



EUROPA-UNIVERSITÄT
VIADRINA
FRANKFURT (ODER)



Co-funded by
the European Union



Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

International Workshop

“Turning the tide: Opposing challenges to democracy across contexts”

European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany, 26-27 March 2026

Organizers:

Sonja Priebus (European University Viadrina), Theresa Gessler (University of Hamburg), and Aleksandra Maatsch (Jean Monnet Chair at the University of Wroclaw)

Description:

An increasing number of democracies around the world are subject to processes of ‘autocratization’ or ‘democratic backsliding’. Within the European Union, several states are affected by multifaceted authoritarian tendencies. In Hungary and in Poland, right-wing governments have dismantled democracy and the rule of law, with Slovakia since 2023 having embarked on a similar path of autocratization. In Germany, the right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is set to win the upcoming general elections in some Eastern states and is likely to put democracy under pressure. One more recent non-European example is the United States under President Donald Trump’s second presidency, where, for example, media pluralism and the independence of the judiciary have come under threat.

While research has mostly analysed processes of autocratization and, in particular, actors driving these processes, actors resisting those attempts have been largely neglected (Gamboa 2022). Hence, opposition to autocratic tendencies has received disproportionately less academic attention than the actions of autocratic incumbents.

This workshop centres on all forms of *opposition* to trends of populism, autocratization and democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe (including Germany), with the aim to enhance our still limited theoretical and empirical knowledge on opposition activities. It is guided by two major questions: 1) Who are the opposition actors? 2) At which levels do these opposition actors operate?

Workshop venue

European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)

Building: Gräfin-Dönhoff-Gebäude (GD), Europaplatz 1, 15230 Frankfurt (Oder)

Campus map: <https://www.europa-uni.de/resources/bilder/bilder-900x600/campusplan-de-en-pl/campus-lageplan-de.jpg>

Programme

Day 1: Thursday, 26th March	
09:00-09:30	Welcome: Gessler, Maatsch and Priebus
09:30-11:00	<p>Panel 1: Theoretical and empirical perspectives on opposition Moderation: Sonja Priebus</p> <p><u>Claudia Matthes</u> (Humboldt-University Berlin): <i>Democratic Backsliding and Resilience from a Critical Modernisation Theory Perspective</i> <i>Discussant: Samet Kayar</i></p> <p><u>Daniel Kovarek</u> (EUI Florence), Bence Hamrak (CEU), Attila Farkas (ELTE Budapest): <i>What Makes a Party Seem Like Sham Opposition? Evidence from a conjoint experiment</i> <i>Discussant: Theresa Gessler</i></p> <p><u>Joep van Lit</u>, Michal Mochtak (Radboud University): <i>Multilevel Democratic Defence: Citizen Support for Multi-Level Resistance to Autocratization</i> <i>Discussant: Agnieszka Kwiatkowska</i></p>
11:00-11:15	Break
11:15-12:45	<p>Panel 2: Civil Society as opposition actors Moderation: Theresa Gessler</p> <p><u>Rafael Labanino</u> (BOKU Vienna, HfWU), Márton Gerő (ELTE Budapest), Aron Buzogány (BOKU Vienna): <i>Inside and Outside Lobbying under Democratic Backsliding</i> <i>Discussant: Ismael Benkrama</i></p> <p>Omer Faruk Genckaya (Istanbul Medipol University), <u>Uğur Ülger</u> (Gaziantep University): <i>Civil movements against authoritarianism in Turkey, 2007-2014</i> <i>Discussant: Anna Fruhstorfer</i></p> <p>Rebecca Kittel, <u>Ismael Benkrama</u>, Birce Altın, <u>Anna Fruhstorfer</u> (Freie Universität Berlin): <i>Protest Camp Infrastructure between collective action and external pressure</i> <i>Discussant: Daniel Kovarek</i></p>
13:00-14:30	<p>Lunch break Mensa Europaplatz</p>
14:30-16:00	<p>Panel 3: Opposition in Italy, Turkey, and Hungary Moderation: Aleksandra Maatsch</p> <p>Davide Rocchetti, Andrea L. P. Pirro (University of Bologna) (online): <i>Protesting for protest: countering illiberal restrictions to democracy in Italy</i> <i>Discussant: Daniel Morgenstern</i></p>

	<p>Berk Esen (Sabancı University), <u>Hakan Yavuzylmaz</u> (Başkent University): <i>The formalization of opposition coordination in Turkey: the conjunctural impact of regime vulnerability and power asymmetry</i> <i>Discussant: Aleksandra Maatsch</i></p> <p><u>Daniel Morgenstern</u> (European University Viadrina), <u>Theresa Gessler</u> (University of Hamburg), Leander Kraft (European University Viadrina): <i>Contentious Episodes of Autocratization: (Un)intended Effects of Opposition Strategies in Hungary</i> <i>Discussant: Rafael Labanino</i></p>
16:00-16:30	Coffee break
19:00-21:00	Dinner Restaurant Oliveto, Bischofstraße 15
Day 2: Friday, 27th March	
09:00-10:30	<p>Panel 1: Multi-level perspectives on opposition Moderation: Theresa Gessler</p> <p><u>Samet Kayar</u>, Kamil Glinka (University of Wrocław): <i>Defending Democracy from Below: Lessons from Metropolitan Governments in Poland, Hungary and Turkey</i> <i>Discussant: Claudia Matthes</i></p> <p><u>Henri Koblischke</u> (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf): <i>The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee in the EU's rule of law crisis</i> <i>Discussant: Sonja Priebus</i></p>
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-12:00	<p>Panel 2: Opposition in Poland and Hungary Moderation: Sonja Priebus</p> <p>Markus Gastinger (Salzburg University), Kinga Koranyi, <u>Aleksandra Maatsch</u> (University of Wrocław): <i>Framing the Freeze: Civic Platform and Tisza Party's Discourses on the Rule of Law Conditionality</i> <i>Discussant: Henri Koblischke</i></p> <p><u>Agnieszka Kwiatkowska</u> (SWPS University Warsaw): <i>Leveraging Discursive and Electoral Strategy Against Authoritarianism: The Battle for Democracy in Poland's 2023 Elections</i> <i>Discussant: Joep van Lit</i></p>
12:00-12:30	Conclusion and planning ahead
12:30-14:00	Lunch Mensa Europaplatz