

Invitation

Réka Kinga Papp

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A long march from state socialism to illiberalism: Orbán, Soros, and the NGOs in Hungary

Thursday, 22 June 2017, 5 pm

wiiw, Vienna 6, Rahlgasse 3, lecture hall
(entrance from ground floor)

Abstract

It has been a long march from 1989 when Hungary was declared a democracy and the formulation of the civic sphere began, to 2010 when PM Orbán declared the illiberal programme of the 'Regime of National Cooperation'. This programme promotes, in a schoolmaster's style, a new culture war, coupled often with actual open repression, against all those who might oppose Orbán and his overwhelming power in the system he operates. Independent NGOs have been under fire since 2010. They have been accused of serving foreign interests and wrecking the true Hungarian society with their contagious liberal ideas and also by standing up for human rights. In his latest attempts Orbán is labelling them straight up foreign agents. In parallel with these developments, higher education budgets have been fiercely cut and the autonomy of public universities abolished since 2011. The Central European University CEU, founded and funded independently of the illiberal state, is the last one standing among those powerful institutions that have shaped Hungarian scientific life and the strategic field of higher education. Their existence has been threatened by the infamous LexCEU. But Orbán did not just come out of nowhere. He did not gain his absolute power in an instant, nor is he some external force that struck a well-functioning system. Universities and civil society are key factors of a healthy democracy, yet they have been gradually weakened, forced into dependence by constant underfunding and political domination through the two decades of post-Soviet Hungary. To repair what Orbán has ruined, these institutions cannot simply turn back to what went down before. Institutional and political strategies must change to make a difference.

Réka Kinga Papp is a Budapest-based journalist and performer, specialising in social and human rights issues, environmental matters and the history and structure of movements and social initiatives. Currently she is a Milena Jesenka journalist fellow at IWM. She is a founder of the Green Spider Media Lab that produces documentaries and campaigns on and with NGOs. She is an author of the Hungarian political weekly HVG, elaborating on social policy, workers' rights, gender issues, media structure and cultural policy. She is an anchorperson at the radio station Klubrádió, running her show 'Professor Paprika and the Complicated Things', promoting social sciences in a comic tone for laicist audiences. As a media researcher she focuses on progressive movements and protagonists and their strategies, with special respect to the boundaries between

radicalism and peaceful advocacy. Her major topics were the West German '68 movements and the RAF, the environmentalist scene and the free birth movement in Hungary lately. She is the press officer of the Association of Hungarian Sex Workers. She has worked with over fifty NGOs in Hungary and is dedicated to the #Civilizáció initiative, an assembly of Hungarian civic organisations to step up against the ongoing repression of independent initiatives.

Univ. Doz. Dr. Robert Stehrer
Scientific Director wiiw

Dr. Sándor Richter
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