



Università
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di Palermo

Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza
Dipartimento di Eccellenza



HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

12 – 14 December 2022

Università degli Studi di Palermo
Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza
Piazza Bologni, 8, 90134 Palermo (PA)

The Ph.D. School in *Human Rights: Evolution, Protection, and Limits* of the University of Palermo is excited to announce that a workshop on the topic *Human Rights and Democracy* will be held in Palermo (Italy) from the 12th to the 14th of December 2022.

The event will be held in hybrid mode. Attendance in person is encouraged, but participants who do not wish to or cannot travel to Palermo will be given the opportunity to participate virtually.

The workshop aims to provide an opportunity for young researchers in different but related fields of research (such as legal and political philosophy, political sciences, criminal law, public and private law, international law, etc.) to meet and interact, and allow members of the civil society to share their experience in one of those fields (see the part “case study panels” below).

PANELS

Ph.D. students and researchers who obtained their Ph.D. in the last 5 years, as well as Master’s students or people who got their Master’s degree within the same period, are invited to submit an abstract of **no more than 500 words (including title and five keywords)** in order to take part as speakers in one of the **five panels** mentioned below. The workshop will be held in English.

1. Democracies facing populisms: a multidisciplinary overview

Over the last two centuries, failed welfare policies, political scandals, global inequalities, the progressive impoverishment of the middle class, as well as a substantial lack of future perspectives, have played a key role in the worldwide rise of the so-called “populist movements”. It is, in fact, argued that populism reflects current political systems’ difficulty in effectively dealing with the central issue of our time: insecurity, in all its different but convergent aspects (economic, criminal, social, etc.).

Nonetheless, as argued by Pierre-André Taguieff, populism has become a polemic label often used to stigmatize the political enemy on duty.

Based on this assumption, the panel aims to “take populism seriously” in order to critically explore its theoretical boundaries with democracy and question whether it is exclusively a threat or it could be regarded as an opportunity to rethink and



refine contemporary democracies and policies.

Moreover, in accordance with the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon and the interdisciplinary approach of the workshop, the panel should provide an opportunity to analyze old and contemporary populisms from different perspectives (historical, comparative, constitutionalist, political, anthropological, etc.), as well as their relationship with other political phenomena (such as fascism) and, last but not least, the impact that populist waves have on migration policies, human rights, and individual guarantees against punitive power.

2. Europe's response to democratic backsliding

Europe is considered a continent at the forefront of respect for democracy and human rights. The presence of international organizations, including the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe, aiming to guarantee those values should be a safeguard capable of addressing possible breaches. However, the last decade saw an increase in illiberal democracies, and more than half of the European states suffer from democratic backsliding. Within the EU, the 'rule of law crisis' is an ongoing issue, leading to a dysfunction of its internal mechanisms. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on fundamental freedoms due to the adoption of containment measures affecting our freedom of movement and reunion through extraordinary procedures, which, in some countries, reinforced the trend of increasing authoritarianism and has affected democratic governance. Additionally, the increase of fake news has contributed to the weakening of democracies around the globe.

Based on this, it is necessary to question the actions that organizations such as the EU and the Council of Europe undertook to address the situation. The role of the European Court of Human Rights or the Court of Justice of the EU and other bodies, such as the Council of Ministers and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and EU agencies, seems particularly interesting, as the main institutions seem unable to act. Besides the internal aspects, both the EU and the Council of Europe have external policies related to democratization. This panel could also explore the role of those organizations, their policies and soft law instruments in this field in third countries, and their tools to monitor the state of democracy.

3. Freedom of expression and the protection of democracy

According to the European Court of Human Rights, freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the basic conditions for its progress and the development of every individual (*Handyside v. the United Kingdom*, para. 49). However, the threats against freedom of expression never disappear and are constantly evolving with the contemporary age. While traditional threats to freedom of expression continue, various contemporary-day threats are also emerging. How, for example, does the



current surge of disinformation affect democracy?

This panel will examine both perspectives on traditional threats against freedom of expression, such as terrorist propaganda, expressions inciting violence, and hate speech, as well as new challenges such as online expression, mis/dis/mal-information, fake news, and the emergence of populist expression. In this panel, we seek to examine how democracy can be protected against these threats. We specifically intend to investigate what the international, national, and local institutions can do to resolve these problems while considering the public's suggestions for responses. Academic, artistic, political, and journalistic expressions are among the objectives of this panel.

4. New technologies and human rights: which future for democracy?

The progress and development of technology are profoundly modifying the way in which we approach human rights and their relationship with democracy from a theoretical, legal, and ethical point of view. The panel aims to stimulate a debate over the impact of algorithms, data-mining, and artificial intelligence (AI) on democracy and good governance, and in particular on democratic decision-making processes such as, first of all, elections.

Democratic systems, in fact, precisely because they are based on the principle of equal, free, and personal voting, are particularly fragile and defenseless in the face of sophisticated techniques for manipulating information.

Several questions arise, starting from a necessary reflection on the threats posed by digital transformation to human rights, which are, as reconstructed, among others, by Rodotà, necessary preconditions of the democratic process. The ambivalent role that technology plays in the democratic process offers fertile ground to discuss the current framework: if, on one hand, technology has the merit of enhancing transparency and inclusion at all levels of public decision-making, on the other, social media has been strategically used for microtargeting political campaigns, spreading fake news and tampering with democratic elections. Moreover, digital transformation has led to a problematic confusion between public functions - ontologically pertaining to public authorities - and private actors, coupled with the greater use of AI in the performance and control of these functions. Even a "super-intelligence" cannot make perfect decisions: the manipulative, irresponsible, or illegal use of AI, however sophisticated, undermines the possibility of emergent "collective intelligence" and may jeopardize the functioning of representative democracy, individual and collective rights, and the transparency and authenticity of information.

Consequently, an inquiry into the most appropriate tools to ensure inclusion, accountability, transparency, and a thorough respect for all the interests involved is of paramount importance.



5. Democracies, human rights, and global challenges: which protection for future generations?

During the last years, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the “liquid” nature of borders as well as the weakness and interdependence of human beings. The pandemic has revealed that global challenges (climate change and global warming, sustainable development, economic and financial crisis, world hunger, social inequalities, difficult access to life-saving medicines and vaccines in developing countries, etc.) cannot be faced without an authentic “ethics of responsibility” and solidarity between all human beings.

Nonetheless, as argued by Luigi Ferrajoli, a substantial lack of supranational institutions guaranteeing fundamental rights, as well as the blind predominance of egoistic and nationalist interests, has prevented unitary and global strategies in order to ensure the effectiveness and equality of human rights. Nowadays, we are all hyperconnected thanks to new technologies, but we cannot (or we do not want to) provide unitary responses to social complex phenomena and basic human needs.

Based on this assumption, the panel aims to critically analyze the limits of contemporary national democracies and investigate the role of criminal law, international and regional law, as well as institutions implementing human rights in protecting future generations in the “Age of Globalization”.

TIME FOR EACH PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Each speaker will be given 20 minutes for their presentation.

Following each presentation, 20 minutes will be dedicated to questions and answers.

CASE STUDY PANELS

In accordance with the dynamic and interactive nature of the workshop, the call is also open to activists, NGOs, individuals or groups of 2 or 3 current Ph.D. students or researchers who obtained their Ph.D. in the last 5 years, as well as Master’s students or people who received their Master’s degree within the same period, who are interested in submitting a **proposal of no more than 500 words for a case study or a workshop activity, not specifically related to one of the five panels but cross-cutting their themes** (such as analysis of legal or political cases or press trends impacting on democracy, experiences of civil society and activists addressing or cross-cutting the topics of the panels, etc.).

Case study panels will last approximately 40 minutes and will be held interactively. The proponents will be responsible for the organization of the single panel, and they will have to ensure the audience’s active participation.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The workshop will benefit from the participation of two keynote speakers who are renowned experts in the above-mentioned research fields. We are happy to



announce that we will be joined by Christie Edwards (OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) and Markus Krienke (University of Lugano).

Professor Aldo Schiavello, Coordinator of the Ph.D. School in “Human Rights: Evolution, Protection, and Limits” will open the workshop with a lecture.

ABSTRACTS AND CASE STUDY PROPOSALS SUBMISSION AND EVALUATION

Abstracts and case study proposals in English must be sent **by 31 July 2022** to workshop.hr@unipa.it as a PDF file, named as follows:

- NameSurname _ abstract.pdf (Example: JaneSmith_abstract.pdf)
- NameSurname _ casestudy.pdf (Example JaneSmith_casestudy.pdf)

The abstract should include the following: the author’s name, academic affiliation, and position; or -in the case of an application for “case study panels”- the name of the NGO or role in civil society, the title of the paper, five keywords, and an indication of the preferred panel (or the preference for “case study panels” for those who apply for them). Applicants shall also specify in the abstract whether they wish to attend the workshop remotely or in person.

Evaluation will be **anonymous** and will be carried out by the following criteria:

- Coherence with the purposes and research topics of the workshop
- Originality
- Methodology

Selected speakers will be notified by e-mail by **15 October 2022**.

SUMMARY OF DEADLINES

- **31 July 2022**: Deadline for the submission of abstracts
- **15 October 2022**: Notification of acceptance of abstracts

Scientific Committee: Giulia Sajeve, Matija Žgur, Maria Ferrara

Scientific Supervisor: Marco Brigaglia

Organizational Committee: Arnoux Bellavitis Marguerite, Cibella Enrica, Romano Veronica, Sardo Martina, Sironi De Gregorio Francesca, Tokmak Gulden Deniz

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