

Call for Papers:

Joint Conference of the **German Association for East European Studies** (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde, DGO), the **Herder-Forschungsrat** (Fachkommission Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften) and the **Section on Political Sociology in the German Sociological Association** (GSA/DGS):

Europe at the crossroads!
Analyzing the current critical junctures and the political, socioeconomic and cultural dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe

Date: September 5-8, 2023

Place: Frankfurt (Oder) at the European University Viadrina

The beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022 was a historical watershed in European history and marked the end of the post-Cold War era. Using the term "Zeitenwende" in his notable speech only three days after Russia's invasion, German chancellor Scholz pointed at the fundamental challenge towards the European order of peace, freedom and democracy that this war means. At the same time, this turning point in European history does also clearly set an end to what we might call the post-socialist transformation phase. Whatever direction Europe may take, 'post-socialist transformation' or 'post-socialist countries' will no longer be the adequate term to describe the single or common development paths of Central and Eastern European countries.

This conference and the corresponding publication pursue the aim of analyzing and conceptualizing the emergence, the meaning, and the future relevance of the so-called 'Zeitenwende' for Europe in general and for Central and Eastern Europe in particular. We aim at contextualizing and analyzing this supposedly turning point in contemporary Europe with (1) a focus on the 'long lines of transformation' that set the context of this rupture, (2) the ambivalences of Europeanization and frictions that mark the phase of 'post-transformation' as well as (3) first foreseeable consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine.

During 30 years of post-socialist transformation, nation-building, increasing attempts of sovereignty and democratization in Central and Eastern Europe were often accompanied by two distinct unexpected gloomy developments: The model and elements of liberal democracy have been questioned in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe, e. g. Hungary or Poland, and in Europe in general (Ivan Krastev, *Europadämmerung*, 2017), what eventually even signifies a fundamental crisis of so-called 'late modernity' (Andreas Reckwitz, *Das Ende der Illusionen*, 2020). At the same time, the quest for independence and democracy in some post-Soviet countries went along with the price of being brutally retrieved by the former hegemonial power. Russia's neo-imperialism was previously not really part of the tableau of investigating transformation although the wars in Transnistria, Chechnya, Georgia, and even in the Western Balkans need to be perceived as phenomena of de-colonization and of post-transformation alike. Both contradictory developments of the transformation and the 'post-transformation' path require a new understanding and new concepts of Europeanization and the role of Central and Eastern Europe for the future of Europe at the crossroads.

The situation that Europe is at the crossroads marks a “critical juncture” (Collier & Collier 1991, 29) for numerous countries and the global order alike that will deeply shape future developments. Critical junctures describe “periods of significant change, which typically occur in distinct ways in different countries (or other units of analysis), and which are hypothesized to produce distinct legacies” (Collier and Collier 1991, 29). We argue to see critical junctures from five perspectives: First, a contemporary perspective focuses on the diversity of the impact of Russia’s war against Ukraine in different countries’ and the EU’s reaction. Second, in a historical perspective, we may look at long-term developments since the 1990s, thus focusing on the high dynamic and often poorly understood ambivalences of post-socialist transformation and Europeanization. Third, from a logic-of-consequences-perspective, we may think about new political, cultural or economic orders in Europe and worldwide. Fourth, from a conceptual perspective, it becomes obvious that the idea of ‘transformation’ as a paradigm for the analysis of societal dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe has reached its end. Fifth, from a decidedly sociological perspective, we see sharply changing patterns of roles, relations, attributions and societal belongings within and across European societies.

To fully understand the current state in Central and Eastern Europe, it seems promising to analyze the interplay between the era of post-transformation and the new situation after the beginning of Russia’s war against Ukraine. The questions at stake are therefore the following:

- 1) While ‘transformation’ has been intensively explored, a debate on concepts and phenomena of the even more ambivalent state of post-transformation did not take place; there is a lack of conceptualization of what comes after transformation. However, the diverging pathways of de-consolidation of democracy in Poland or Hungary, the Non-Consolidation of democracy in the Western Balkans or Georgia, the brutally prevented democratization of Belarus and the Russian attempt of colonial suppression of democracy in Ukraine underline the need for a new paradigm of Eastern European developments beyond transformation and post-transformation.
- 2) The concept ‘critical juncture’ also forces us to ask what commonalities are inherent to European democracies: Are contestation and participation, for example, still universal and ‘culturally neutral’, and what is, was or will be the core of liberal democracy? What is the role of institutions, new movements, and political discourses in Central and Eastern Europe? What different constellations in politics and society can be identified that help to explain the current dynamics? As the majority of the Post-Soviet Republics is under authoritarian rule with the impressive exception of Ukraine, we have to ask whether we see new divisions in the region, which may have a particular impact on the future of liberal democracy.
- 3) What are the central characteristics of societies ‘after transition’? Did semi-directed economic order emerge as a counter-model to liberal market economy? Does the economy provide a particular basis for increasing authoritarianism, and what are relevant entanglements between the political and economic spheres in Central and Eastern Europe that are relevant with respect to the diagnosed critical juncture?
- 4) Identity politics, competing story-making and the provision of historizing narratives are assumed to play a central role in the emergence and consequences of the recent critical juncture. How did the making of collective identities, the permanent change of

- public debate, power structures and fragmentation of the public impact on the multiple and ambivalent post-transformation paths in CEE?
- 5) The reinvention of the nation is one element of the transition processes which has been often ignored. The case of Ukraine and the new discursive localization of Eastern European Countries in EU discourses about identity reflects approaches of re-inventions of democracy from below and also new claims on decision-making and recognition on the European level. What dynamics and developments in terms of collective identity on the regional, national and European level can be observed currently in Central and Eastern Europe, and how do they relate to conflicts, ambivalences and changing European discourse patterns?
 - 6) What is the role of civil society in the current situation, in and around Ukraine, but also in other European countries and in particular, in Russia and Belarus? As conflicts and ambivalences often play a crucial role in movement's framing, we have to analyze the contradictory approaches of civil society actors to democracy, Europeanization, community building, peace and cooperation in Europe. At the same time, civil societies may also support authoritarian rule, social exclusivity, nationalism and the like - so what are the ambivalences of civil society in the run-up of Europe's critical juncture?
 - 7) The European Union faces comprehensive restructurings regarding the accession options for Ukraine and Moldova, but also for the Western Balkans. What are steps and time frames for a possible enlargement, and how should the respective interim periods be managed in order to avoid new-old transitional conflicts stemming from asynchronicities of development and accession? How could a new conception for countries in the process of accession, but also for the former Eastern Partnership resp. the European Neighbourhood Policy look like, and what might be targets? What are future models of European transnational associations?

We invite theoretical, empirical and conceptual papers that deal with these or further questions regarding the role of Central and Eastern Europe for 'Europe at the crossroads'. Please send abstracts of max. 500 words to EuropeanJuncture@europa-uni.de until 20.01.2023. Applicants will be informed about a decision of participation by the end of February.

In case of a successful application, you will be invited to submit a paper of max. 8.000 words until 15.06.2023. We will share papers before the conference in order to ensure a discussion of high quality and related to the papers.

Revisions of the papers will be possible until 31.10.2023. The publication as a special issue or edited volume is planned in early 2024.

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