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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)

Room: GD 102

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
09:30-11:00	<p>Panel 1: Theoretical and empirical perspectives on opposition</p> <p>Claudia Matthes (Humboldt-University Berlin): <i>Democratic Backsliding and Resilience from a Critical Modernisation Theory Perspective</i></p> <p>Joep van Lit (Radboud University): <i>Multilevel Democratic Defence: Citizen Support for Multi-Level Resistance to Autocratization</i></p> <p>Daniel Kovarek (EUI Florence), Bence Hamrak (CEU), Attila Farkas (ELTE Budapest): <i>What Makes a Party Seem Like Sham Opposition? Evidence from a conjoint experiment</i></p>
11:00-11:15	Coffee break
11:15-12:45	<p>Panel 2: Civil Society as opposition actors</p> <p>Aron Buzogány (BOKU Vienna), Rafael Labanino (BOKU Vienna), Márton Gerő (ELTE Budapest): <i>Repertoires, Resources, and Resistance: Explaining Civil Society Behavior in Autocratizing Systems</i></p> <p>Omer Faruk Genckaya (Istanbul Medipol University), Uğur Ülger: <i>Civil movements against authoritarianism in Turkey, 2007-2025</i></p> <p>Anna Fruhstorfer, Ismael Benkrama, Rebecca Kittel (Freie Universität Berlin): <i>Violence and Protest Camp Infrastructure</i></p>
13:00-14:30	<p>Lunch break</p> <p>Mensa Europaplatz</p>
14:30-16:00	<p>Panel 3: Opposition in Italy, Turkey, and Hungary</p> <p>Davide Rocchetti and Andrea L. P. Pirro (University of Bologna) (online): <i>Protesting for protest: countering illiberal restrictions to democracy in Italy</i></p> <p>Berk Esen and Hakan Yavuzylmaz: <i>From Informal Cooperation to Formal Alliances: Opposition Coordination in Turkey's 2018 and 2023 Elections</i></p> <p>Daniel Morgenstern (European University Viadrina), Theresa Gessler (University of Hamburg), Leander Kraft (European University Viadrina): <i>Contentious Episodes of Autocratization: (Un)intended Effects of Opposition Strategies in Hungary</i></p>
16:00-16:30	Coffee break
19:00-21:00	<p>Dinner</p> <p>Restaurant Oliveto, Bischofstraße 15</p>

Day 2: Friday, 27th March	
09:00-10:30	<p>Panel 1: Multi-level perspectives on opposition</p> <p>Samet Kayar (University of Wroclaw), Kamil Glinka (University of Wroclaw): <i>Defending Democracy from Below: Lessons from Metropolitan Governments in Poland, Hungary and Turkey</i></p> <p>Henri Koblischke (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf): <i>Bystanders, Sidelined, or Actors with a Role to Play? The EU's Rule of Law Crisis, the Committee of the Regions, and the European Economic and Social Committee</i></p> <p>Aleksandra Maatsch and Kinga Korányi (University of Wroclaw): <i>Framing the Freeze: Civic Platform and Tisza Party's Discourses on the Rule of Law Conditionality</i></p>
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-12:00	<p>Panel 2: Poland before and after the government change</p> <p>Agnieszka Kwiatkowska (SWPS University Warsaw): <i>Leveraging Discursive and Electoral Strategy Against Authoritarianism: The Battle for Democracy in Poland's 2023 Elections</i></p> <p>Magda Solska (Université de Fribourg): <i>Between Democracy and Party Interests: Explaining the Enduring Rule-of-Law Crisis in Poland</i></p>
12:00-12:30	Conclusion and planning ahead
12:30-14:00	<p>Lunch</p> <p>Mensa Europaplatz</p>