

Conference: *What Europe? Ideals to Fight for Today*

March 27 and 28, at the ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry

Organized by:

Bard College Berlin
ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry
The Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College, New York
The German Association for East European Research (DGO)

Bard College Berlin is a German university, recognized by the Senate of Berlin, which is also part of Bard College, Annandale New York. The college offers a liberal arts education in the German and U.S. traditions, based on the small-group seminar format.

The ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry is a research institute exploring interdisciplinary intersections in the arts, sciences and humanities, with a lecture series, workshops, and postdoctoral Fellowships linked to specific research projects.

The Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College New York preserves the intellectual heritage of one of Bard College's former professors, Hannah Arendt, by placing her work in dialogue with pressing questions of contemporary concern.

The German Association for East European Research (founded in 1913) is the largest German-language research organization focused on the Central and East European region.

Each year, Bard College Berlin, ICI Berlin and the Hannah Arendt Center organize a joint conference addressing an issue of current political significance in connection with the work of Hannah Arendt and the questions and traditions that inform the aims of liberal arts education. Last year's conference—also hosted by the ICI Berlin—was devoted to the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Hannah Arendt's text *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Guest speakers included Seyla Benhabib (Yale University), Jay Bernstein (New School for Social Research, New York) and Christoph Menke (Goethe Universität, Frankfurt).

This year's conference, "What Europe? Ideals to Fight for Today," explores the situation of "crisis" in which Europe has found itself since the financial collapse of 2008. The conference is unique among recent events discussing the current state of affairs in Europe in that it offers a searing examination of the contradictions at work in this landscape of crisis, and of points of tension and controversy that may reach explosion, or that are simply the result of misperception and prejudice.

Above all, the conference invites intellectuals who are well known for their contributions to debates on the fraught history of Europe, or on its present dilemmas, to put their diagnosis of the present and the future.

Drawing on a key question from the work of Hannah Arendt, the conference asks what goals and aims political engagement in Europe should set itself today. In her essay "Tradition and the Modern Age" Arendt observes that the rebels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fought against tradition, but that in the "modern age" it is difficult to answer the challenge "what are we fighting for?" Protest and activism have returned in some measure to the streets and capitals of Europe. But what aims truly animate the demonstrations? What chance do they have of influencing political (and, perhaps more importantly, economic) processes? This is one of the central issues our speakers, experts on the problem of political conflict, and on the dynamics of political change, will broach.

The opening keynote lecture at 19:00 on 27 March, "Ukraine: Soviet Past, European Future?" will be delivered by the historian Timothy Snyder, Professor at Yale University. Professor Snyder is best known for his book *Bloodlands: Between Hitler and Stalin*, which elucidates the organization of the projects of genocide that drove the European totalitarian regimes of the mid-century. Professor Snyder has recently written (in *The New York Review of Books*) on the outbreak of protest in a country in which he has taken a special interest, in part because of its historical position between Fascist and Communist designs, the Ukraine. Professor Snyder's thesis, like that of Ivan Krastev, who will speak later in the conference, is that the European Union, though sometimes a frustrating enigma to its own citizens, operates as an inspiration to the democratic impulse of populations struggling with the burdens of corruption in post-Soviet and post-Communist states. Professor Snyder's lecture makes clear the crucial importance of long historical legacies for understanding the configuration of crisis in Europe today, and for grasping the meaning and significance of Europe's political institutions, also for those who are excluded from or positioned outside these institutions. The lecture will be followed by a reception on the rooftop at ICI at 20:30.

Like all conferences organized by the Hannah Arendt Center, this event does not have a narrowly academic focus or academic format. On the second day of the conference, speakers are invited to contribute short statements of 15-20 minutes to a panel discussion on one of the themes related to the topic. The first panel, 10:30-12:00 on March 28, asks about the location of democracy in Europe today. Protests have been seen in Bulgaria, Greece, Ukraine, Portugal, Spain, yet with very different motivations and divergent causes, though all in some respect generated by a drastic recent fall in economic prosperity. These protests show one stark paradox: that in the case of newer entrants to the European Union, or countries where negotiations or debates over entry still continue, the Union is looked to as a source of democratic safeguards. In the EU itself however, conflicts arise about how far the Union's policies, laws and stipulations can be influenced by its citizens, with—at the outer fringes—the emergence of parties and alliances (most recently that of Britain's British National Party with Greece's "Golden Dawn") who represent an outright rejection of European transnational governance. The question arises as to where we really find "democracy" in Europe today: at the local or national level, in the relationship to transnational institutions and frameworks? And what possibilities exist for extending or strengthening democratic self-determination in Europe as it is now constituted? The speakers on this panel have long experience with the phenomenon of protest and resistance among diverse populations of Europe. Ivan Krastev, one of the foremost theorists of democratic self-determination in Europe today, is Director for the Center of Liberal Strategies in Sofia, and Permanent Fellow at the Institute for the Human Sciences in Vienna. He writes regularly on the currents of European popular politics for a wide variety of publications. Eirini Avramopoulou is a Greek social anthropologist educated at the University of Cambridge who studies popular protest movements both within and outside the borders of the European Union, examining the ways in which they articulate social and cultural possibilities of change. Ulrike Winkelmann is a writer and editor for the TAZ newspaper, where she regularly contributes on domestic and European issues.

Our second panel, at 14:00 on March 28, addresses the meaning of a European idea in the current context in Europe. The speakers on this panel are Roger Berkowitz, Director of the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College; Patrick Bahners, a long-time director of the FAZ Feuilleton and currently a cultural correspondent of the German newspaper FAZ in New York and Walter Russell Mead, Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College and editor of The American Interest magazine.

Our final panel debates what is perhaps the most controversial aspect of discussions of the European future, the matter of the values and heritages that it should either overthrow or remain faithful to. Rob Riemen is the founder of the Nexus Institute in the Netherlands, the business of which is to pursue the question of what kinds of values (democratic deliberation, cultural tolerance) ought to determine Europe's future, and the interaction between its citizens, whether at the political or the social level. Agata Lisiak is a specialist in urban cultures teaching at Bard College Berlin and Humboldt University, who is currently a Fellow at the Vienna Institute for the Human Sciences. She is researching the influence of immigrant mothers on the integration of young people into the societies of which they become a part when families change their country of residence. Peter Baehr, who teaches at Lignan University in Hong Kong, and is also Raymond Aron Fellow at the Institute for the Advancement of the Social Sciences at Boston University, has worked on the traditions that form European consciousness, from the political traditions of Ancient Rome to the work "ethic" supposedly conferred by the Protestant reformation.

As with all the conferences organized by Bard College Berlin, the event will be preceded by workshops, seminars and lectures for students at the college, who take an active part in the preparations for the discussion open to the public at ICI on 27-28 March.