

Online Committee Meeting 9th November 2021

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

Apologies from Andrew Milner, Fátima Vieira, Julia Ramírez Blanco, Jorge Bastos da Silva.

- I. PRESENTATION OF THE POTENTIAL BRIGHTON 2022 CONFERENCE:
After welcoming all committee members and receiving everyone's permission to record the meeting, Gregory Claeys invites Patricia McManus – the potential organiser of the USSE 2022 Brighton conference to offer an overview of the proposal.

Patricia McManus, acknowledging that the cost of the conference is of prime concern informs the committee that she has worked on an estimate of the most economical option for the conference. She informs the committee that the organisers will not be charged for using the lecture theatre or the seminar rooms, but a per delegate fee would be required to cover the administrative costs. Another necessary basic expense would be the cost of food, including 3 lunches. PM notes that she is not familiar with the USSE conferences and that she will be attending the 2021 event this year. Using the screen-share option (pictures included), PM discusses the estimated cost of the conference per 100 participants.

GC thanks PM and asks about the potential costs of cheap accommodation, especially affordable dormitory rooms. PM responds that she should be able to learn more on Tuesday 16th November and adds that given the fact that student accommodation should be available during the holiday period. PM shares a link through the chat where committee members can learn more about the conference venue. GC notes that the majority of the Brighton conference attendees would not be able to afford hotels at the three-star level, where the cost per night at this point is £142 a night, the price which will presumably be higher in the summer months. PM responds that the university has a relationship with a number of local hotels, e.g. the MyHotel chain, where block bookings with a reduction to around £100 should be possible. The local Premier Inn of £29 a night is also available. There is also a large number of bed & breakfast accommodation available, and the, most probably, best option of the student accommodation on sight. The Tuesday meeting should be able to shed light on the availability of the student accommodation from July 11th onwards. GC asks for a comment on how the university is handling the covid situation and inquires about the cost of the hybrid facilities, given the fact that it is very likely the conference may have to be an online event. GC asks for the estimate of the virtual or hybrid conference. PM adds that the facilities are available at the venue, but technicians who should be helping with any technical issues would need to be paid. PM informs the committee that the double vaccination rates in Brighton are similar to those in Turkey and that infection rates are also very close. PM adds that while the UK has a flawed covid awareness policy, the strongly unionised university has a much better policy functioning at the campus, including the monitoring of carbon dioxide in the rooms. PM and GC agree that given the unpredictability of the situation in 7 months' time, the option of an online

conference needs to be seriously considered. GC invites question, in the absence of which he thanks PM for the presentation. PM leaves the meeting.

- II. DISCUSSION ON DECISION-MAKING REGARDING THE 2022 CONGERENCE VENUE. GC opens the discussion of the proposal noting that the committee had already recommended Dicle as the 2022 conference venue, after which Antonis Balasopoulos reached out to PM to propose an alternative conference venue. GC notes that the cost of the hotels may not be an issue due to the wide verity of accommodation in Brighton. Nathaniel Coleman notes that although the accommodation is widely available, the conference will be organised in high tourist season. GC agrees and notes that block booking about 50 rooms in hotels by the organisers would be a wise move given the circumstances.

GC points out that he is aware that political objections were raised with regard to the Dicle potential conference venue, and notes that since is the 2022 conference may be online in whichever venue it takes place, it is advisable to host the 2022 event at Dicle and 2023 one in Brighton. He notes that the committee should consider itself under obligation to the Turkish organisers after having recommended Dicle as the 2022 conference venue. GC adds that the point of the 2022 meeting was to bring in the very large Turkish constituency into the Society, which is why the previously proposed venue had been Istanbul. GC notes that it he would be extremely ill at ease to host an online conference in Brighton rather than in Diyarbakir if in both cases the meeting in person proved impossible. Antonis Balasopoulos responds by pointing out that the Brighton proposal holds for 2022, and he does not know whether it would be available for 2023. He further notes that the committee had recommended Dicle in the absence of other conference venue alternatives. He continues by pointing out that it is the USSE membership that needs to approve of the conference venue. AB does not see a procedural issue with recommending both venues as the membership has not been notified of the Dicle option yet. GC responds that his recollection of what was agreed by the committee on 19th October is different; and that the committee had agreed that the point of the note to be circulated to the membership was not a referendum but was intended as a way to establish the number of potential in-person participants. GC also points out that the participants of the 2021 Porto conference are not the Society's members, but will be so only on attending the actual conference, and therefore are not an appropriate body to decide on the next conference venue. Moreover, given the fact that about 15-20% of those who declare attendance at a conference do not show up, it would be problematic to ask the participants' opinion on the next meeting without knowing whether they will be participating in the approaching 2021 event. The constitution states clearly that members are those who attend a conference, not those who sign up and may or may not attend the event. Therefore, GC concludes, it seems to follow that the responsibility of choosing the 2022 conference venue falls on the committee as a body representative of the Society. GC continues that the constitution leaves a huge amount to the discretion of the committee and that the current circumstances require acting on this. Additionally, the fact that technically the committee at this point does not have a membership to appeal to is another reason for the committee to take it upon itself to decide on the matter on the next conference venue. Artur Blaim agrees that the point on membership is problematic: the participants of the Prato conference, who may be considered as the body to

address on the subject, may not attend the 2022 event, therefore, posing the question of the 2022 event to them would be unadvisable. GC agrees that posing the question to the Prato participants is not an option. GC notes that the Society at this point does not have a membership, neither past nor present. In response to Michael Kelly's query, GC clarifies that it would seem that membership in the Society lasts for a year after the conference one has participated in, therefore has lapsed since the 2019 conference and in the absence of the 2020 conference, and adds that the year-long duration is not specified in the constitution. It has always been assumed that paying the Society fee during a conference secures membership for the following year, though the fee-paying clause is also not in the constitution. This is additionally complicated by the fact that there will be no fee paid during the 2021 Porto event. What follows is that if we exclude the 2019 Prato membership as the potential decision-making body, we would also need to include the 2021 Porto membership. Antonis comments that, as he hopes the committee remembers, the committee has made a recommendation regarding Dicle as a body which is not to make the final decision. On the subject of membership AB notes that the problem with membership raises the question of the committee's questionable status. GC responds by pointing out that since membership has lapsed, it leaves the committee as the only body able to make the decision regarding the 2022 conference venue, acting in the name of the Society, and as permitted by the constitution. Antonis Balasopoulos notes that the committee cannot consider itself as a valid body since the membership it is supposed to represent has lapsed. Nathaniel Coleman recognises the necessity to address and solve the membership issue, and the crucial question is: is the committee able to resolve if it is allowed to be the decision-making body at this point, and notes that a substantial problem arises if the committee is not able to make this decision. Nicole Pohl comments that the committee has found itself in a new and difficult situation. NP sees it as counterproductive to discuss the question of membership in great detail at this point, especially that, given the fact that the Society technically has no membership at this point, it may as well be dissolved. NP urges the committee adopts a pragmatic approach and leaves the membership question to be solved in due course. NP suggests that the committee makes the conference venue decision at this point and carefully looks at the definition of USSE membership in the near future and also at the capacity of the committee. GC responds that the constitution at this point does not prohibit the committee to make the decision on the next conference venue. Artur Blaim notes that the committee finds itself in a position similar to that of a government in exile, which does not have the parliament but makes decisions. Laurence Davis notes that the concept of representation presupposes a demos. Since there is no demos, there is no representation, therefore the committee cannot make the decision as a representative body. Even a government in exile represents a particular demos. Referring to the comment by Gregory Claeys, LD notes that if the constitution does not prohibit an action, it does not imply the action is allowed. Essentially, it does not follow that what is omitted is permitted. LD adds that he is highly respectful of all members of the committee present at the meeting. LD recalls that at the end of the previous long committee meeting Antonis Balasopoulos presented a compromise to the heated discussion, from which LD and another committee member dissented, that a note will be circulated to the 2021 Porto participants with the recommendation of Dicle. Gregory Claeys reiterates that there is a disagreement over what the note's purpose was, with himself believing it was intended to assess the number of potential Dicle conference participants. Nathaniel

Coleman points out that committee members need to recognise that an agreement is not likely to be achieved over the versions proposed by GC and LD. JG points out that the Society's main role is to provide its member with an opportunity to meet during the Society's annual conferences and, therefore, suggests a vote on one of two options: 1) the committee, or, 2) the entire membership of the USSE mailing list decides on the 2022 conference venue. GC responds by pointing out that the USSE mailing list is not technically the Society's membership. Moreover, the 2) option would exclude the Turkish members from voting. GC suggests 1) as the best option. Nathaniel Coleman observes that neither 1) nor 2) is entirely right. Referring to the anti-democratic practices of Turkey and the boycott of the venue, NC notes that it is difficult to judge an academic setting. NC emphasises that a decision should be taken ASAP and encourages the committee to vote on 1) and 2). Michael Kelly objects to the use of the word boycott. JG suggests a vote on 1) and 2). Laurence Davis objects to voting on 1) in principle; the committee is not authorised to decide on the 2022 conference venue. LD supports JG's suggestion of 2). LD believes that if the committee does not agree that 2) is a viable option, the only alternative seems to be that the deciding body is constituted by the 2021 Porto participants. LD notes that during the previous committee meeting it was decided that the committee is not allowed to decide on the matter. LD proposes a vote on 2) and the option of the Porto 2021 vote. Antonis Balasopoulos observes that during the previous meeting, a number of committee members raised objections to the Dicle conference venue, which led to the committee deciding to seek members' vote on the venue. Justyna Galant expresses frustration at the difficulties the committee has been facing during the meeting and, while expressing gratitude for all the members' involvement and time spent debating the important issues, suggests the committee's self-dissolution and not organising the 2022 event, allowing for the election of a new committee capable of reaching decisions. GC disagrees and points out the given the covid-related break in the society's activities, it is necessary for the USSE to meet as soon as possible. GC reiterates that asking the entire USSE mailing list or the 2021 Porto participants would exclude the large body of Turkish scholars who would join the Society during the 2022 Dicle conference.

It is decided that due to the lack crucial data on the Brighton proposal – the cost of an online event – the committee will need to meet again to continue the discussion when the relevant data is provided on Tuesday 16th November, and after inquiring whether Brighton would be able to organise the conference in 2023. It is agreed that during the meeting to take place on 16th November meeting the committee will be vote on whether the body deciding on the 2022 conference venue should be: 1) those listed on mailing list of the Society; 2) Porto 2021 participants; 3) the committee.

Gregory Claeys thanks committee members for their time and closes the meeting.