

EU Today Podcast 1 Transcript

The JMCE 2018-21 EU Today podcast series features interviews with visiting speakers, scholars and Jean Monnet key faculty members. Access the audio file, other podcasts, and general information about the podcast on our Podcast page: <https://jmce.unc.edu/podcast/>

[Intro music in theme of piano playing Ode to Joy]

Katie Lindner: Hello, and welcome to EU Today, a podcast from the Center for European studies, a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Thank you to the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission, the EU Delegation to the U.S., and the U.S. Department of Education for supporting our center and its programs. On this podcast, we sit down with scholars and policy leaders to discuss pressing issues facing the EU. We hope you enjoy it.

Our first guest on the show is Dr. Kiran Klaus Patel, professor and chair of European and Global History at Maastricht University. Professor Patel visited UNC to give a public lecture entitled "The Making of a European Alternative: Cooperation and Integration in Western Europe after 1945." On the podcast we dive into challenges of European integration from a historical perspective, and learn about the legacy of 20th century German institutions. Interviewing Dr. Patel is Stephanie Shady, UNC Ph.D. candidate in Political Science.

[Ode to Joy fades back in and plays for appx. 4 measures]

Stephanie Shady: So, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today, and so you are a historian of European history and of German history, and you gave us, last night, a great talk about how European integration has changed over time, how it has evolved and some of the reasons behind that. And you pointed out that this is not the first time that European countries have wrestled with questions of continental unity, or how integrated economically/politically they should be, and you discussed this in your 2018 book Project Europa. And so how do you view the present-day Euroscepticism in light of this history? Should we be worried that this current trend is remarkably different from the past, or is it a continuation of the same?

Dr. Kiran Klaus Patel: Right, I think it is a little bit of both as so often. So, there are also early periods where people have had sort of conflict and conversation about

European integration. So, if you go back to the 1950s and 1960s the “choice for Europe,” Andrew Moravcsik’s term, wasn’t clear to everybody. So, there were also people who hoped that the empires that most Western European countries had set up would be the way forward. And there were, on the other hand, also strong communist parties. For instance, in France and Italy 20-30 percent of people were voting for those. So those kinds of groups were quite skeptical of European integration.

Having said that, I think we are now living also in very different times, because there is a new level of mass-mobilization against European integration which wasn’t really so much visible in earlier periods. So, there were moments of discontent, and many people accepted, or I should rather say tolerated European integration, or that they really supported it, but now we have new parties who really want to change the EU from within, or really want to leave the EU, as we for instance see with Brexit.

Stephanie Shady: Great, yes, and so, in line with this, how can we take this history and knowledge that this is not the first time, but maybe perhaps the first time were seeing this level of mass mobilization, what can we do as EU citizens or external observers in the U.S., of these European politics, how can we think about this history as we evaluate our stances toward European integration today?

Dr. Patel: I think from the perspective of history, we first need to get a better understanding of what this history is all about. Because I think to this day we have wildly simplistic accounts of the seven decades of European integration history. One the one hand, there is a very pro EU story which is that it did create peace and prosperity and that it was a quite straightforward solution to any of the problems of the time, and on the other hand you have the attemptive interpretation, where all the blame is basically put on European integration. And this is also what I’m trying to do in my book, is to produce and present a balanced account that really tries to show what European integration was, not really so much at the level of negotiations and international politics, but what it brought to people in the member states, and also beyond.

Stephanie Shady: Absolutely, you mentioned last night several institutions that get ignored in the classic story of EU integration in that path from the coal and steel community up to the EU, that, even as a political scientist focused on the European union, I wasn’t very ware, because we are so focused on contemporary periods, so it was really interesting just to see all these other institutions that could have made it into that story that we hear today.

Apart from European integration, you’ve also written quite a bit about Nazism, and the rise of these parties, in the context of concerns about social welfare and looking

for responses to that. Looking today we've seen the quite a number of these radical nationalist parties, some ascribing to parts of Nazism themselves such as the Alternative for Germany, and Fidesz in Hungary. Do you see any parallels in the reasons that these parties are emerging historically in the time of Nazism and today, and what are some key differences between then and now?

Dr. Patel: I think there's always differences and similarities. We now are just at the end of a long period of economic problems and depression in many European countries and in the United States, and that has an impact on many discussions. So, the new level of populism that I think we see in many Western countries certainly has to do with these economic developments. But that is not the only thing, and I think the EU is only one object of the criticism of these organizations. If you look at Turkey, India, or other countries that are obviously not part of the EU, you also get the rise of these rightist populist parties. So, in that sense I think that there is a broader story to be told.

What I find interesting is that in the 1930s, some of these rightist parties because you mentioned social policies, and advance is not the right word, but really pushing for certain kinds of social policies that also led to new forms of integration. Nazi Germany is a very interesting example in this context because we, of course, and rightly so, remember the persecution of the Jews, but on the other hand, they also created an in-group. The *volksgruppen*, the folk's group as they were called, in Nazi terminology, i.e. the Aryan part of the population, for which there were new offerings or social welfare benefits, and that was certainly part of the attraction of the regime. And what we see now in these parties in Poland, Hungary, elsewhere, and I don't want to say that they're exactly the same as the Nazi party, is that some of them also use that kind of approach. That they offer, for example the PiS party in Poland, new welfare benefits, old age pensions for instance for part of the population to also win more support for populist policies, this is not across the board, the AfD in Germany, for instance, is quite undecided about its social policy, and is quite vague to this day, about what its social policy should be. It started out from a very neoliberal position, and it is now moving in all kinds of directions, and the party is split in different factions anyway, and it still remains to be seen what kind of approach they will take there.

Stephanie Shady: Definitely, I know there are a couple of scholars out at Chapel Hill that talk about the extent to which these parties are forced to or not take positions on this dimension of contestation that they're not thinking about yet. If they emerge as a nationalist party, they can maybe ignore economic policy for a time, but eventually they're cornered into making a decision or taking a position.

Dr. Patel: I think that it's also good that existing parties push them hard to also be clear on what they would want on key policy choices, that easy answers can't be all

you get from these parties. Again, unfortunately I should also say while they gain support and are able to build up big party structures like AfD for instance, they're also able to define these policies more. So, it's on the one hand good that they're being cornered in and have to say what they want, but on the other, I think there might also be perils to set developments from the e the interwar years there.

Stephanie Shady: Definitely. So, in light of the role of Nazism clearly causing divisions among European countries with the world war, what do today's emerging nationalist parties do to pose challenges to the European integration project, and is there anything the e European leaders or the public can learn from the lessons of contestation against European closeness that might help them surmount these challenges today?

Dr. Patel: I think firstly, what we've seen over the past five or so years, is that quite a few of these populist parties re not openly anti-EU anymore, and I think this is also reflex to Brexit because there was before in the Netherlands and in quite a few other countries the debate of also leaving the European union. As an effect of Brexit and the level of contestation within the United Kingdom, I think quite a few of these political parties on the right particularly have decided to say, "well, we want to stay in, but we want to change the EU from within". You see that with Orban's Fidesz party, you see that with Matteo Salvini in Italy, you see that with quite a few of these others, and in that sense the European Parliament elections in May will be very important because I think what we'll see is more and more parties who want to remain part of the project of the European Union, but change it from within to a more sovereigntist as they would call it direction. So, in some sense that is a somewhat new direction, and also one where there isn't a clear parallel to the interwar years, because there wasn't an international forum, body or organization of similar strength to the EU today. So, what you had was the League of Nations, even if we now think it was more important than we thought, a comparably weak organization. In that sense, I think also, sometimes things are working out in new and different contexts, and history doesn't have a real quick answer for you there.

Stephanie Shady: Yeah, definitely, it's sort of interesting as maybe a place of optimism, that at least they want to work within the European institutions, that there is a norm that that is the way to conduct policy, even if it might not be a policy that every part of the public agrees with. I wanted to pick up on something interesting you mentioned that these parties are not always taking this anti-EU position. In the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, which studies these different parties in Europe, we see pretty low correlations of anti-EU integration and anti-immigration or other pro-nationalist policies, so it's not as clear-cut as one might think on the surface, that there is a lot of variation there, which is think is very interesting.

Dr. Patel: I fully agree with you, and I think also what we see in that—we had a time when the European political systems had been quite stable, and they have become immensely volatile as of recent years. So also, the positions of parties, of movements changes quite quickly, quite rapidly. That makes that research all the more interesting and important, because coalitions and positions will change so rapidly, that one really needs to know where these different organizations and parties actually stand.

Stephanie Shady: Absolutely, and it's important to keep track of the changes over time.

You also talked a little bit about U.S. and European relations last night in your talk. And last year you published a book called *Nazism Across Borders: The Social Policies of the Third Reich and their Global Appeal*, which was an edited volume. This book discussed ways that the Nazi party in Germany exported parts of their social policy and their model worldwide. Could you share some of the core themes from that book? What are your key takeaways from it?

Dr. Patel: I'd be happy to. First, I'd like to say that this is an edited volume as you just said that I did with Sandrine Kott a Swiss-Franc scholar who is based at the university of Geneva and NYU at the moment. And with Sandrine I am part of a group of historians who are working on the history of the German ministry of labor under Nazism. On different kinds of policies that the Nazis did, Sandrine and I felt that it is very important to look at the international dimensions Nazi policy. Why? Because the German kaiserreich already since the 1870s had been propagating its social policy as an international model. So, these are these Bismarck reforms on all kinds of insurance schemes that the Nazis also capitalized on, and where they added their own brand of social policies and it's interesting to see that against the backdrop of the great depression, a lot of countries were really interested in what the Nazis were doing, not only dictatorships like fascist Italy or Japan, but also for instance the United States. This is also part of my earlier research on the 1930s where I was able to show that for instance president Roosevelt was quite interested in Nazi social policies and asked for reports about them.

Stephanie Shady: That is very interesting, I had never really thought about that. Clearly this is an example of a different side of a very nationalist party that we don't often see, looking back in history. With these new nationalist parties starting to at least inch their way into European governments, albeit not necessarily the majority, are there any responses that you might anticipate from other countries in Europe? Are there other countries where there are parties learning from these nationalist parties?

Dr. Patel: I think what we see is that quite a few of these nationalist parties work together. Again, Steve Bannon, as we also now know plays a certain role in this, and has said publicly that he wants to play a role in the cooperation amongst these parties in the runup for the European Parliament elections we still have to see how powerful that's going to be, but we see something that was also happening in the 1920s and 30s: that also very rightist nationalist parties can work together and form coalitions. So, in that sense there I think that we need to watch that very carefully, and see how they would come together. At this stage, if you talk about the European Parliament, it is interesting that these parties are split over various political families. So Orban's party, Fidesz, is still part of the conservative party group, and just over the past few days, there was intense conflict over that very fact due to his strong criticism of Commission President Juncker. That is very interesting—you could say that they're split, and that could be seen as an advantage, because that weakens them, but you could also say they become ever more influential because they are spread all over the system. That is, I think a very interesting tendency that we have to watch further.

Stephanie Shady: Yes, absolutely, it's interesting that they can maybe export a few tactics or positions from a platform into more traditional mainstream conservative parties.

Dr. Patel: That is what we've seen already in the past years on migration issues and other questions.

Stephanie Shady: Yes absolutely, especially in Germany. Great! Well, thank you so much for answering all these questions. Are there any final takeaways or thoughts that you really want listeners in the public or in schools to understand about European integration from a more historical perspective that you want people to take away?

Dr. Patel: I think that from an American point of view, it is sometimes very difficult to understand what the EU actually is, and I share that point fully, it is very difficult, and I think that Europeans are not always very good at making that clearer to others, but I think that it is also a very interesting experience that will hopefully interest Americans more to see where an important partner over those past six seven eight decades of postwar history is going to, and where future forms of cooperation could actually lie. So, for that reason I think the podcast is great, and I wish you good luck with the next steps, because this is work, and these are discussions that I think we need to have, not only in America, not only in Europe, but also transatlantic.

Stephanie Shady: Great, thank you so much. Yes, we really hope this podcast helps reach, especially, American audiences that might be less familiar with these topics. I

certainly did not have the exposure to European history or contemporary institutional study until I got to college, so it's really great that we're able to share this information more widely. So, thank you so much for sharing it!

Dr. Patel: Thank you for bringing me here.

[Ode to joy plays in the background]

Katie Lindner: Please note that any opinions expressed in the EU today podcast are solely those of our guests and our hosts, and not of the UNC Center for European studies, which takes no institutional positions. Be sure to tune in for more episodes, and subscribe to *EU Today* wherever you listen to podcasts.

[Ode to Joy fades out]

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Disclaimer: The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.