocracy in many parts of the region, to the three lost decades at its worst. Catching up with the West, culturally narrated through the Return to Europe symbolism, has not materialised according to many criteria and indicators, including the one of political will itself. A cloud of doubt and darkness over the nature of the European political horizon and its future has ensued. In the meantime, Western Europe – both as the core of a multilevel, densely institutionalized polity with its own teleological “official history” and as a cognitively promoted space, has found itself amidst its own politico-cultural paralysis.

As a result, growing numbers of critics have argued that the Community has been rendered obsolete, unable to serve as the role model not only for aspiring spaces - i.e., the countries featured in the enlargement process but also for the relatively fresh “fringes” that have made it inside. The traditional difference between the West and the East, with a swinging Central European part has been thrown into turmoil and uncertainty. EU’s Constitutional fiasco, the Community’s non-action to the implosion of Libya (remember the propagated notion of the Mediterranean Union? – no worries, if not), the rise of domestic populism via Brexit and its subsequent export, Covid-19 collective-action freeze; the uneasiness of the right (or any profound) response to Putin’s nearly genocidal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and most recently, the ChatGPT4-induced political-legal cacophony have been but the most blatant markers of this political ossification.

This conference invites the participants to take a thorough scrutiny of what could be argued to represent alarmist, doomsaying visions. Instead of avoiding these specters, the conference makes them its central theme. The “Nightfall” metaphor is borrowed from a brilliant sci-fi novelette of the same name written by Isaac Asimov during WW2. The central plot of the book – growing concerns that the fictitious planet with permanently shining six suns and no darkness ever-present is just about to enter into a period of prolonged, cataclysmic nightfall - represents a suitable starting point for our conversation. Other echoes follow a sceptical journalist, scientists with expert authority on the subject; myths galore, (mis/dis)interpretations of existing and historical information, hitherto unknown scientific facts having causal effects, and evidence of wiped-out civilisations going insane during previous periods of nightfall.