

Minutes of the USS/E Committee meeting, 2 Feb. 2023

Present: Sorin Antohi, Barnita Bagchi, Artur Blaim, Corin Braga, Gregory Claeys (Chair), Nathaniel Coleman, Zsolt Czigányik (Treasurer), Rhiannon Firth, Justyna Galant (Secretary), Susanna Layh, Ewa Majewska, Nicole Pohl, José Eduardo Reis, Adam Stock.

Agenda and subsequent discussion:

GC opens the meeting and thanks everyone for attending. GC emphasises that the meeting regarding some USSE members concerns with Cluj 2023 have already been addressed during the previous, lengthy committee meeting (18th September 2022). CB had provided statements regarding the issues of concern during that meeting. GC was under the impression that during that meeting all the concerns were thoroughly discussed, yet as became obvious on the reception of the Open Letter written and circulated by some members of the USS/E and the resignation of Heather Alberro from the position of the EDI, this impression was not shared by all. GC explains that since the Open Letter was not addressed to him, he felt under no obligation to answer it. GC reiterates that Romania is not a country hostile to the LGBTQIA+ community. EM interjects

1. Discussion regarding the “Open Letter” circulated to USSE members

Ewa Majewska raises concerns regarding the lack of response to the Open Letter and objects to the minutes from the previous committee meeting. JG explains that the minutes were prepared by GC who also was conducting the meeting and will be subsequently amended to reflect the proceedings more closely.

Corin Braga responds to the contents of the Open Letter. CB understands and agrees with the concerns related to the safety of the LGBTQIA+ USS/E members and the more general issue of equality, diversity and inclusion. He shares university documents on the subject of anti-discrimination: the ethical code, The code against discrimination, The conduct code concerning antisemitism, and a report of the 2022 project “Campus Pride – advocacy community campaigns for safe universities” (these documents and some more are posted on the site of the conference <http://phantasma.lett.ubbcluj.ro/en/ubb-policies-against-discrimination/>). CB expresses his deep regret that the Open Letter makes a comparison between Romania and Russia, emphasising that Romania follows the values and principles of the European Union, and is not “following in the footsteps of Russia and Hungary”. CB found the comparison of Romania to president Putin’s Russia factually incorrect, prejudicial and stigmatising. As to the proposal “to make Queering Utopianism the main conference theme”, the CFP already encourage USS/E members to present papers and organise panels on such issues as: “Minoritarian (sexual, racial, natural) utopian / dystopian imaginaries”. Once in Cluj, LGBTQIA+ members could also contact colleagues from Babes-Bolyai university specialized in Gender Studies. Organisers can act as facilitators. However, changing the subject of the conference would be academically

unprofessional and counter-productive, as the organising center has no expertise and competences in the proposed theme. CB offered to resign from organising the conference if the theme of the conference or the venue are not acceptable for the Society. No one from the committee objects at this point to Cluj 2023 in the agreed form.

Zsolt Czigányik objects to the language used in the Open Letter and points out that according to him there was no hostile behaviour towards members of the committee during the previous committee meeting.

Artur Blaim points out that the Open Letter employs disparaging descriptions of members of the Committee in terms of age, race and gender, which clearly violates the Society's equality and inclusivity rules. Raising concerns about Romania as a country unsuitable for USS conferences is regarded by some members (E.g. ZC) as "racist." ZC adds that in order to assure the diversity of the society, problems of, for instance, low-income scholars need to be taken more seriously.

Nicole Pohl agrees that the Open Letter should have been answered. She strongly objects to the allusions of bullying, mistreatment of people contained in the Open Letter with no frank and fair discussion of issues and allegations and advises that the signatories of the Open Letter should also be much more careful with the language.

Riannon Firth, as ECR officer, feels personally concerned about the ECRs who are among the individuals expressing worries regarding Cluj 2023 and emphasises the the committee has a collective responsibility to give a written response to the signatories of the Open Letter. RF points out that she does not agree with the entire content of the letter, such as the question of changing the conference topic.

Ewa Majewska emphasises that Heather Alberro felt diminished and not heard during the previous committee meeting. Adam Stock reiterates that HA performed her duties as an EDI officer and that according to him she was indeed not treated fairly and respectfully in the discussion during the previous committee meeting. Burnita Bagci does agree that HA was not treated kindly during the previous meeting and emphasises the need to discuss the concerns raised in the Open Letter.

It is agreed that a response to the Open Letter will be prepared on the basis of the comments made by the committee members in a google document prepared by JG.

Alexandra Sippel emphasises the need to include all minorities and that concerns regarding discrimination in its various forms apply very widely across all the European nations.

Nathaniel Coleman expresses his discomfort at the idea of signing a letter of apology in response to the Open Letter.

The use of the Society mailing list JG notes that sending of the "Open Letter" from an address other than the Society's only official email address belonging to the USSE Secretary was not only in violation of the data protection laws, but an abuse of confidence of the Secretary in misappropriating the list which was sent elsewhere only for the purposes of Society elections. JG also shares a screenshot showing Heather Alberro's invitation to boycott Cluj 2023 and set up an alternative utopian studies

society and organise an alternative conference. She notes that the invitation was shared on a Facebook group named “Utopian Studies Society-Europe” and under the logo of the USSE.

2. EDI officer. On Adam Stock’s initiative, following the resignation of Heather Alberro, Nicole Pohl was elected as interim EDI officer. It will be the task of the AGM during the Cluj conference to elect a new EDI officer.

3. Discussion of proposals for Society Business Protocols

1. The Society's Mailing List is Society property. While it may be lent to conference organisers, and/or for Society elections, for data protection purposes, it is not to be otherwise used without the explicit permission of the Secretary. Misappropriation of this List may result in expulsion from the Society.
2. Society Business is normally conducted through the Committee and at the AGM. All of the Society's engagement with conference organisers is through the Chair, Secretary, and Committee. If need be members should contact local organisers via queries made to the Committee, not directly or by general missives.
3. Committee Minutes will normally be recorded as well as taken by the Secretary.

4. Treasury. ZC reported that the surplus of the Brighton conference, 2.127 EUR was transferred by the organisers to the committee’s bank account, which now contains 6.498,83 EUR. This allows the society some flexibility in allocating bursaries.

Note: Ewa Majewska informed the committee that she does not find the above minutes accurate, without suggesting amendments.