PhD student: Amandine Le Bellec,

Supervisors: Carlo Ruzza (SIS, Unitn), Réjane Sénac (CEVIPOF, Sciences Po Paris)

Title: LGBT rights as a “European value”: The sexual politics of the Common European Asylum System

Abstract:

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people continue to be confronted by many human rights violations, with 69 countries still criminalizing homosexual acts in 2019. In this context, it is not surprising that some LGBT people have sought asylum in places where the legislation is more favourable, such as the EU. Although many EU countries penalized homosexuality not so long ago, some researchers have argued that gender equality and LGBT rights have become a core value of the EU. In this sense, this research examines how has the politicization of gender and migration reoriented the Common European Asylum System to include LGBT identities as a valid category for claiming asylum.

This study will collect data on three major moments of the Common European Asylum System: 1999-2005 (birth), 2011-2013 (strengthening), and 2015-ongoing (crisis). Data will be collected from policy documents and directives, reports, minutes of EU Parliamentary debates, press releases, case law; and interviews with members of the Commission, the Parliament and civil society organizations. Using process-tracing and Critical Discourse Analysis, I will first evaluate the extent to which this reconfiguration of LGBT rights as a European value has occurred; and secondly, analyze the impact of this reconfiguration upon asylum.

This research will contribute to the LGBT asylum debate, where the influence of the EU has long been neglected; but it will also contribute to major debates in European studies – such as where are the boundaries between the EU and Member States when dealing with both politicized and human-rights related issues.

PhD student: Jessica Cuel,

Supervisors: Louisa Parks

Title: Help that hinders? NGOs’ impact on participation in local environmental governance

Abstract:
It is widely acknowledged that community-based natural resource management is conducive to positive outcomes in environmental governance. One essential feature of this success has been the direct participation by local communities in decision-making processes and in programs implementation. Enhancing effective and meaningful community participation contributes not only to more context-specific and arguably more effective environmental governance, but also to creating and strengthening democratic spaces both within the communities involved and between these communities and external actors.

As important bridges between global governance and local initiatives, and between donors and beneficiaries, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have the potential to play a crucial role in promoting participatory approaches to environmental governance. However, some scholars suggest that the predominance of northern-based and donor-driven NGOs in civil society has stifled local-level democracy and action. Despite their importance, little research has been conducted on how the organizational dynamics of specific NGOs have influenced participation in local environmental governance.

By examining the action of several NGOs in local communities, the proposed research aims to establish the impact of specific features of environmental NGOs in helping or hindering local communities to engage in participatory environmental governance. This research adopts an ethnographic approach and will rely on interviews with NGOs practitioners as well as with members of local communities and on the systematic analysis of documents produced by NGOs. The project is exploratory and will generate findings about the effects of NGOs organization on community support in environmental governance that could be tested in other community settings.

**PhD student:** Aleksandar Damjanovski

**Supervisors:** Stefano Benati

**Title:** The influence of EU agencies on government preferences: the case of EU Cooperation on Defence and Security

**Abstract:**

In the last five years, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Council have developed a package of measures that aim to improve the effectiveness of the EU Cooperation on Defence and Security. This process has increased the role played by EU agencies, such as the European Defence Agency and the European External Action Service; it has increased their ability to reshape national strategies and preferences, and has resulted in more cooperative outcomes.

By using Rational Choice Institutionalism theory, the proposed research aims to understand the abilities of EU agencies to alter Member States preferences by reformulating
national interests in light of European security and defence goals. Through their role in controlling and assessing cooperative projects proposed by national governments, EU agencies act as ‘gatekeepers’ and ‘agenda setters’ of strategic culture, thus redefining governments’ interests and cognitive strategic paradigms. Furthermore, structuration theory facilitates understanding to what extent the interaction among EU agencies and Member States are mutually constitutive.

By adopting a principal-agent model (P-A), the research will analyse how EU agencies in the defence and security sector are able to pursue European interests, and how they operate in order to achieve Europeanised security and defence. Both constructivism and rationalism approach will be used to explain changes in the ‘operational’ beliefs of national strategic cultures and actors’ preferences, while a network analysis will be used to investigate the interactions among different EU agencies, thus defining the relevant ‘agent’ in the P-A model. Findings and outcomes will be interpreted under the Europeanisation concept.

**PhD student:** Ruben David

**Supervisors:** Louisa Parks

**Title:** Evolving norms in the UN climate change regime: the contributions of the EU and China with regard to the Least Developed Countries

**Abstract:**

This research analyses the role both the EU and China have played in shaping the global climate regime beyond their borders, in the context of UN multilateral cooperation. The project focuses on the normative structures of the UN climate regime, exploring the process by which norms of international climate governance have diffused and evolved over time. The study aims to understand how the EU and China have positioned themselves within normative debates on climate change revolving around the “cleavage” between ‘developed – developing’ countries. In fact, the specific area in which the normative actions by the EU and China on climate change will be analysed is their approaches regarding the regulation of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) within the UN climate regime, as regard both mitigation and adaptation.

By developing a qualitative longitudinal design, this project will map the evolution of the EU’s and China’s foreign climate policies over the period 1992 – 2020. The starting-point of the investigation is consistent with the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) while the end of the time period corresponds to the 2020 UNFCCC COP 26, to be held in Glasgow. The longitudinal analysis is divided into four time periods, selected on the basis of the different stages of UN climate regime development. This periodization allows for an analysis of EU’s and China’s positions at different points in time.
and then for a comparison across these phases. The specific methodological tool that is applied to conduct the study is narrative process-tracing.

Finally, the analysis conducted in this research project will contribute to an important and growing body of literature addressing different dimensions of international climate change politics, including the role of key states (i.e., China), supranational actors (i.e., EU) and norms.

**PhD student:** Micaela Musacchio  
**Supervisors:** Emanuele Massetti  
**Title:** Relationships between far-right parties and movements: France, Italy, and the United Kingdom in times of crisis  

**Abstract**

The political, economic, and cultural crises that have affected Europe in recent decades have represented major shocks for many European countries. It has been argued that the main beneficiaries of these crises have been far-right parties, which have managed to achieve electoral success by exploiting feelings of discontent and insecurity of the population. The far right, however, has been not only a protagonist in the electoral arena, but also in the protest arena through the activities of social movement organisations.

The aim of this research is to examine the relationships between far-right parties and movements and how these have changed during crises. The research will analyse how these actors influence each other’s discourses, actions, and whether and to what extent they share members. It will do so by looking at three sets of relationships: Lega and CasaPound in Italy; the Rassemblement National and Bloc Identitaire in France; the UKIP and the English Defence League in the UK. In order to analyse protest, structural, and discursive dimensions of these relationships, data will be gathered through a claim analysis of parties’ and movements’ manifestos and websites, a protest event analysis, a document analysis of electoral lists, and interviews with parties and movements’ leaders.

By bridging the scholarships on party politics and social movements and by looking at how these parties and movements interact and shape each other’s actions, structures, and discourses, this research aims to show how movements contributed to the success that far-right parties have obtained in the electoral arena.