Laboratory for the Study of Democracy
DEMLAB
SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SCIENCES
FACULTY OF SOCIAL & ECONOMIC SCIENCES A.U.TH.
transform! europe
ROSA LUXEMBURG FOUNDATION
With the support of:
RESEARCH COMMITTEE
ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI



INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

Representation, Left Strategy, and Democratic Futures

Progressive Politics under Authoritarian Pressure

Organising committee:
Antonis Galanopoulos, Angelina Giannopoulou,
Giorgos Katsambekis, Yannis Stavrakakis

6–7 Nov 2026

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Room 319, 3rd floor

Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences Building
AUTH campus

PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Friday 6 November

9:45-10:00 Welcome and opening remarks

Yannis Stavrakakis (DemLab Director, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)
Aris Stylianou (Head of School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)
Barbara Steiner (Director of Transform! Europe)

10:00-11:30 Session 1

The Strategic Crisis of the Left: Between Political Retreat & Electoral Paralysis

The opening roundtable establishes the diagnostic framework of the seminar. It identifies the main contradictions shaping the contemporary Left and broader progressive forces in contemporary democracies: declining hegemonic capacity, fragmented social bases, electoral volatility, and the challenge of authoritarian politics.

Key topics

- The paradox of electoral presence without hegemonic prospects
- Short-term electoralism versus long-term strategy
- Lessons from recent experiences of left governance and opposition in Europe
- How the terrain of political struggle has changed in the last decade

Speakers: Myrto Tsakatika (University of Glasgow),
Costas Eleftheriou (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens),
Angelina Giannopoulou (Sophia University Institute, Transform! europe)

Chair: Yannis Stavrakakis

11:30-12:00 Coffee Break

12:00-13:30 Session 2

Politics Without Illusions: Strategy, Power & the Political Organisation of the Left

This session develops and problematises the conceptual and strategic challenges and potential resources for the rest of the seminar. It revisits the question of hegemony not only as theory but as a practical problem of political organisation and strategy.

Key topics

- Conceptualising politics today: rationalism, affect, necessity, contingency
- The crisis of the party form: populism, anti-populism, horizontalism and vertical leadership, left-wing 'elitism'
- Coalitions, alliances, and the question of political mediation: Internationalism, nationalism, and strategy in a fragmented geopolitical order

Speakers: Jacopo Custodi (Scuola Normale Superiore),
Paolo Gerbaudo (Complutense University Madrid),
Yannis Stavrakakis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

Chair: Angelina Giannopoulou

13:30-14:30 Lunch Break

14:30-16:00 Session 3

Reconnecting with Society: Organisation, Emotion, and Popular Politics

This session shifts the focus from strategic issues to the sociological and organisational
crisis of the Left, examining why progressive politics struggles to sustain long-term
relationships with popular classes.

Key topics

- Individualisation, democratic fatigue, and the transformation of electoral behaviour
- Why mobilisation often fails to translate into durable organisation
- Ideological production in an era of post-truth, hypernormalisation, and digital fragmentation
- Emotional engagement and political belonging in contemporary movements

Speakers: Viktoria Huegel (University of Vienna)
Antonis Galanopoulos (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Eteron)
Alexandros Kioupkiolis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

Chair: Giorgos Katsambekis

10:00-11:30 Session 4

From Post-Democracy to Authoritarian Governance

This session analyses the structural changes reshaping democratic politics, focusing on the rise and mainstreaming of authoritarian practices, securitisation, and the normalisation of exclusionary discourses.

Key topics

- The mainstreaming of authoritarian politics across the political spectrum
- The erosion of democratic norms and institutions
- Human rights discourse and its limits in contemporary struggles
- Climate crisis and political ecology as structural drivers of political conflict

Speakers: Danai Koltsida (Panteion University, Transform! europe)
Giorgos Katsambekis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)
Katy Brown (Manchester Metropolitan University)

Chair: Antonis Galanopoulos

11:30-12:00 Coffee Break

12:00-13:30 Session 5

Rebuilding the Left: Experiences, Experiments, and Lessons from Political Practice

This session introduces concrete political experiences that test new forms of organisation, mobilisation, and strategy.

Key questions

- What forms of organisation are proving effective today?
- How are contemporary left-wing and progressive alternatives articulated?
- What can we learn from relevant successes and failures?
- Can local experiences inform broader political strategy?

Speakers: Julia Wollenberg (Die Linke)
Roni Küppers (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
Nikos Nikisianis (Η Πόλη Ανάποδα/The City Upside Down)

Chair: Boris Kanzleiter

13:30-14:30 Closing Lunch

The seminar is dedicated to the memory of the distinguished Greek sociologist, Constantine Tsoukalas, who passed away on August 17, 2026.