cordially invites you to a lecture by

Péter Csigó
MOKK, BME

‘Welfare Tourists’, ‘Lazy Southerners’ and the Perspectives of European Solidarity

The talk addresses the anti-European and nationalist upsurge that has recently shaken Europe. In recent years, the xenophobic stance of formerly marginal extremist parties has penetrated the political mainstreams even in core European countries. The last years have clearly shown how easily the centrist political elites, so far the prime advocates of the European project, can turn their backs to their cosmopolitan engagements. This process endangers the whole project of European integration, since it corrodes the "supranational expansion of civic solidarity", what Jurgen Habermas has rightly called the prime prerequisite of a successful European future.

The fact that the project of pan-European solidarity suffers so badly from the above nationalist upsurge stems from the paralyzing, systemic ills of today's "mediatized populist democracies" (to be grasped in opposition to the "representative democracies" of the 20th Century). In mediatized populist democracy, all parties act in the name of the interests and the wants of "the people" as a whole, and they all hope to connect this imaginary "people" through popular media channels. However, the figure of the people - what the people want to do, what the people would sympathize with, what the people are able to understand, etc - is too opaque to catch in today's democracies.

The above, deep systemic crisis of visibility makes it hard to assess what exactly "the popular will" stands for in today's mediatized democracy. What remains instead is a permanent speculation about the noisiest and most apparent instances in which the popular will is believed to manifest itself (crowds cheering for populist leaders, catchy campaign slogans, loud demonstrations, TV interviews with "common people", opinion polls, etc.). These common sensical representations of the "peoples's will" are usually seriously distorted: they present people as more self-interested, more narrow-minded and more determined in their preferences than they are in reality. The above, systemic crisis of representation and visibility in today's mediatized populist democracies hinders social groups and forces who want to further the European solidarity project in forging international political coalitions in the name of the pro-Europe fractions of European nations.

Tuesday, 10 March at 5.30 p.m.
Monument Building Gellner Room

Péter Csigó (PhD) is a Hungarian media and political sociologist. His main research field is the transformation of democratic politics in the emerging media and social environment of late capitalism. Csigó's research engages the chaotic outcomes of the speculative processes that in his view permeate today's media and political markets, the actors of which incessantly rush after popular success and enclose themselves in a self-absorbed, bubble-like interpretive universe, detached from the fundamental realities of public opinion formation. Csigó's research results are covered in his forthcoming book The Neopopular Bubble: Media and Democracy in Late Capitalism (CEU Press, under publication)