CONCEPT NOTE

Synopsis
The goal of the workshop is twofold. First, on a substantive level, the workshop aims at stocktaking of the status quo and discerning future research avenues for the study of political institutions and their impact on the sustainability of peace and the quality of democracy in divided societies. Particular attention will be given to new conceptual and methodological challenges, the subnational level of analysis as well as the unintended long-term impact of power-sharing agreements on the quality of democracy. Second, on a professional level, the event will provide an opportunity for young researchers to present their ongoing work in an academic workshop, expose them to a critical audience from outside of their university, and make use of the event as a starting point for further cooperation and exchange. For more senior academics, the event will provide a welcome occasion to discuss their own work with an emerging generation of scholars.

Many of the countries which have adopted power-sharing institutions following the end of the cold war have reached a stage which allows for a critical evaluation of the institutional choices and their effects on conflict prevention in the short term and democratic consolidation in the long term. Additionally, the recent demise of autocratic regimes in e.g. countries of the Arab Spring, Myanmar or Nepal underline the need for thorough evaluation of previous power-sharing arrangements in order to identify lessons learned.

Context
Researchers focusing on the impact of political institutions in divided societies largely agree that the inclusion of all significant social groups into the political process is a crucial condition for the avoidance of violent crises. The two distinct schools which have developed over the last decades disagree on the ways to achieve this inclusion. The consociational approach advocated by Arend Lijphart is based on the premise that the inclusion should be achieved through creating mutual constraints for the ethnic groups facilitated by institutions like proportional electoral system, a technically defined federal system, proportional representation of the groups in the executive, and mutual veto on the group-specific issues. On the other hand, the centripetal school advocated by Donald L. Horowitz has sought to achieve inclusion through creating incentives for interethnic cooperation. This is expected to be achieved through preferential voting systems, multiethnic federal units, and presidential executive. The recent wave of power-sharing in countries like Afghanistan, Bosnia, Fiji, Iraq, Kosovo, Macedonia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Timor-Leste provides ample evidence for the importance of political institutions when it comes to ending violence in plural societies. The current and upcoming challenges for the societies in the countries of the Arab Spring, Myanmar and Nepal further emphasize the importance of future studies on this issue.
**Purpose of the event**

Against this background the workshop intends to provide a forum for a critical reflection on recent developments in the study of political institutions and to provide an opportunity to shed light on upcoming research. Overall, the workshop invites particularly contributions aimed at answering of the following questions:

a) Which methodological problems for the study of political institutions in divided societies can we identify? How can these problems be resolved and benefit the furtherance of research?

b) Which new insights can we obtain by shifting the level of analysis from the prevalent national to the often neglected sub-national level? How do the different levels interact and impact on each other’s role in mitigating the negative consequences of segmental cleavages present in divided societies?

c) Enquiring into the experiences with previous and current power-sharing regimes, which unintended consequences can we identify? Acknowledging that most institutional choices entail a trade-off, which lessons-learned can we draw from the resulting balancing processes and how can they inform different settings?

The decades’ long research on the effects of political institutions has considerably advanced our understanding of their impact on conflict dynamics in divided societies. However, the research is confronted with a number of methodological challenges, which, if solved, open up new avenues for further studies. This includes the importance of appropriate case selection. Many studies suffer from a rather weakly justified selection of cases and lack conceptually valid scope conditions, diminishing the validity of their inferences. Another notable challenge is the endogenous nature of institutions. The research mostly omits the fact that power-sharing institutions are implemented in countries which are most prone to intercommunal violence making most of the causal inferences of power-sharing on the likelihood of violence problematic. Finally the research has concentrated on studying net effects of different variables affecting the likelihood of conflict. The research has avoided looking into the conjunctural effects of the various configurations of variables failing to provide more holistic explanations of the intrastate violence in divided societies. Finally the literature has mostly concentrated on the study and comparison of a limited number of cases. To reconcile this shortcoming the workshop will highlight the necessity of extending our scope of knowledge to previously understudied or emerging cases of divided societies with potential or actual intercommunal violence.

The debates on power-sharing may considerably benefit from looking at different outcomes of local institutions within the same country. For instance, implementing decentralization as a component of power-sharing arrangements in divided societies may be overall seen as preserving peace, yet its consequences may vary across subnational units. Comparative studies can enrich our knowledge on what aspects of decentralization produce which outcomes and what are the underlying conditions for these relationships. Furthermore, the subnational level of analysis provides insight into how a particular framework of institutions constrains and guides the behavior of local actors. In-depth knowledge of how politics work at the subnational level may help us better understand how and why intercommunal cooperation takes place. Fragile peace cannot be addressed without looking at what is going on at the nucleus of politics. The analyses merely focused on central government oversight and policy making in divided societies risk to neglect many creative approaches of the citizens at the local level who deal with each other and go beyond the mere preservation of peace. Finally, the study of subnational units opens the space for novel policy recommendations.

Research on political institutions has got increasingly aware of unintended consequences which may come with a specific institutional choice. If not anticipated and included into a comprehensive assessment, specific institutional choices may fall short of their expected benefits. In the context of
power-sharing and post-conflict-studies this dilemma has been recognized with the potentially detrimental impact of peace-facilitating arrangements on the overall democratic development of a country. The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates vividly that the very same institutional framework which ensures the absence of violence may also be detrimental to the further democratic development. Such observations point towards a temporal mismatch of static institutions and conflict dynamics. It invites further work on the required transitional and malleable features of institutional frameworks which develop in accordance with societal needs. This observation underscores the importance of conceptualizing power-sharing agreements as ‘critical junctures’ which set the further political dynamics on a largely path-dependent development. Once entrenched, corrective modifications are only very difficult to introduce.

Anticipated outcome and Impact

Overall, we expect the workshop to provide a stimulating exchange on recent research on power-sharing and to identify those areas where further research appears to be most needed and promising. Particular emphasis will be given to the above outlined conceptual and empirical challenges and the identification of approaches to meet them. While the workshop is conceptualized as a self-standing event, it will form part of a wider effort at the Center for the Study of the Imperfections in Democracies (DISC) to advance the understanding of institutional arrangements aimed at ensuring the peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups within a society.

Those participants who present a research paper will profit from the feedback of the invited discussants as well as overall input from the audience. We expect and encourage as an outcome of the workshop a closer cooperation among the various participants. We are confident that the workshop will be the starting point for new collaborations, intensify already existing connections, and foster a scholarly conversation beyond the meeting in Budapest. The event is an opportunity for a new generation of scholars at the Central European University and from other institutions to meet in person, to discuss their research projects and general research experiences among themselves as well as to directly receive valuable feedback from already established scholars. The inclusion of experts with ‘in-the-field’ experiences will receive particular attention and will ensure a robust link between the academic research and the policy formulation.

The papers presented during the workshop will be made available to the public. Beyond a publication in the working papers series of the Center for the Studies of Imperfections of Democracies, we envisage a special volume with a peer-reviewed journal.

About the organizer – the Center for the Study of Imperfections in Democracies (DISC)

Established in 2007, DISC aims to develop and encourage research that reaches across traditional academic and geographic boundaries that exist in the study of democracy by connecting researchers from distinct world regions and from various fields and perspectives. Currently DISC is developing a number of projects dealing with the impact of political institutions in post-conflict environments. Among others a recently funded project studies the persistence of ethnic identities as the drivers of political mobilization in post-conflict Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia. DISC’s other current projects deal with representation of minorities in local politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina; populism and populist parties in post-communist democracies; spatial models of party competition in the study of ethnic politics in young democracies; and social and political inequalities.