Central European University
CEU Political Science Department
MA Program
Academic year 2018/2019
Winter semester

Course description

Democracy between Crisis and Transformation: Normative and Institutional Perspectives

Lecturers: Nenad Dimitrijevic and Tamas Meszerics
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Meeting times: to be announced
Office hours: to be announced

Nenad Dimitrijevic:
Tamas Meszerics:

Type of course and number of credits: MA elective, 4 credits (8 ECTS)
Teaching format: a lecture and seminar cover each topic

Course overview

The course departs from the insight that democracy is in crisis. The core aim of the course is twofold. First, we propose to explore the sources and different dimensions of the crisis. Second, we intend to examine whether the dynamics of the crisis contains the seeds of transformation.

The crisis of democracy can be approached in many ways, by using different methodologies, theoretical frameworks, studying different subjects, or different dimensions of the same subject. This course concentrates on the relationship between the state-centered liberal democracy and processes of globalization. The approach is problem-focused: we will be identifying and exploring the focal points of change that the globalization brings to our ‘standard’ understanding of democracy and statehood. We will ask what has happened with the normative foundations, legal order, institutional set up, political and social processes, and actors of modern democracies in this new constellation.
We will analyze different dimensions of the crisis. In normative terms, democracies appear incapable of affirming the core principles of political legitimacy. Institutionally, we can still identify equal citizens, democratic institutions, political organizations, and legal rules that shape politics. However, the formal quality of institutional architecture is becoming increasingly formalistic. Democracies fail ever more in performing their constitutionally defined tasks. Political actors look simultaneously all-powerful and powerless. Formal institutions, strong enough to ignore their citizens, are defenseless against intrusion of the social power. New stateless sources of law and power, established by poorly visible global actors, have been imposing their authority at the expense of both the state supremacy and international law. A parallel structure of invisible and uncontainable power has been formed behind the façade of official (domestic and international) politics. We will try to elucidate this process and its consequences.

Methodologically, addressing these and related questions requires obtaining empirical knowledge, employing analytical approaches, and engaging with normative contestations. Description, analysis, and evaluation will be handled as parts of a complex methodical whole. This also implies that we will explore and assess our questions not simply by pointing to ‘how things are’ - we will be critically reading different theoretical approaches that deal with our topics.

The course consists of three parts. This structure is offered for analytical purposes only: it does not point to the separateness of the topics.

Part one deals with basic conceptual clarifications, concentrating on the notions of democracy, crisis, and globalization. We first specify the working concept of democracy: its normative core, institutional setup, site, actors, and processes. We open the question of the relationship between political and social. Next, we summarize the general idea of crisis, and the concept of political crisis. Third, we identify multiple meanings of the term globalization, and settle for a conceptualization that will be used throughout the course.

In the second part of the course, we turn to transformations. The withering away of supremacy of the modern state requires to revisit the question of where democracy is heading. Again, the question concerns normative underpinnings, institutional architecture, and social and political processes. We explore different theories and different practices, focusing on agents (individual and collective actors, both those ‘in authority’, and those who question the existing authoritative relations).

Part three proceeds by exploring frameworks of transformation. We first turn to the EU, with the specific goal of examining the challenges to the core democratic concept of political representation. We proceed by analyzing the idea of global governance, and the approaches that support the idea of the ‘return to the nation state’. Finally, we return to the ideas of transformation of democracy, to see about the normative rightness and feasibility of some of the offered frameworks of change.

**Expected outcomes**

By the end of the course students will acquire an understanding of the key normative and institutional controversies surrounding contemporary democracy. They will also master the basic methods and concepts applied in discussions about these controversies. Approaches they will
learn include normative, institutional and empirical analyses, and their interplay. The concepts include democracy, crisis, globalization, political legitimacy, agonism, legal pluralism, global constitutionalism, and the like. The concepts, institutions, and processes will be studied at societal, legal, and political levels, with the goal of promoting the importance and understanding of interdisciplinarity. Special attention will be paid to the study of actors and their interplay with institutional frameworks.

Course requirements and evaluation

Each topic will be covered by a lecture and a seminar. One of you will be asked to prepare a short presentation for each seminar class, as the basis for a more concentrated discussion. Your presentation will take approx. 20 minutes, and it will be based on a short position paper (4-5 pages), that you will distribute electronically to all class participants and to us before 4 pm, on the day preceding the seminar class. Your presentation should contain a short critical evaluation of the topic and of the way it is presented in the assigned readings, as well as questions that you think need to be raised in the seminar discussion.

Each class participant will contribute to the seminar preparation by sending 2-3 questions or comments. The same deadline applies.

Classes are mandatory. In case of absence, you will need to provide written documentation of legitimate circumstances that prevented you from attending class. Legitimate circumstances include illness, serious family emergencies, and participation in activities sponsored by CEU. The same documentation is required in case you fail to submit your written assignment on time. Should you fail to provide required documentation, you will not receive credits for the course.

You are expected to be familiar with the CEU policies on scholarly dishonesty.

Questions and comments during lectures are welcome. Active participation in seminars is required. You are expected to come prepared for in-depth discussion of the topics and the required readings. The readings classified as ‘optional’ are for your further consideration and reference – you may find them particularly useful when preparing your presentation or final paper.

The use of electronic devices (laptops, tablets, e-readers, phones, etc.) is not allowed.

You should write an approx. 15-20 pages long (Times New Roman 12, double-spaced) final essay. The topic should be chosen - upon our approval - by March 10, 2019. We will discuss your proposals in closing class meeting. The final paper should be submitted by April 10, 2019.

Grading will depend on the above presented features, in the following way:

- 25% presentation
- 15% questions and class participation
- 15% review of optional readings on a topic different from that of the presentation
- 45% final paper
Topics and literature

[All the required readings will be available at the CEU e-learning site. For the suggested readings, please consult CEU library, electronic databases, or turn to the course lecturers.]

One: Concepts and Diagnosis

Week 1 Concepts I: Democracy

Mandatory reading


Optional readings


Week 2 Concepts II: Crisis of democratic legitimacy

Mandatory reading


Optional readings


• Reiner Forst and Rainer Schmalz-Bruns (eds.), *Political Legitimacy and Democracy in Transnational Perspective* (Oslo: Arena, 2011), available at http://www.arena.uio.no


Week 3 Concepts III: State Democracy and Globalization

Mandatory readings


Optional readings


Week 4 Case study of crisis and change: participation, membership, citizenship

Mandatory readings


Optional readings


Two: Agents and theories of transformation

Week 5 Social Movements

Mandatory readings


Optional readings


• Andrew Conio (ed.), *Occupy. A People yet to Come* (London: Open Humanity Press, 2015)


• Emilio Castaneda, “The Indignados of Spain: A Precedent to Occupy Wall Street”, Social Movement Studies, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 2012


• Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011)


Week 6 Critical theories: Agonism

Mandatory readings


Optional readings


Week 7 Global constitutionalism vs. societal constitutionalism

Mandatory readings
Three: Frameworks of Transformation

Week 8 Global governance

Mandatory reading


Optional readings

• Jürgen Habermas, “Spectacle of a Capitalistic World Society Fragmented Along National Lines” at http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022337


Week 9 The case study of the EU: Political Representation

Mandatory readings


Optional readings


• Hanna F. Pitkin, The Concept of Representation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967)

Week 10 Back to the nation state?

Mandatory reading

Optional readings

• Mathias Risse, “What to Say About the State?”, Social Theory and Practice, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2006

**Week 11** *An Agenda for a Different Democracy*

**Mandatory reading**


**Optional readings**


**Week 12** *Discussing final paper proposals*