

Webinar

Civil Liberties and Social Rights under Threat?

Thursday, 2 July 2020 at 6.30-8.30pm EEST (Greek time)

The COVID-19 pandemic has a continuous impact on civil liberties and social rights, which is unfolding during the different phases of the pandemic and the enacted containment measures.

The outbreak of the pandemic provided clear indications on whether someone lives in a liberal constitutional democracy or in an illiberal regime. Even if measures limiting civil liberties were necessary for dealing with this unprecedented situation in both systems, the handling of the situation differs substantially. Whereas in the former such limitations are open to scrutiny with respect to proportionality and can be subject to political comment, in the latter critical debates just do not take place.

Despite its legal content, the limitations of negative rights and liberties are affecting directly the citizens, who clearly identify that not being allowed to exit their home infringes on their constitutional rights, but at the same time on their everyday lives. The seemingly legal debate therefore automatically acquires a political dimension as well.

Proportionality combined with temporality were invaluable during the first phase of the pandemic, where restrictions on free movement proved to be an effective tool against the spread of the virus. At the same time, experience has shown that restrictions on the right to privacy are more prone to outlast emergencies – as the mass surveillance following the 9/11 attacks. Once hidden mechanisms of surveillance are in place, they are difficult to control. Furthermore, new technologies with access to sensitive data are now being used for the detection and tracking of infected persons for the sake of protecting the population. What role do democratic institutions, first the parliament, but as well political parties and the civil society, play in safeguarding democratic scrutiny and fundamental rights? Also, ‘bio-politics’ come into play, as medical criteria are used as a prerequisite for exercising rights.

The impact of the pandemic on social rights is as well crucial. What were the lessons learned during the global financial crisis? How will the financial burden of this new crisis be allocated?

Is there a progressive approach – in terms of extend and criteria – to this necessary limitation of fundamental rights? Could progressives develop concrete and specific policy proposals with respect to legal theory, in order to shape this liquid environment?

Leaving the initial shock behind, we are now able to start reflecting on how to tackle the challenge of the pandemic, scrutinizing the consequences, and avoiding them to have a more permanent nature than necessary.

Program

6.30pm	Introduction	Ulrich Storck , Director, FES Athens
6.40pm	The Constitutional Dimensions of the Pandemia	Xenophon Contiades , Professor of Constitutional Law, President of Tsatsos Foundation
6.50pm	Surveillance and Data Protection	Lilian Mitrou , Professor of Data Protection Law
7.00pm	The Impact of the Pandemia on Employment	Ellie Varchalama , Legal Counsel in the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE), Vice-President of the National Commission for Human Rights
7.10pm	A Progressive Approach	Marinos Skandamis , Secretary of KINAL for Civil Protection, f. Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice
7.20pm	The Role of Civil Society	Maria Gavouneli , President of the National Commission for Human Rights, Designated by the Greek League for Women's Rights
7.30	Interactive debate with the participation of the audience	
	Chair	Fotini Kokkinaki , Journalist, HumanRights360 Communication Officer
8.30	End of Event	

** Conference Languages are Greek and English*