Wednesday, 24 April, 2013, 11 a.m.  

Fellow Seminar

**Lilla Balázs**

**Minority Protection beyond EU Conditionality:**
The Implementation of Minority Language Provisions in the Case of Romania

Research on national minority protection in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) has highlighted the instrumental role of European Union (EU) conditionality in bringing about positive change. EU conditionality has been found to work mainly by attaching the requirement of the adoption of minority protection standards to the incentive of EU membership, often overriding domestic opposition. At the same time, the accession incentive explanation also points to the inherent limits of these effects. First, they can be expected to be reversed once EU membership is granted, especially since in the absence of internal EU minority standards, conditionality is replaced by no EU sanctioning mechanism on potential infringements. Second, sustainability is also highly relevant with regard to the actual implementation of these formal rules – a question that arises from the superficial character of candidate state compliance in minority protection, generally attributed to the double standards applied by the EU itself, the lack of clear compliance benchmarks, as well as limited attention to the phase of actual implementation during accession.

In the framework of EU conditionality and minority protection, studies on the fate of legislative acts on minority protection in the post-accession period reveal that a large-scale legislative backtracking has not happened to a larger degree than in the pre-accession period and it occurs only under extremely unfavorable conditions. Nevertheless, the stage of the actual implementation of minority protection rules presents a different picture. In this context, I will present findings from my research on the
sustainability and depth of minority protection measures in the implementation phase. More specifically, the presentation will address the institutional application of minority language use in the official communication in the case of selected local public institutions in Romania. Considering conditions that can potentially influence implementation at external, central and local levels of implementation, the presentation will seek to highlight the specific configurations of conditions and mechanisms that lead to the implementation or non-implementation of minority language provisions. These will be then assessed in terms of their implications regarding the implementation process as a whole, but also in relation to the longer term effects of EU conditionality and the European minority rights regime as a whole.

Lilla Balázs has a PhD in Political Science from the ETH Zurich. As a member of the European Politics research group at the ETH Zurich, between 2009 and 2012, she took part in a research project on the development of minority protection policies within the context of EU accession in East Central Europe. Her main research interests include minority rights, language rights, Europeanization and policy implementation.