

Report: JMN International Conference *Another World is Possible*

The International Conference '***Another World is Possible***' was organized by the **Jean Monnet Network "Crisis - Equity - Democracy for Europe and Latin America"**, and took place on the 18th of September 2018, at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). It aimed to take stock and compare what has been happening in Latin America and Europe since the Global Financial Crisis broke up in 2008. The event also intended to put this evaluation in perspective with the demands, visions and strategies of new social movements.

The Opening Session included Christian Gymer Hanot and Bettina Guilherme both representing the Jean Monnet Network, and Professors Mônica Herz (Vice Deputy of the Dean of the Social Sciences Center), and Marta Fernandez (Director of the Institute of International Relations from PUC-Rio) from the hosting partner.

The conference was organized in two sessions. The morning table was chaired by Professor **Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann** (Institute of International Relations/PUC-Rio) and counted with the participation of four speakers: **Stephan Schulmeister** (University of Vienna), **Yiannis Bournous** (Head European and International Affairs of SYRIZA and Head of Strategic Planning of the Greek Prime Minister), **Luiz Eduardo Melin** (career civil servant from the Brazilian Central Bank, former Director of the Brazilian Development Bank-BNDES, and former Chief of Cabinet Economic Ministry) and **Simone Romano** (Senior Fellow from the Istituto Affari Internazionali, and Researcher and Intesa Sao Paolo Lecturer at Roma Tre University).

The main aim of the morning session was to discuss governmental reactions following the financial crisis. Particular attention was given to the different economic conceptions and policy options regarding how to deal and overcome financial crises. The political effects of the 2008 market meltdown are still pervasive today. For instance, the austerity measures pushed through in Greece and in other European countries changed dramatically the European political landscape. The initial popular discontent was expressed in massive protest mobilizations and in the creation of new social movements. On the other hand, far-right movements to have gained space in increasing polarized societies.

The first speaker, **Stephan Schulmeister**, made an introduction about Keynesian economic theory, emphasizing that the "theoretical production has practical implications in reality". Besides calling attention to the fact that paradigmatic economic theory influences real world dynamics, Keynes has also asserted financial markets are doomed to cyclical speculation crisis. Global financial system became progressively more vulnerable by the stripping away of controls to the free movement of capital. Thus, Macroeconomic policies should be adopted to regulate markets and the State has a key role in the economy. For Schulmeister, 2008 is just an outcome of "business as usual", i.e. neoliberalism and financial capitalism provoke cyclical speculation crisis. He concluded his speech affirming the Greek case shows there is no clear correlation between the speculative and the real sides of the economy.

Yiannis Bournous shared his experiences detailing the Greek case, focusing on bailout negotiation process, its implementation and aftermath. Talking about the financial crisis ten years after, Bournous asserted that it hit Southern countries of the Eurozone hardest. In

the Greek case, corruption in welfare allocation, tax collection unbalances and chronic unemployment contributed to an environment of rising inequalities even before the crisis hit. At the peak of the economic instability Greece reached 27% of unemployment and a 25% loss in GDP. In this context, Syriza government was the first of the Eurozone to invite the IMF to intervene in interbank affairs and EU bailout negotiations. The efforts to balance the power of European institutions payed off and allowed room for maneuver. Despite Greece being obliged to accept neoliberal measures, “damage control” negotiations allowed for the maintenance of some important social policies in the aftermath of the crisis.

The next guest speaker was **Luiz Eduardo Melin**, who spoke about the experience in Brazil having participated in President Roussef government as Director of the Brazilian Development Bank from 2011 to 2014. He advanced that the economic policy decision makers in Brazil had the chance to initially put aside the neoliberal recipe following the crisis because the country has a large economy, its own currency and relative low openness. For him, a country who values growth can implement macroeconomic policies on the real side of the economy; as a consequence of “progressive” socioeconomic policies implemented in Brazil until 2016, 40 million people changed brackets in terms of income, challenging the logic around which the hegemonic economic logic functions. The situation changed dramatically more recently with the turn to neoliberal approach by President Temer’s government.

The last presentation of the morning session was given by **Simone Romano** who discussed current developments in Italy. He stated that the current Italian government has strong political backup and is portraying itself as a “government of change”; many promises have been made, such as giving power to the people regardless of the pressures of the international community, particularly the European Union. The ascension to power of the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte occurred in a context where the migration crisis particularly impacts Italy and the economic situation must be understood in terms of a broader long term trend in which “the cake is getting bigger but not been distributed in an equal manner”. This dynamics hit the middle class the hardest. He argued that to respond citizens’ frustrations, the current government is holding a discourse of opposition to Italian elites and EU institutions, and that Italy’s landscape can be characterized by a populist movement.

The Conference’s afternoon session was chaired by Professor **José Ruiz Briceño** (Universidad Cooperativa Bogotá) and composed by **Gemma Ubasart** (ex-secretary general of PODEMOS Catalunya, and Professor at Universidad de Gerona), **Gabriele Rodrigues Pereira** (member of the Free Pass Movement /Movimento Passe Livre- MPL) and **Michel Navarro** (member of the Homeless Workers Movement /Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto - MTST). Under the theme “Global Governance and Social movements”, the second panel had the goal to discuss the visions, impacts and strategies used by new social movements to in light of the context of the first panel’s discussion. Specifically, it aimed to evaluate social movements’ strategies of protest, participation in traditional parties and/or founding new parties, leading governments, forming alliances and overcoming opposition.

Gemma Ubasart, started her talk presenting the triple crises Spain has faced, which help explain the rise of social movements such as PODEMOS. First, the economic crisis related to recession and the austerity measures implemented to overcome it. Secondly, the political crisis expressed the popular dissatisfaction with the ruling class that led to a rupture of the

traditional Spanish two-party dynamics. Thirdly, the territorial crisis, marked by independentist tensions, which adds to the other structural elements. Ubasart explained that Spanish citizens became progressively more critical, politicized and active. Those aspects are key to understand both the demonstrations of 2003-2004 against the Iraq war, and the 2011's 15M anti-austerity movement. These conjunctures created a window of opportunity to turn social indignation into political challenge. PODEMOS has led a strategy of transforming the political map through vote. By creating a political party, founded in 2014, PODEMOS assumed power and today is one of the largest political parties in Spain. Gemma concluded her speech pointing the challenges of transforming the system from within, emphasizing the difficulties to choose allies.

Gabriele Pereira did her presentation together with Ana Santos, also a member from MPL; they focused their discussion on the role of the movement during the 2013's protests in Brazil, and the organization's current mobilization strategies. The movement "It's not about 20 cents" started as public manifestations against raised in public transportation fares and soon integrated a variety of public agendas, ranging from advocacy against corruption to better education, health and transportation. Now, five years later, MPL's representatives perceive 2013 as a success. The presenters have also reflected on main changes and challenges activists presently face in Brazil. They have explained how police repression increasingly discourages protests and how resistance takes different forms today. Mass mobilizations, such as the one that followed Marielle and Anderson's (PSOL member of Rio de Janeiro City Council and her driver) murder show that Brazilians still use protest as a strategy of resistance.

The last speaker of the day was **Michel Navarro**, who started his talk presenting data about Brazil's inequalities and the housing deficit. He also highlighted the negative impact of Brazilian regressive tax system, in which the poor pay relatively more taxes than the rich. MTST strategy is based in occupations, some of them reaching thousands of families of homeless people. Their main cause is to defend the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded, particularly housing and labor rights. MTST and Povo Sem Medo (*People with no Fear*), a coalition of more than thirty national movements, have supported a candidate running for 2018's Brazilian presidential elections, Guilherme Boulos. Nevertheless, Navarro highlighted it is wrong to say MTST has launched a candidate. Instead, it would be more accurate to say that Boulos is a political leader who is a member of the MTST, but whose engagement and political career was much broader than it.

The presentations were followed by questions by the public and a lively exchange with the presenters. Despite the specificities of the crises in Europe and in Latin America, the discussions pointed out to common root causes, as well as similar effects on domestic societies. Enduring economic inequalities and political polarization pose challenges to democracy in several countries from both continents. Comparative analyses of these crises as well as birregional cooperation can trigger urgently needed innovative solutions at the domestic and multilateral levels.