

Online Committee Meeting 19th October 2021, 5pm UTC

Present: **Chair:** Gregory Claeys, **Secretary:** Justyna Galant, **Treasurer:** Zolt Czigányik, **Committee Members:** Antonis Balasopoulos, Artur Blaim, Michael Kelly, Jorge Bastos da Silva, Laurence Davis, Lisa Garforth, Nathaniel Coleman, Nicole Pohl, Pavla Veselá, Sorin Antohi, Susanna Layh.

Apologies from Adam Stock, Andrew Milner, Fátima Vieira, Julia Ramírez Blanco.

2022 CONFERENCE PLANS:

Gregory Claeys informs the Committee that the Oxford venue for the conference would not be able to offer free housing for the participants at this point. It is agreed that Oxford should be considered as a potential venue for the 2023 event. GC invites Ecevit Bekler to talk to the Committee about the Diyarbakir conference venue.

Ecevit Bekler gives a presentation during which he provides details regarding the location of the potential hosting institution (Dicle University), accommodation and transportation links, the historical background and monuments in the area. EB also informs that the venue is fully technologically equipped and providing for a hybrid or online conference will not pose a problem. Zolt Czigányik inquires about the distance from the university to the town centre. EB answers the distance is approx. 4 km (taxi: 40 min / 4-5 Euro), adding that a minibus service is available and that a shuttle will be arranged for conference participants. Michael Kelly addresses the question of safety and the potential unrest in the area at the time of the conference. EB responds that the venue should be safe at this point and security would be not problem. EB leaves the meeting.

Nathaniel Coleman notes that the political situation may be a detriment, and adds that the lack of direct flight connections and the difficulty getting to the area may be a discouragement to some prospective participants. Sorin Antohi mentions the historic significance of Diyarbakir, the opportunity to visit the unique sight of Göbekli Tepe, and acknowledges the potential problems accessing the place for scholars who have taken a stand on the ongoing local conflict. SA further notes that although participating in a conference organized in Diyarbakir may be seen as ethically problematic, it is also a fact that boycotting an event like this would amount to discouraging the local scholars rather than showing them support in the challenging political context. Lisa Garforth points out that according to the UK travel advisory travelling to the region is unsafe; the fact that will result in the lack of university insurance and funding. Laurence Davis agrees, confirms that the Foreign & Commonwealth and Development Office advises against travelling to the region, and adds that participation in the conference could be seen as expressing passive acceptance of the political crimes conducted in the area. LD also notes that certain political questions would not be safe to discuss at the venue, in light of the potentially endangering the wellbeing of the organisers. Sorin Antohi points out that these concerns pertain to the country as such, irrespective of the specificity of the region. Antonis Balasopoulos notes that Diyarbakir is the only conference venue available for 2022, but, apart from the ethical concerns to be determined individually, there are 3 issues

that need to be addressed: 1) the matter of security; 2) the situation at the border with Syria; 3) the high costs of flights. With apologies, Zsolt Czigányik leaves the meeting. Nathaniel Coleman adds that university funding may be another concern, given the aforementioned travel advisories. Nicole Pohl notes that a hybrid conference would be a solution to some of the concerns, such as the costs and security issues. Gregory Claeys agrees and notes that an advantage of the conference would be the probable participation of many Turkish scholars who have not been able to attend previous USS/E conferences. Antonis Balasopoulos expresses a concern with the potential politicisation of the event and the probable censorship of the proposals. Susanna Layh adds, regarding the matter addressed previously, that the travel advisory for Germany also discourages from visiting the region of the conference. Laurence Davis supports Antonis Balasopoulos' point, adding that a number of topics and approaches that regularly feature during the Society's conferences, such as Marxism, could prove problematic for the conference organisers, occasioning censorship or self-censorship of the proposals, or potentially endangering the conference hosts. Gregory Claeys points out that the Society reserve the right to withdraw its association. Sorin Antohi points out that the conference may be an opportunity for the Turkish scholars to feel encouraged to take up important political issues in the academic context. Michael Kelly points out that we may need the information on how the university is governed and whether any active repression of speech occurs there. He cautions that the Society needs to tread carefully given the complex set of circumstances surrounding the conference. Gregory Claeys points out that the Society will not be able to know how the university is governed, nor have we ever asked for this information from any other organiser. Nicole Pohl agrees. Gregory Claeys notes that Ecevit Bekler specifically asked for the Society's help in organising and guiding the event. Nathaniel Coleman reiterates that the Society is confronted with a difficult question and that the issues the Committee is facing regarding the Diyarbakir conference should be carefully discussed on a variety of levels, in with regard to many countries with complex political situations. All agree. Laurence Davis agrees that this is the first time the Committee is facing such a problematic question. He points out that the Scholars at Risk organisation lists Turkey as one of the countries most culpable of actions against academic freedom. Artur Blaim points out that by not agreeing to the conference being organised in Diyarbakir the Society would be in fact punishing the Turkish scholars who already find themselves in a challenging academic environment. Sorin Antohi agrees and adds that it is also possible that the regime would not show any particular interest in the conference. Justyna Galant raises the question of the Society's grants being used to support academics from oppressive environments. All agree that the proposal is controversial as it would involve politicisation of the Society. Nicole Pohl notes that dilemmas that the Committee is facing may become more frequent and pertain to many nations, depending on the global political situation. She points out that ethical dilemmas regarding travelling to or participating in events in particular countries may occur with regard a variety of nations, such as the USA under the recent Trump presidency. NP also notes that if the Society inquires into the politics of Decli University, it would then need to act similarly with regard to all future organisers' universities. Gregory Claeys agrees that practices like this would likely lead to the Society's demise as there would be no parties interested in hosting the annual conferences. GC proposes forswearing any attempts at inquiring the hosts on the internal university politics and organising the hybrid event in Diyarbakir with caution and awareness of the political situation. Jorge Bastos da Silva agrees with GC and Artur Blaim's abovementioned position mentioning the situation of the Portuguese people under the long-lasting dictatorship, and noting that academic conferences organised in politically problematic

locations may play a vital positive role for the societies where freedom of speech is restricted. The Committee votes and decides to recommend Diyarbakir as the 2022 conference venue, with 2 voices against. Gregory Claeys expresses deep apologies to Fátima Vieira following the Committee's discussion of the conference plans that resulted in organisational issues and subsequent changes to the Porto 2021 CFP. Antonis Balasopoulos proposes that participants of the Porto 2021 USS/E conference should be asked whether they approve of the Diyarbakir 2022 conference venue and consider participating in the conference. A note will be prepared by the USS/E secretary and circulated to the Porto 2021 conference participants. JG proposes to discuss the remaining Society matters during the Porto 2021 Committee meeting.

Gregory Claeys expresses thanks to the Committee and ends the meeting.