

Conference Report
STATE (IN)STABILITY
Past, present and future perspectives for the nation state
Topic for 2021 – State (in)stability in the age of post-truth

The second international scientific conference *STATE (IN)STABILITY: Past, present and future perspectives for the nation state* was held on November 12, 2021 at Libertas International University, in Zagreb, Croatia. The conference, funded by Libertas International, featured 36 conference speakers from 19 different countries and 34 research, professional, and higher education institutions for a total of 34 presented papers. In terms of sheer numbers the second conference was much larger than the first conference held in November 2020. Taking into account the aforementioned number of participants, countries of origin, number of institutions and number of presented papers for last year (25/10/15/22 respectively), the 2021 conference was roughly 50% larger in all the metrics. Also, due to the ongoing conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference was again held in hybrid format, and since some of the online participants came from cities spanning 13 time zones (from the Philippines to Michigan, USA) the organizers obviously had to take into account geography, and not only paper topics, when dividing the speakers into panels. The speakers of the 2021 conference, according to their information in the conference Book of Abstracts, came from: Croatia, USA, Russia, Hong Kong, Austria, North Macedonia, Germany, France, Belgium, United Kingdom, Canada, Netherlands, Serbia, Finland, Philippines, Germany, Spain, Poland, and India.

The presented papers were focused mostly on stabilizing and destabilizing factors connected to post-truth phenomena, but the conference also accepted papers connected to the its long-term goal of investigating various aspects of the stability and instability of states and the state system. Because of the influence which these various “post-truth phenomena” have at all levels of discourse, and their possibly destabilizing effects on the global political and economic order, democracy, society and culture, the conference speakers investigated a large number of research questions pertaining to, but not limited to, phenomena such as: information bubbles, fake news, conspiracy

theories, the distrust of science, traditional media and political authorities, the rise of contemporary populist movements, cult-like behavior, the acceptance of fringe ideas in the political mainstream, historical revisionism, etc.

The main idea driving these questions and the investigation of post-truth was that the 21st century has provided a push towards a “post-truth society”, not referring to a society in which events take place “after” truth, but rather one which has somehow, vaguely yet ostensibly, moved beyond truth. The concept is, however, a new one, so it neither has a conclusively agreed upon definition, nor is the state of affairs which it is meant to denote altogether clear. On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that new realities within social and traditional media have influenced all levels of social, political, economic and cultural discourse to the extent that growing information bubbles have produced a number of inwardly coherent systems of language and belief whose members have little to no common ground on which to carry an intelligible discussion with anyone outside their own bubble.

The central topics of interest, which were meant to provide an overall investigative framework within which most of the research of the conference speakers took place, were presented by two keynote speakers. The first was Kristijan Krkač of the Zagreb School of Economics and Management. Along with several guest professorships, a large number of published books and papers, edited volumes etc., Krkač is Croatia’s preeminent Wittgenstein scholar and an expert in epistemological issues. In his keynote address *Bullshit, fake news, misinformation, and lies in crisis and disaster*, Krkač spoke out on addressing and overcoming various obstacles to correct information in times of crisis. The second keynote speaker was Lee McIntyre of the Center for Philosophy and History of Science at Boston University and of Harvard Extension School, author of the 2018 bestselling book *Post-Truth*. McIntyre’s work is widely regarded as the foremost attempt to grapple with post-truth phenomena from a philosophical perspective, but also refers to relevant research in political science, general, political and social psychology, sociology, media studies etc. In his keynote address *What is Post-Truth?*, McIntyre defined the main issue of post-truth as the attempt to control and subjugate truth through political power, so that the truth of a statement is no longer defined by its relationship to reality, but rather with its relationship to the source(s) of the statement and other factors.

The conference lectures were distributed into six panels chaired by Boris Kashnikov (National Research University “Higher School of Economics”, from Moscow, Russia), Višeslav Raos (Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Croatia), Damir Mladić, Vladimir Filipović and Stipe Buzar (all three of Libertas International University, Zagreb, Croatia). Panel #1 focused on the relationship between post-truth and phenomena related to war, security, terrorism, military alliances, and post-war historical narratives. Panel #2 focused on various aspects of fake news, security, media

distrust, disinformation, and political propaganda. Panel #3 covered a wide range of topics on epistemic authority, identity politics, but also the application of them to various cases, such as in the Phillipines and India. Panel #4 introduced discussions on the political and economics repercussions of post-truth and the concept's connections to neoliberalism, historical revisionism, welfare, and state stability. Panel #5 was a thoroughly philosophical panel which discussed a number of epistemological issues regarding truth and post-truth, their relations to reality and power, but also the possible philosophical origins of post-truth. Finally, panel #6 discussed a number of topics spanning from geopolitics to global health, citizenship and the rule of law, all in terms of their connection to post-truth.

To conclude, the wide variety of paper topics was clearly influenced by the pervasiveness of the key concept, post-truth, in many parts and aspects of academic life and the wider society. It is worth mentioning that the speakers came from a very diverse set of disciplines, spanning from philosophy and political science, through economics and history, to cultural studies and journalism. In view of that, it seems that the organizers, more or less, got the kind of academic response for which they were aiming with the Call for Papers which they had published back in December 2020.

This conference report was assembled with assistance from the conference chairs and with full access to conference materials provided by the organizers, for which I thank them.

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