At the outset of his latest book *Revolutionary constitutions. Charismatic leadership and the rule of law*, Bruce Ackerman presents an ambitious research plan aimed at exploring the different pathways through which constitutions have acquired legitimacy over the last century. Three ideal types are put forward:

- **revolutionary constitutions** are the product of intensive and successful popular mobilizations led by charismatic outsiders overthrowing illegitimate incumbent rulers;

- **establishment constitutions** are legal and political orders resulting from strategic concessions by pragmatic insiders aimed at the co-optation of moderate outsiders;

- **elite constitutions** are constitutional orders promoted by emerging political and social elites in the absence of a general popular mobilisation against declining old rulers or imposed by external forces and later accepted by society.

According to Ackerman, constitutional orders situated in different legitimacy pathways experience remarkably different life-cycles. Not only the constitutions of each of these ideal types cope with distinct challenges in gaining legitimacy at the outset and retaining it as the original political constitutional momentum fades away. Also the role of supreme and constitutional courts varies remarkably, with important consequences in terms of legal and political culture.

Although very widespread in scope, Ackerman’s project is particularly topical for a European audience. Firstly, by ascribing in turn European national constitutions to the above three ideal types, Ackerman’s analysis points to a much more nuanced and complex account of European constitutionalism than the hitherto prevailing views regarding it as simply deriving its authority from universal human rights and establishing a form of highly constrained democracy which seems to echo the elitist model. The question of legitimacy is tied to the creation and consolidation of the constitutional order in a way that transcend the classic distinction between political and legal constitutionalism, and which suggests a research agenda which extends well beyond the “founding” moment. Secondly, by connecting the discussion on the legitimacy of European constitutional orders to the process of European integration, Ackerman makes no mystery of his ambition of shedding some light also on the multiple constitutional crises of the EU, detected in the rise of populist political movements, Brexit and the corrosion of the rule of law in constitutional systems like Hungary and Poland. In his diagnosis, Ackerman suggests that these crises might have a common root in the incapacity of European member states to identify a common pathway to integration. This difficulty, he argues, is not simply a matter of political will but the reflection of the variety of legitimacy patterns emerging from the main constitutional orders of EU member states. Unlike in the US, where the revolutionary paradigm is predominant, integration in Europe struggles to accommodate constitutional traditions marked by their distinct revolutionary, establishment and elite imprinting. In fact, the three biggest countries (and arguably the ones which have exerted more influence upon the shape of the European Union) are instantiations of the three different models: France is revolutionary; Germany is elitist; the UK is an establishment constitution.
We want to expand this intuition and test it as the basis for a comparative analysis of European constitutionalism. The goal of the conference is to bring together comparative constitutional scholars and political scientists from different European jurisdictions with the aim of covering several case studies. The conference will engage directly and critically with Ackerman’s influential scheme at two levels. Methodologically we will discuss whether Ackerman’s scheme provides an accurate grid for understanding the legitimacy of the constitutional orders established in Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Substantially, we will test Ackerman’s analysis and, in particular, its explanatory potential of diverse case studies and of the current European crises. The discussion at both levels will be driven by the more general question of whether in the tradition of European constitutionalism legitimacy is obtained through constitutionalisation.

After an introductory discussion of Revolutionary constitutions with the author, the conference will examine in turn each of Ackerman’s ideal types with a view to both reflect critically on their theoretical soundness and the substantiating capacity of the selected case studies. A last panel will be devoted to an assessment of Ackerman’s diagnosis of the current malaises of European integration.