



# ECPS

EUROPEAN CENTER for  
POPULISM STUDIES

## ***‘We, the People’ and the Future of Democracy: Interdisciplinary Approaches***

***In-Person Programme: July 1-3, 2025. St. Cross College, Oxford University***

***Virtual Programme: September 2025 – April 2026 via Zoom***

Between 2012 and 2024, one-fifth of the world’s democracies disappeared. During this period, “us vs. them” rhetoric and divisive politics have significantly eroded social cohesion. Yet in some instances, democracy has shown remarkable resilience. A key factor in both the rise and decline of liberal democracies is the use—and misuse—of the concept of “the people.” This idea can either unify civil society or deepen social divisions by setting “the people” against “the others.” This dichotomy lies at the heart of populism studies. However, the conditions under which “the people” become a force for democratization or a tool for majoritarian oppression require deeper, comparative, and interdisciplinary analysis. Understanding this dynamic is crucial, as it has profound implications for the future of democracy worldwide. This programme aims to foster a broad and interdisciplinary dialogue on the challenges of democratic backsliding and the pathways to resilience, with a focus on the transatlantic space and global Europe. It aims to bring together scholars from the humanities, arts, social sciences, and policy research to explore these critical issues.

### **Organiser**



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### **Partners**



***Special Thanks to Phil Taylor, Pádraig O’Connor, Freya Johnston, Heidi Hart, David J. Sanders, Clare Woodford, Anthony Gardner, Liz Carmichael, Harry Bregazzi, Hugo Bonin, Benjamin Gladstone, Doris Suchet, Jenny Davies, Justine Shepperson, Daniel Rowe, Katy Long, Julie Adams, Réka Koleszar, Stella Schade, Louise Lok Yi Horner, Jacinta Evans, Contestation of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS), Network for Constitutional Economics and Social Philosophy (NOUS), and Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE).***

### **Zoom Registration Link**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/bmhkaTKZTuKtqJIur132FA>



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## DAY ONE

Tuesday, July 1, 2025

### Introduction

(08:45 – 08:50 / London Time)

**Sumeyye Kocaman** (Managing Editor, *Populism & Politics*, DPhil, St. Catherine's College, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies).

### Opening Addresses

(08:50 - 09:20 / London Time)

**Kate Mavor**, CBE (Master of St Cross College).

**Janet Royall** (Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, Principal of Somerville College, Oxford University).

### Roundtable -I-

(09:20 - 11:00 / London Time)

#### *Politics of the 'People' in Global Europe*

#### Chair

**Jonathan Wolff** (Senior Research Fellow in Philosophy and Public Policy, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford; President of the Royal Institute of Philosophy).

#### Speakers

*"The Reappearance of 'The People' in European Politics,"* **Martin Conway** (Professor of Contemporary European History, University of Oxford).

*"The Construction of the Reactionary People,"* **Aurelien Mondon** (Professor of Politics, University of Bath).

*"Christianity in A Time of Populism,"* **Luke Bretherton** (Regius Professor of Moral & Pastoral Theology, University of Oxford).

*"The Connection between Cosmopolitan Democracy and Global Law,"* **M. Isabel Garrido Gómez** (Professor in Legal Philosophy, University of Alcalá).

### Coffee Break

(11:00 – 11:30)



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## **Panel -I-**

(11:30 - 13:00 / London Time)

### ***Politics of Social Contract***

#### **Chair**

**Lior Erez** (Alfred Landecker Postdoctoral Fellow, Blavatnik School of Government, Nuffield College, Oxford University).

#### **Speakers**

*“Exploring Human Rights Attitudes: Outgroup Perception and Long-term Consequences,”* **Sabine Carey** (Professor of Political Science at the University of Mannheim and Director of the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research); **Robert Johns** (Professor of Politics at the University of Southampton), **Katrin Paula** (Postdoctoral Researcher, Technical University Munich) and **Nadine O’Shea** (Postdoctoral researcher, Technical University Munich).

*“Doing Politics Non-politically: Explaining How Cultural Projects Afford Political Resistance,”* **Nathan Tsang** (Doctoral Candidate in Sociology, University of Southern California).

*“From Demos to Cosmos: The Political Philosophy of Isabelle Stengers,”* **Simon Clemens** (Doctoral Researcher at the Cluster of Excellence “Contestation of the Liberal Script – (SCRIPTS)” and at Theory of Politics at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin).

#### **Lunch**

(13:00 – 14:00)

## **Panel -II-**

(14:00 – 15:30 / London Time)

### ***‘The People’ in the Age of AI and Algorithms***

#### **Chair**

**Alina Utrata** (Research Fellow, Rothermere American Institute, St John’s College, Oxford Un.).

**Murat Aktaş** (Professor, Political Science Department, Muş Alparslan University).

#### **Speakers**

*“Reclaiming ‘The People’ in an Age of Algorithms: AI Literacy as a Democratic Virtue,”* **Hossein Dabbagh** (Ass. Prof. of Applied Ethics, Northeastern University, London, & University of Oxford).

*“Navigating Digital Disruptions: The Ambiguous Role of Digital Technologies, State Foundations and Gender Rights,”* **Luana Mathias Souto** (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, GenTIC Research Group, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya).



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*“The Role of AI in Shaping the People: Big Tech and the Broligarchy’s Influence on Modern Democracy,”* **Matilde Bufano** (MSc in International Security Studies, Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies and the University of Trento).

## Coffee Break

(15:30 – 16:00)

## Panel -III-

(16:00 - 18:00 / London Time)

### ***Populist Threats to Modern Constitutional Democracies and Potential Solutions: Research Output of the Jean Monnet Chair EUCODEM***

#### Chair

**Elia Marzal** (Associate Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona).

**Bruno Godefroy** (Associate Professor in Law and German, University of Tours, France).

#### Speakers

*“Theoretical Foundations of Modern Populism: Approaches of Heidegger, Laclan and Laclau,”*

**Daniel Fernández** (Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law, Universitat Lleida).

*“Erosion of the Independence of the Judiciary,”* **Marco Antonio Simonelli** (Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona).

*“Referenda as a Biased and Populist Tool: Addressing a Complex Issue in a Binary Way,”* **Elia**

**Marzal** (Associate Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona).

*“Pro-Independence Movements as A Populist Way Out in Multinational Contemporary Societies,”*

**Núria González** (Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona).

*“Potential Solutions: Second Chambers, Demos and Majoritarian Body,”* **Roger Boada** (Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona).

## Drinks Reception

(18:15 - 19:00 -- Common Room)

## Dinner

(19:00 - 21:00 -- Dining Hall)



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## **DAY TWO**

Wednesday, July 2, 2025

### **Panel -IV-**

(09:00 - 10:30 / London Time)

#### ***Politics of Belonging: Voices and Silencing***

##### **Chair**

**Azize Sargın** (PhD., Director of External Relations, ECPS).

##### **Speakers**

*“The Scents of Belonging: Olfactory Narratives and the Dynamics of Democratization,”* **Maarja Merivoo-Parro** (Marie Curie Fellow, University of Jyväskylä).

*“Transnational Solidarity Movements: Autogestion, Community Building, and Defining Colonial Alterity between French Algeria and Israel/Palestine,”* **Sara Elizabeth Green** (DPhil student, Faculty of History, University of Oxford).

*“Silent Symbols, Loud Legacies: The Child in Populist Narratives of Post-Communist Poland,”* **Maria Jerzyk** (Graduate student, Masaryk University in Brno, Czechia).

##### **Coffee Break**

(10:30 - 11:00)

### **Roundtable -II-**

(11:00 - 12:30 / London Time)

#### ***‘The People’ in and against Liberal and Democratic Thought***

##### **Chair**

**Aviezer Tucker** (Director for the Centre for Philosophy of Historiography and the Historical Sciences, University of Ostrava).

##### **Speakers**

*“Listening to ‘the People’: Impossible Concepts in Political Philosophy,”* **Naomi Waltham-Smith** (Professor, Music Faculty, University of Oxford).

*“Liberal Responses to Populism,”* **Karen Horn** (Professor in Economic Thought, University of Erfurt) & **Julian F. Müller** (Professor of Political Philosophy, University of Graz).

*“The Living Generation – A Presentist Conception of the People,”* **Bruno Godefroy** (Associate Professor in Law and German, University of Tours, France).

##### **Lunch**

(12:30 - 13:30)



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## **Panel -V-**

(13:30 - 15:00 / London Time)

### ***Governing the 'People': Divided Nations***

#### **Co-Chairs**

**Leila Aliyeva** (Associate Researcher, Russian and East European Studies, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, Oxford).

**Karen Horn** (Professor in Economic Thought, University of Erfurt).

#### **Speakers**

*"Catholicism and nationalism in Croatia: The Use and Misuse of 'Hrvatski Narod'"* **Natalie Schwabl** (Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Arts, Languages, Literature and Humanities, Sorbonne University).

*"'Become Ungovernable: ' Covert Tactics, Racism, and Civilizational Catastrophe,'"* **Sarah Riccardi-Swartz** (Assistant Professor of Religion and Anthropology, Northeastern University).

*"Is There Left-wing Populism Today? A Case Study of the German Left and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance,"* **Petar S. Ćurčić** (Research Associate, Institute of European Studies, Belgrade).

## **Coffee Break**

(15:00 – 15:30)

## **Panel -VI-**

(15:30 - 17:00 / London Time)

### ***The 'People' in Search of Democracy***

#### **Chair**

**Max Steuer** (Principal Investigator at the Department of Political Science of the Comenius University in Bratislava).

#### **Speakers**

*"Between Antonio Gramsci and Erik Olin Wright: Deepening Democracy through Civil Society Engagement,"* **Rashad Seedeem** (Adjunct Research Fellow in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Media in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Melbourne).

*"Resilient or Regressive? How Crisis Governance Reshapes the Democratic Future of 'The People',"* **Jana Ruwayha** (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Law; Teaching and Research Assistant, Global Studies Institute; University of Geneva).

*"The Performative Power of the 'We' in Occupy Wall Street and Gezi Movement,"* **Özge Derman** (PhD., Sciences Po and Sorbonne University).



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## DAY THREE

Thursday, July 3, 2025

### Coffee

(09:00 - 09:30)

### Panel -VII-

(09:30 - 11:00 / London Time)

***'The People' in Schrödinger's Box: Democracy Alive and Dead***

### Co-Chairs

**Ming-Sung Kuo** (Reader in Law, University of Warwick School of Law).

**Bruno Godefroy** (Associate Professor in Law and German, University of Tours, France).

### Speakers

*"The Matrix of 'Legal Populism': Democracy and (Reducing) Domination,"* **Max Steuer** (Principal Investigator, Department of Political Science, Comenius University).

*"Lived Democracy in Small Island States: Sociopolitical Dynamics of Governance, Power, and Participation in Malta and Singapore,"* **Justin Attard** (PhD Candidate, University of Malta).

*"Russia's War on Democracy,"* **Robert Person** (Professor of International Relations and Director of curriculum in International Affairs, United States Military Academy).

### Coffee Break

(11:00 – 11:30)

### Panel -VIII-

(11:30 – 13:30 / London Time)

***'The People' vs 'The Elite': A New Global Order?***

### Co-Chairs

**Ashley Wright** (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Minerva Global Security Programme, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford).

**Azize Sargın** (PhD., Director of External Relations, ECPS).

### Speakers

*"We: The Populist Elites,"* **Aviezer Tucker** (Director for the Centre for Philosophy of Historiography and the Historical Sciences, University of Ostrava).



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*“Reclamations of ‘We, the People’: Rethinking Civil Society through Spatial Contestations in Turkey,”* **Pinar Dokumacı** (Assistant Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin) & **Özlem Aslan** (Ass. Prof. in the Core Program at Kadir Has University).

*“The Transatlantic Network of Authoritarian Populism: The Rise of the Executive and Its Dangers to Democracy,”* **Attila Antal** (Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Institute of Political Science, Eötvös Loránd University).

*“The French New Right and Its Impact on European Democracies,”* **Murat Aktaş** (Professor, Political Science Department, Muş Alparslan University); **Russell Foster** (Senior Lecturer in British and International Politics, King’s College London, School of Politics & Economics, Department of European & International Studies).

### Discussant

**Karen Horn** (Professor in Economic Thought, University of Erfurt).

### Lunch

(13:30 – 14:30)

### Roundtable -III-

(14:30 - 16:00 / London Time)

### *When the Social Contract Is Broken: How to Put the Genie Back*

### Co-Chairs

**Irina von Wiese** (Honorary President of ECPS).

**Selçuk Gültaşlı** (Chairperson, ECPS Executive Board).

### Speakers

**John Thomas Alderdice** (Baron Alderdice of Knock, in the City of Belfast, Founding Director of the Conference on the Resolution of Intractable Conflict, Oxford University; Founder of the Centre for Democracy and Peace Building).

**Maya Tudor** (Professor of Politics and Public Policy, Blavatnik School of Government; Fellow, St Hilda’s College at the University of Oxford).

**Julian F. Müller** (Professor of Political Philosophy, University of Graz).

### Closing Remarks

(16:00 - 16:10 / London Time)

**Irina von Wiese** (Honorary President of ECPS).



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