

# NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2024



Funded by  
the European Union  
NextGenerationEU

National Recovery and Resilience Plan



OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA



## EUROPEAN VALUES AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES RESEARCH GROUP

### Welcome to our first newsletter!

European Values and Social Challenges (EUVaSC) is a research group within the SUMMIT Project, implemented by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Its research falls within the field of social challenges encompassing multidisciplinary approaches from legal studies, political science, European studies, studies of institutions and policies in identity formation and education.

Three main strands mutually inform each other focusing on value-based approaches to explaining and understanding social challenges. They include normative, theoretical as well as empirical studies based on previous achievements of the strand lead experts and potential for publications.

The central focus of the first research strand is the link between the internalization of specific political values and the resilience of the institutions of democracy. The starting assumption is that specific political values and the resilience of the institutions of democracy.

The second strand deals with European constitutionalism in times of constitutional polycrisis, extraordinary constitutionalism and transitional constitutionalism with a value-based approach. Finally, the third strand explores the relevance and values of universities for the future focusing on PhD innovation in a European context.

# PROF. MARIA STOICHEVA:

## Leader of the EUVaSC research group

*“Our research on European values responds to the rise of the topic in the European political discourse in a context where European values are used by both defenders and critics of the European project. Our belief is that the topic requires perspectives from various disciplines in the context of the social challenges of our time.”*



## CONVERSATION SERIES EUROPEAN VALUES AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES



In the past year we started an innovative format for academic discussion in partnership with Alma Mater TV: the Conversation Series European Values and Social Challenges. In this series, the research group members discuss contemporary challenges with leading international scholars in an accessible way. Our first guest was prof. Michael Byram speaking on the topic of Internationalisation and academic competences. The Conversation was led by prof. Maria Stoicheva.



We continued the series with Strengthening democratic values and civic engagement through education – the perspective of the Council of Europe with prof. Martyn Barrett

The next episode was on The Ukraine and Gaza Wars: Lessons and Changes with prof. Vesselin Popovski and Prof. Krassen Stanchev



Then, we offer you a conversation on Challenges to Representative Democracy with Prof. Dr Sascha Hardt and prof. Martin Below.

Finally, a conversation with former Rector of Sofia University Prof. Anastas Gerdjikov and Prof. Maria Stoicheva on European Values and Social Challenges. (IN BULGARIAN)



# XI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "THE AGENDA OF THE NEW EU INSTITUTIONAL CYCLE": KEYNOTE SPEECH BY PROF. STOICHEVA

Prof. Maria Stoicheva was keynote lecturer at the Eleventh International Conference “The Agenda of the New EU Institutional Cycle” (May 30-31, 2024) of the European Studies Department (Sofia University). Her speech on the topic of European values opened the panel on EUROPEAN IDENTITY, EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolina Tsvetkova shared some of the results of the empirical study undertaken within Strand 3 - "Are Bulgarian School Leavers Interested in Actively Participating in Civic and Political Life?".

## EUROCLIO – (BE)LONGING: CONFRONTING OUR MEMORIES - WORKSHOP BY PROF. TSVETKOVA

Assoc. Prof. Nikolina Tsvetkova delivered a workshop during the 30th Annual Conference of EUROCLIO – (Be)longing: Confronting our memories which took place in Sofia (April 25-27, 2024). The participants discussed how educational institutions can foster young people's active civic engagement by seeking answers to the questions of Who am I? Who are you? Who are we? Where are we headed?

## INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS



On 28 March 2024 Sofia University hosted the international scientific conference “Representative Democracy in Crisis: Critical Narratives on Representative Democracy in Europe”. World renowned scientists and researchers from European universities participated in the event, discussing different aspects of representative democracy in Europe. The conference also explored the crisis of representation and democracy, the imaginary foundations of representative democracy, ideologies and founding constitutional myths. The impact of the crisis and emergency constitutionalism and fear policies on representative democracy, the tendencies to post-democracy and technocracy are central for the event.

Prof. dr Martin Belov, leader of research strand “European Constitutionalism in Times of Constitutional policrisis, Extraordinary Constitutionalism and Transitional Constitutionalism” underlined the importance of the topic, by reminding that representative democracy is a main pillar of our thinking about the political system. Given the visible signs of crisis in representative democracy, the event will become a discussion forum on recent challenges, including globalisation, technological changes.

# INTERNATIONAL FORUM EUROPEAN VALUES AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES 24 APRIL 2024, SOFIA

Democratic backsliding, conservative populism, the specifics of the doctoral ‘defence’ in various contexts, young people’s interest in and engagement with civic and political life – those were only a few of the topics discussed at the first European Values and Social Challenges forum, that the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski hosted on 24 April 2024 in the House of Europe in Sofia. The event was part of the annual reporting conference under the comprehensive research project - SUMMIT – Sofia University Marking Momentum for Innovation and Technology Transfer, which is being implemented by the University between 2023 and 2026.

The debate focused on various threats to democracy such as radicalisation of political discourse, conservative populism, the absence of substantive political ideas and solutions, which enables the flourishing of anti-democratic parties and messages against the EU, and NATO, among others.

The second part of the forum zoomed into some preliminary results of the international comparative research which a sub-team of the EuVaSC group is going in order to identify the relationships between young people’s values, attitudes and skills and civic and political engagement.

Finally, a separate research direction of the group focuses on the experience of defending the doctoral dissertation across 10 cases from 9 countries employing ethnographic methodology. The researchers are currently preparing an edited volume and a few articles in Web-of-Science-indexed scholarly journals.



# LECTURE SERIES

This year, we also launched two lecture series: The Constitutional Imaginaries and the Imaginaries of Crisis and Fear Lecture Series.

The **Constitutional Imaginaries** are closely related to the linguistic, visual, and emotional turn in the social sciences, humanities, and law that has been unfolding in recent decades. The constitutional politics of memories, fears and hopes are tied to the forms of symbolic-imaginary, visual, textual, emotional and performative constitutionalism. They are built on the basis of normative ideologies and ideas, constitutional myths and mythologies, constitutional utopias and dystopias, constitutional taboos, etc. The lecture series aims to present the views on constitutional imaginaries of some of the most ambitious, established and recognizable researchers from leading European and global universities. Three lectures that were held in the 2023/2024 academic year and presented the scientific achievements and conclusions resulting from the joint work of the authors on publications related to the SUMMIT project. There are more lectures scheduled for 2024 and 2025.

The lecture series "**Emergency Constitutionalism, Constitutional Polycrisis and Rule of Law and Democracy in Transition**" aims to explore, through critical and contemporary analytical perspectives, the main challenges that multiple crises and emergency regimes pose to the rule of law and democracy. The lecture series explores the challenges that new technologies and the ongoing technological and information revolution pose to the rule of law and democracy. The influences of the digital revolution, constitutional polycrisis and multi-level governance on the values, principles and institutions of contemporary liberal democratic constitutional systems will be presented. Special attention will be paid to the profound effects that the system of crises and multiple transitions have on constitutional values and principles, constitutional design and the functioning of liberal democratic constitutional systems. Lecturers are prominent specialists from leading European universities. More lectures are scheduled for the autumn of 2024.



# OUR PUBLICATIONS:

- [Byram, M. \(2024\). Reflections on Working for the Council of Europe](#)
- [Byram, Michael, Melina Porto, and Leticia Yulita. 2023. Beyond Teaching Languages for Communication—Humanistic Perspectives and Practices](#)
- [Popovski, V. \(2023\). The Right to International Solidarity](#)
- [Popovski, V. & A. Malhotra \(Eds.\). Reimagining the International Legal Order](#)
- [Popovski, V. \(2023\) Reimagining the United Nations Security Council](#)
- [Stoicheva, M. \(2023\). Reimagining European Institutions. In: Popovski, V. & A. Malhotra \(Eds.\). Reimagining the International Legal Order](#)
- [Stoicheva, M., Sreejith, S.G., Gupta, I. \(eds\) Relevance of European Studies in Asia](#)
- [Byram, M. \(2023\). From Instrumentalism to Humanistic Education: The Changing Purposes of Language](#)

## COMING UP NEXT

### **What to expect from EUVaSC until the end of 2024?**

- Conference Imaginaries of Crisis and Fear - 8-10 November 2024, Sofia University
- More episodes of the Conversation Series European Values and Social Challenges
- More lectures part of the Constitutional Imaginaries and the Imaginaries of Crisis and Fear Lecture Series.
- Constitutional Imaginaries in Central and Eastern Europe: a Special issue of Review of Central and East European Law
- Public lectures by prominent scholars in the field of social challenges

*Further info: SUMMIT project website: <https://summit.uni-sofia.bg/>*

*Photo credits: Sofia University, PR Department*

*SUMMIT EUVaSC research group info: [aseniad@uni-sofia.bg](mailto:aseniad@uni-sofia.bg)*

*Contract BG-RRP-2.004-0008 for the financing of project "Sofia University - Marking Momentum for Innovation and Technological Transfer" under pillar 2 "Establishing a network of research higher education institutions in Bulgaria", component "Innovative Bulgaria" from National Recovery and Resilience Plan part of the program to accelerate economic recovery and transformation through science and innovation.*