

PopCon, Research Project on Populist Constitutionalism
Law School, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Call for papers

**The populist transformation of constitutional law:
Populist constitutionalism and democratic representation**

International Conference, Thessaloniki, 7-8 May 2021

Populism seems to be on the rise worldwide. There are, nevertheless, several varieties of populism, from exclusionary authoritarian to inclusionary democratic ones. They all have in common a critical stance towards liberal, or legal, constitutionalism and the excessive juridification and depoliticization of society that goes with it. While, however, authoritarian populisms are constructed around an exclusionary, nationalist and xenophobic concept of the people, democratic populisms pursue the inclusionary and radical-democratic vision of enhanced popular participation.

Populist discourses and practices have a profound effect on constitutionalism. Populists contest constitutional orthodoxies. They criticize or forthrightly reject existing constitutional arrangements; they challenge established constitutional interpretations and beliefs; and, once in power, they seek to either amend the constitution or effectively change the way the governmental system operates without a formal amendment. Again, depending on the specific version of populism, this may result either in democratic and constitutional backsliding or in the revitalization of constitutionalism through democratization of constitutional law. In either case, constitutional law is transformed.

In the last decade or so, populists in power have been mainly associated with right-wing authoritarianism. On the other hand, in several cases democratic populists aspire to realize the transformative potential contained in constitutions, in order to alter structured inequalities and power relations, and contribute to the social and political inclusion of the less well-off. In that respect, populist constitutionalism is associated with radical-democratic aspirations of social transformation.

The world Covid-19 pandemic seems to have accelerated the pace of developments. The public health crisis and the ensuing emergency gave authoritarians the opportunity to go further with the democratic and constitutional backsliding, especially by sidestepping parliaments and concentrating even more power in their hands. At the same time, progressives are pushed to propose more radical inclusionary policies to address the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. Note that such developments are not limited to 'proper', so to say, populists; they also extend to mainstream political actors endorsing at

least some aspects or elements of populist constitutionalism. After all, populism comes in degrees.

The PopCon research project is carried out by a research team based in Thessaloniki, Greece. We study the relationship between populism and constitutionalism, aiming to propose an approach to constitutional law that mitigates populist challenges to constitutional democracy. We are also interested in establishing an international academic network on populist constitutionalism; colleagues from Bologna, Enna, Nicosia, and Sheffield are already part of it.

In this first conference that we organize we aim to bring together scholars from various fields researching topics such as the relation between different versions of populism and constitutionalism; the impact of populist constitutionalism on institutions of representative democracy; how liberal democratic constitutionalism may be reconciled with inclusionary, as opposed to exclusionary, populism; whether the democratization of constitutional law may help overcome the challenges posed by authoritarian populists to democracy and the rule of law. Subjects we aim to address include, but are not limited to:

- **Populism and constituent power**
- **Constitutional populism, populist constitutionalism, popular constitutionalism: Concepts and misconceptions**
- **Populism and the crisis of parliamentary - party democracies**
- **Constitutional representation and the populist challenge**
- **Populism, constitutionalism and the role of political parties**
- **Populism, constitutionalism and the role of mass media**
- **Populist constitutionalism and the democratization of constitutional law**

Contributions could discuss theoretical perspectives or practical outlooks focusing on specific aspects of the subject, or case studies. We explicitly welcome contributions examining the experience from the European South, the Central and Eastern European countries, and especially the Balkans.

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Bojan Bugarič (University of Sheffield)

Prof. Costas Douzinas (University of London)

Prof. Antoine Vauchez (University Paris 1-Sorbonne).

Organizing committee: Asst. Prof. Akritas Kaidatzis, Dr. Eleni Kalampakou, Assoc. Prof. Ifigeneia Kamtsidou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), Assoc. Prof. Christos Papastylianos, Assoc. Prof. Costas Stratilatis (University of Nicosia)



The conference will take place at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Law School. Virtual participation will be available via zoom- meeting.

Abstracts of up to 500 words should be submitted in English. The organizing committee may exceptionally accept abstracts also in French or Greek.

Important dates:

- **Abstract submission deadline: January 25, 2021.**
- **Notification of acceptance: January 31, 2021.**
- **Draft paper submission deadline (5000 - 7000 words): April 25, 2021.**
- **Conference dates: May 7- 8, 2021.**

After the conference, participants will have the opportunity to finalize their papers and submit them, in English only, for an edited volume or a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal. There is no registration fee. However, the PopCon Project cannot cover for participants' travel and accommodation expenses.

For submissions and information please send e-mail to:

popcon.project@gmail.com or akritas@law.auth.gr.