

Section 8– Relazioni Internazionali

Chairs: Carla Monteleone, Vittorio Emanuele Parsi

Panel 8.12 A Triadic Relationship in the Post-Soviet Space: Identity Politics, State Consolidation and Domestic Regimes

Nationalism has a bad reputation nowadays, particularly in the West. It results directly associated with the ideas of discrimination, authoritarianism, ethnic cleansing and war. However, identifying it exclusively with these political phenomena means to ignore the role of nationalism for the self-determination of oppressed peoples, democratization, domestic cohesion and the welfare state foundation. Identity politics is close to sharing the same destiny of the broader concept of nationalism, frequently being associated with its darker sides. It refers to the process of people adopting political positions based on embedded identities – as their ethnicity, race, or religion – rather than on broader policies. This choice is fostered by the perception of a lack of political recognition of these identities.

Francis Fukuyama argued that identity politics has become a master concept that explains much of what is going on in global affairs (2018). It is particularly fit to grasp what has happened in Central-Eastern Europe and in the post-Soviet space, where the fluidity of the social classes and the weakness of the intermediate bodies have encouraged its spread.

Differently by other regions, here this phenomenon overlapped with the transition processes of stateness and regime changes across the post-communist states, luring the scientific interest of several scholars. Some studies argued that state consolidation and stable democracy have triumphed only in countries that previously solved their nationness problem. Other works find a democratization positive effect on the state consolidation and on the weakening of ethnic divisions' disruptive effects. Finally, another group posits that state consolidation represents a background condition for shaping national identities and fostering democratization.

After more than a quarter of a century since the end of the Cold War, what does the experience of the post-communist countries tell us about this triadic relationship? Which kind of effects does identity politics produce in terms of state consolidation and regime change in Central-Eastern Europe and in the Post-Soviet Space? Does identity politics take the shape of a domestic or of an international variable?

Empirical evidence shows a more complex and nuanced reality than the one so far understood by the theory. State and democracy have consolidated despite the strong ethnic cleavages in Latvia and Estonia. National homogeneity fostered state consolidation together with authoritarianism in Armenia. Identity-based politics and state weakness did not thwart the partial democratization of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. Finally, Russia is resorting to the identity-based *Russkiy Mir* formula to restore its hegemony over the former Soviet countries alternatively hindering their state consolidation and democratization.

The panel welcomes papers focused on the interaction between the three variables, but also those that investigate the relationship between two of them. Similarly, it accepts studies based on a theoretical approach, quantitative or qualitative analysis, as well as those connected with the theories and methods of comparative politics or international relations.

Chairs: Mara Morini, Gabriele Natalizia