Call for Abstracts – Deadline: March 15, 2016
Conference, New Europe College, Bucharest, 3-4 June, 2016

Title: Refugees, Migrants and Cosmopolitics

Argument
Migration and cosmopolitanism are consubstantial. Cosmopolitanism means to be a citizen of the world, with no borders or, at least, with permeable borders. Migration means to move from one place to another. Thus, migration, without impediments, appears to be the natural starting point for a cosmopolitan view, and theories of cosmopolitanism, as a rule, take the division of the globe into different nations and their borders as an obstacle for a cosmopolitan arrangement of the world.

However, migration as practice turns out to be the biggest test for cosmopolitanism, both as theory and as cosmopolitan practice. The intensification of migration, through increasing number of economic migrants and refugees, generates anti-cosmopolitan stances: immigration is seen as a threat of overpopulation, a threat of denaturation of the values and identity of the receiving countries, a threat to the democratic state which allegedly cannot function with large influx of people, or as security threat. Nevertheless, these threats do not mean necessarily a failure of cosmopolitanism, but mainly a refusal and a failure to approach migration through its consubstantial cosmopolitan perspective.

The phenomenon of migration poses some crucial problems for political theory. If citizenship and equality are the concepts by which political and legal theory conceives the political agency and rights of individuals, then an increasing population of migrants, with partial or no status, creates a political structural inequality. Both the economic migrant (guest workers, irregular migrants) for whom migration is a choice and an option, and the refugee, whose mobility is seen as an action forced by persecutions, wars or natural disasters (and whom states are at least morally obliged to admit to their territory) increase the mass of noncitizens in the countries of destination (and in the world in general), that is, the mass of persons who do not have political agency and rights. The noncitizens may have a state of origin, but inasmuch as they are not able or prefer not to make use of their state's protection they are all, like refugees, stateless de facto. This is difficult to reconcile with political theories of equality or liberty granted by state, and so migration challenges the conditions of politics assumed by political philosophers. Confronted with the problems of migrants and refugees, the current state-based way of doing and thinking politics shows its structural and conceptual limits. The challenge is then to conceive a cosmopolitan political theory and to imagine a cosmopolitics as a way of doing politics in a global world that would include both migrants and non-migrants.

The existing theories of cosmopolitanism do not resolve the structural political exclusion of migrants, but only alleviate it temporarily. For Kant, migrants, nomads, and other non-citizens are only allowed the right of visitation not residence, that is, temporary access to the territory of a state, so the Kantian right of cosmopolitan hospitality protects migrants and refugees but only through their perpetual displacement. Contemporary liberal cosmopolitanism and the international (composed of nation-states) institutions advanced by this approach do not eliminate the structural exclusion of immigrants, for example, the United Nations’ conventional framework defines the right to leave a territory as a human right, but not the right to enter a territory. The normative approach called ‘open borders’ diminishes its cosmopolitan potential because it is focused mainly on ‘receiving countries’, who have to open the borders, and not on the sending countries which remain more vulnerable (the so called ‘brain drain’ problem). As well, the ‘open border’ approach is formulated within the paradigm of the nation-state, examining in details when and how the state can admit, exclude, select and reject the immigrants, thus failing to map the way the nation-state generates a structural exclusion, incompatible with a cosmopolitan view of migration. A more practical approach with a cosmopolitan intent - that of the transnational NGOs and other institutions providing humanitarian support - although efficient for short term do not solve the problem posed by migration for political theory. This humanitarian approach depoliticizes migrants and refugees by providing food and shelter (mainly in refugee camps), implying the danger of transforming the migrant into a mere human body to be managed in a camp, in this way confirming Hannah Arendt’s insights on the perplexities of human rights for refugees and stateless people. But, as Arendt suggests in “We refugees,” the condition of
refugees and persons without a country has to be taken as a new paradigm for politics, because for the refugees history is no longer ‘a closed book,’ the refugees being the ‘avant-garde of their peoples.’

Thus, the main aim of this conference is to see if and how the refugees and the immigrants can be the avant-garde of cosmopolitanism, that is, how can migrants and refugees contribute to a cosmopolitan restructuring of the ways of doing politics? Can we imagine a cosmopolitics that will include both migrants and non-migrants as a new way of doing politics in a global world? How obsolete is the model of doing politics within the nation-state in tackling the problems posed by migration? What are the limits and alternatives to the strategies of admission and integration into nation-states of receiving countries? Can we imagine in theory a political participation independent of locality that would make it possible for migrant/mobile people to participate to a global and cosmopolitan governance? What can be the role of the nation state in creating the cosmopolitan institutions that will include both migrants and non-migrants? Can the migrants and refugees be seen as renouncing the temptations of the territorial form of community and politics? How could politics and states be reorganised to adapt to a universal aterritoriality as human condition? Etc.

Themes: We invite contributions that address the following topics, although the list is by no means exhaustive: migrants and refugees as the avant-grande of cosmopolitics; migration and limits of cosmopolitan hospitality; migration and cosmopolitan law, migration and (possible) cosmopolitan institutions; migrant cosmopolitanism, the ‘right to have rights’ as a ‘ground’ of cosmopolitanism; (possible) cosmopolitanism of statelessness and bare life; migration and aterritorial cosmopolitics, and others.

Confirmed speakers:
Petar Bojanic (Belgrade)
Costas Douzinas (Birkbeck)
Andrew Schaap (Exeter)
Chantal Thomas (Cornell)
Mark Wenman (Nottingham)

Organizational details
Please submit proposals of 300-words abstracts for 20-minute papers no later than March 15, 2016 to tcaraus@nec.ro and paris_elena@yahoo.com. Please also indicate your name, professional status and institutional affiliation. Decision notices will be emailed by March 25, 2016. Selected papers will be published in a collective volume at an international publishing house. Please note that there is no conference fee. For further details or questions, please contact tcaraus@nec.ro and paris_elena@yahoo.com.

The conference is organized by the members of the research group Cosmopolitanism in a Philosophical Perspective from the New Europe College, Institute for Advanced Studies in collaboration with the Center for Constitutional Law and Political Institutions of the Law School, University of Bucharest, and the Center for Advanced Studies, Rijeka, Croatia.

Scientific committee:
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