

ELECTIONS, DEMOCRACY, CRISIS

IZBORI, DEMOKRATIJA I KRIZA

EXPLORING DEMOCRATIC DECLINE IN EUROPE – A REGIONAL PHENOMENON OR A CONTINENTAL CHALLENGE?

Dejan Bursać

This thematic issue emerges as a continuation of the international academic conference „Elections – Democracy – Crisis“, held at the University of Warsaw in early 2024. It marks a successful collaboration between the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the University of Warsaw and the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade.

The primary aim of both the conference and this publication has been to examine how contemporary crises shape the democratic institutions and processes across Europe. Various disruptions over the recent years, ranging from wars and pandemics to economic instabilities, have triggered surprising electoral outcomes, the rise of new political actors, institutional shifts, and significant transformations within not just party systems, but societies as a whole. Ultimately, these trends raise fundamental questions about the trajectory of democracy itself.

While the broad topic is European in its scope, the contributions gathered here reflect a strong regional focus. Most papers concentrate on case studies from countries where democratic backsliding has become particularly acute in recent years – namely Poland, Hungary, Serbia, and Turkey. These relatively young or fragile democracies serve as critical lenses to observe broader populist and illiberal trends that are not limited to this wider region alone.

Before delving into the country-specific focus, the issue opens with three articles that tackle the broader state of play. These include the varying perceptions of democracy among European citizens, the democratic deficit within the European Union and its institutions, and the increasing concerns over electoral integrity and foreign or domestic interference.

The subsequent country-related articles explore a wide array of topics connected to the interplay between elections, democratic values, and ongoing crises. These include analyses of populist mechanisms for gaining and maintaining power, local elections as contested spaces between populist and democratic



forces, the evolution of nationalist narratives, the tension between EU accession processes and authoritarian tendencies, as well as patterns of clientelism and political corruption and their effects on electoral behavior.

This issue brings together contributions from both quantitative and qualitative traditions and draws on a wide range of disciplinary approaches. Such methodological and thematic diversity only enriches the volume, offering valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and common readers alike. As such, I hope this issue will contribute to ongoing academic and public debates, and I look forward to continuing the conversation at the next „Elections – Democracy – Crisis” conference, planned for spring 2026 in Belgrade.

As guest editor, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all the authors and reviewers, and especially to the editorial board of „Philosophy and Society“, for their immeasurable support in making this thematic issue possible.

Dejan Bursac
Senior Research Fellow
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory
University of Belgrade