

The Autocratic Challenge. Understanding Autocratization Processes in Contemporary Times

15-16 November 2018
Université libre de Bruxelles

The Centre d'Etude de la Vie Politique (CEVIPOL) of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Université libre de Bruxelles is organizing an international conference with the title "The Autocratic Challenge. Understanding Autocratization Processes in Contemporary Times".

Aim and rationale of the conference

The debate on the decline of democracy (see Diamond, 2008; Levitsky and Way, 2015; Schmitter 2016) and the revival on the political and international scene of the autocratic principle of government after the period of demo-optimism (Carothers 2002) of the nineties is linked with some identifiable empirical phenomena: the long-lasting rise of disillusionment toward the functioning and the effectiveness of the democratic system, for example in European consolidated democracies (Foa and Mounk 2016); the attempted erosion of democracy in Hungary or Poland; the transition to hybrid or authoritarian regimes in several regions of the world (e.g. Turkey, Thailand or Venezuela, see McFaul 2002; Coppedge 2006); the authoritarian resilience in the post-soviet space or in Sub-Saharan Africa; the geo-political and economic decline of democracies in front of the rise of authoritarian powers; or the growing presence of autocratic promotion (Ambrosio 2010; Walker 2015) and the influence of autocratic powers on consolidated and developing democracies.

Still, the academic literature on this growing research theme may be considered embryonic. First, from the *conceptual* point of view, the confusion around the concepts and terms used is still wide and often prevents an adequate assessment of the results, making it difficult to compare different studies and to understand the object of the empirical analysis; second, as far as the *methodology* is concerned, the problem of data and measurements of democracy and change within and from democracy characterizes the literature, as well as the permanent division between qualitative and quantitative approaches; finally, from a *theoretical* point of view, few hypothesis have been formalized so far

about causes and patterns of change, and thus debating about theory is needed to advance the scientific knowledge in this field.

This international conference will address these topics trying to maintain a balance between research methodologies, theoretical perspective and focus on area studies, paying particular attention to the post-1989 period. We are open to all types of research design and intellectual traditions, but we prefer focusing in particular on **empirically-grounded papers** emphasizing case studies and relatively small-N comparative perspectives on the following topics:

- *Causes and actors of autocratization*: addressing macro structural conditions along with agency factors, combining domestic and international levels of analysis
- *Modalities of autocratization*: assessing recurrent patterns and trajectories of autocratization
- *Autocratic promotion*: re-assessing how authoritarian powers extend their influence on other countries' political regimes
- *The fragility of democratization*: failed transition, authoritarian resilience and authoritarian transformation

Submission Guidelines

Abstracts (max. 300 words) should be submitted, along with contact information (name, institutional affiliation, department, e-mail address), to Luca Tomini (ltomini@ulb.ac.be) by March 30, 2018. Submissions must be in an electronic form as PDF format or as a Microsoft Word document. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by April 30, 2018.

For more information, please contact ltomini@ulb.ac.be or amerlin@ulb.ac.be. The full paper (max. 8000 words) must be submitted by October 1st, 2018.

Scientific Committee: Aude Merlin, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Luca Tomini, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Elena Aoun, *Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve*; Andrea Cassani, *University of Milan*; Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve*; Ramona Coman, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Jean-Michel De Waele, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Leonardo Morlino, *LUISS Rome*; Philippe Schmitter, *European University Institute*; Natasha Wunsch, *ETH Zurich*.

Organizing Committee : Aude Merlin, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Luca Tomini, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Yalchin Mammadov, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Artem Remizov, *Université libre de Bruxelles*; Domenico Valenza, *College of Europe, Bruges*.