

CALL FOR PAPERS

ECPR Join Sessions Virtual Workshop

'Civil Society Space in Times of Crises: From 9/11 to COVID-19'

17-19 May, 2021

Deadline for paper proposals: **8th of February 2021**

Paper proposals of max. 500 words should be submitted via the ECPR webpage:

<https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PanelDetails/10470>

Abstract

Various reforms in recent years have shown that established democracies inside and outside the European Union (EU) are not immune to illiberal tendencies, with fundamental implications for the conditions in which civil society organizations (CSOs) operate. Consequently, the 'shrinking of civil society space' - defined as CSOs' room for activity and manoeuvre that directly impacts on organizations' capacity to function and to perform key tasks (Borgh & Terwindt 2012; Buyse 2018) - has become a central concern not only in the EU (e.g. EP 2018; CoE 2018; FRA 2018) but also in other consolidated democracies such as the US (e.g. Sidel 2011; IDEA 2018; Civicus n.d.).

In some European countries such as Hungary reforms 'shrinking civil society space' have been read as part of a deliberate governmental effort to dismantle checks and balances and other fundamental mechanisms that assure executive accountability (Khaitan 2019; Bermeo 2016). In others they might constitute an unintended side-effect of governmental policies trying to cope with severe crises including counterterrorism measures (including rules on financial transparency), austerity packages following the 2008 financial crisis, responses to the European migration crisis and most recently the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, echoing numerous case-oriented studies by academics and practitioners, recent expert data suggests that since the early 2000s government control over and repression of CSOs have increased in 2/3rds of EU member states (V-Dem), a trend reinforced by the current pandemic.

Considering the link between the growing legal restrictiveness on CSOs in a range of established democracies and its association with democratic governments' crisis responses this workshop addresses the following questions:

How have democratic governments altered the environments in which civil society organizations operate over the last two decades – through legal or other means – and why? How have these changes affected civil society organizations' ability to survive, operate and perform key functions central to democracy? What consequences did these changes – especially when put in place in the context of specific crises - have for democracy? How have they affected governments' capacity to manage crises?

To date there is little academic research explicitly targeting the drivers or the effects of the 'evolution of civil society space' in established democracies (see, for a recent assessment, Buyse 2018) or how different crises might push democratic governments to fundamentally alter the environments CSOs operate in. This is the case although numerous debates have direct relevance for the theme, including those on militant democracy and rights-restrictions related to counterterrorism measures (e.g. Sajó 2004; Epifanio 2011; 2016), on performance management in welfare provision curtailing voluntary organizations resources reinforced in times of austerity (e.g. Farnsworth & Irving 2011) as well as illiberal tendencies of populist law-making, especially in times of crisis (e.g. Mudde 2016; Caiani & Graziano 2019) populism and public administration (Bauer & Becker 2020), executive aggrandizement (e.g. Bermeo 2016; Khaitan 2019), autocratic legalism (e.g. Scheppele 2018) and democratic backsliding in the EU more generally (Sitter et al 2016).

Keywords: Civil society space, crisis policymaking, rights-restrictions, populist law-making, Covid-19, organizational responses

Expected Participant Profile

Given the salience of the theme and its far-fetching repercussions for a range of academic debates across several social science disciplines, the workshop aims at bringing diverse group of scholars interested in the changing state- civil society relations in Europe and the relationship between crisis management and civil society space broadly defined. More specifically, the workshop aims to open a dialogue between public policy, comparative politics and legal scholars studying government crisis management and reform with scholars focused on civil society organizations themselves and their responses to changes in their environments as well as theoretically oriented scholars interested in the repercussions for the quality of democracy.

We invite papers that study governments' responses to crises and their implications for the organization, activities and development of civil society in established democracies. Whether this relationship is approached at the level of a specific crisis or sequences in which responses to earlier crises affect responses to later ones, we look forward to a wide range of empirically grounded submissions, using quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method approaches. Cross-case and within-case country comparisons are welcome, also papers that focus on the repercussions for organisations operating in certain sub-sectors (eg. migration, gender equality, human rights and democracy etc.) but also papers that include organisational responses across policy sectors and core missions (advocacy groups and service providers). Conceptual papers advancing the debate on crisis management and civil society space are also welcome. Finally, we encourage the submission of papers that focus on populist-law making, rights-restrictions and organizational responses.

If you have any questions or need additional information please contact the workshop directors: Fabrizio Di Mascio (fabrizio.dimascio@unito.it) and Milka Ivanovska Hadjievska (milka.ivanovska_hadjievska@svet.lu.se).