



Workshop: **The consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident on relations between the EEC and Socialist Eastern European countries**

Date: 30 November 2016

Venue: *Sala del Camino, Villa Salviati, European University Institute, Florence, Italy*

Organisers: Federico Romero (EUI and PanEur1970s project); Dieter Schlenker (HAEU and Alcide De Gasperi Research Centre)

### Event Report

Director Dieter Schlenker welcomed the participants and gave a brief overview of HAEU collections and activities. Dr Angela Romano (PanEur1970s) explained the origins of this workshop and its connection to the broader PanEur1970s project.

The workshop involved individual presentations from the participants (see programme), Q&A at the end of each of the two sessions, and a final roundtable discussion involving all the speakers, PI Federico Romero, HAEU Director Dieter Schlenker, and some attendees, among which Aleksandra Kormonicka (EUI PhD researcher and PanEur1970s member) and Dr Andrej Milivojevic (Max Weber Fellow, EUI).

The first session devoted to '**Perspectives on the Chernobyl accident**'. **Prof Kate Brown** (UMBC and Braudel Fellow, EUI) gave a talk about one of the key questions related to the post-Chernobyl relations in the continent, that is the revitalization of economic activities in the radioactive zones and the ensuing exchange of goods in the European market ("The Berry Picking Boom in the Chernobyl Zone: Global Capitalism and Transnational Toxins"). **Dr Melanie Arndt** (Institute for East and Southeast European Studies Regensburg, Germany) also focused on the Chernobyl aftermath and analysed the social mobilization and network to help the "Chernobyl children" recover and boost their immune system through sojourns abroad. Both talks originated in each speaker's most recent research, which will be published in 2017 as monographs. In their presentations, Brown and Arndt also dealt with the EC/EU's role in these transnational issues: in both cases, the EU featured more as a point of reference (either for rules it adopts or as an agency capable of supporting initiatives from the society) than an initiator.

**Prof Elena Dundovich** (University of Pisa), who in 2011 published a book on the EC's response to the Chernobyl accident largely based on the papers by Christopher Audland (the EC Commission Director-General for Energy), focused on the Community's attempt at building a common nuclear security policy ('The EC and the nuclear security question: the roles of member states and DG XVII'). She argued that the internal struggle between the Commission and some EC member states on the matter prevented the Community from reaching an agreement on common nuclear security features and rules until 1996.

The focus of the workshop then turned to the core topic: the EC's embargo and subsequent regulations for the import of foodstuff in the immediate aftermath of the Chernobyl accident, and socialist countries' reaction to them. **Dr Angela Romano** analysed the EC Commission's attitude towards foodstuff market and its bargaining with the member states when defining the regulation on imports ('Legitimate self-defence vs. economic protectionism: New evidence concerning the EEC measures after the Chernobyl disaster'). She argued that the Commission adopted the embargo out of urgency, but was concerned since the beginning about the consequences that Community decisions would have on the already strained economies of the socialist countries. Rather than seizing the chance to impose protectionist measures, the Commission was actually interested in preserving the unofficial yet flourishing relations with the East and in limiting as much as possible the damage to Eastern European economies. It therefore pushed for the early adoption of an EC

regulation *erga omnes*, and also readied for assistance to East European countries suffering shortages of food.

The second session of the workshop focused specifically on ‘**East European perceptions of the EEC and its measures**’, as well as on their reactions. **Dr Benedetto Zaccaria** (HAEU) focused on Yugoslavia’s reactions to the agricultural embargo adopted by the EEC in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Analysing recently released archival papers from the EEC-Yugoslavia Co-operation Council and the Historical Archives of the European Commission, he argued that the Community embargo provoked a crisis of political confidence that urged Belgrade to enhance political and economic relations with Brussels.

**Dr Pal Germuska** (EUI) examined the Hungarian government’s response to the Chernobyl accident and the ensuing EC agricultural embargo. He revealed Budapest’s double disappointment in the Spring of 1986: on the one hand, the COMECON countries failed not only to coordinate their response to the nuclear accident and its consequences, but also to simply circulate adequate information. On the other hand, the EC issued the foodstuff embargo that hit also Hungary. This was very badly received in Budapest, for Hungary had developed excellent though still unofficial relations with the EC and had provided it with accurate data about foodstuff radioactivity. Similarly to Yugoslavia, the Hungarian government resolved to enhance relations with the Community rather than retaliate or place its hopes in the flawed socialist “community”.

Echoing Germuska’s findings, **Dr Pavel Szobi** (EUI) confirmed that lack of coordination among the COMECON countries was a major disappointment for Czech authorities, which then tried to negotiate agreements on specific goods with individual EC member states. Szobi also pointed to the scant information about the Chernobyl catastrophe in the Czechoslovak press and the unpreparedness of the Czechoslovak leadership to face the consequences of the disaster and adequately protect the population. This, he argued, contributed to undermining the government’s political legitimacy and thus accelerated the process towards democratic revolution.

Overall, the presentations were very much complementary and interconnected, and this gave life to a lively discussion and exchange of ideas in the final roundtable, which all the participants found enriching as well as stimulating for future research.

### **Workshop Aftermath:**

The main objective of the workshop was to re-assess the Chernobyl event within the context of EEC-Socialist countries relations thanks to the availability of evidence in former socialist countries’ state archives as well as to newly declassified documents from the EU institutions now accessible at the HAEU. There has been a wide consensus that the papers by the PanEur1970s members (Germuska, Romano, Szobi, and Zaccaria) have successfully accomplished this task. We are therefore considering the idea of submitting a proposal for a special issue featuring these four articles to an international peer-reviewed academic journal.

Angela Romano (Project Manager PanEur1970s, EUI)  
Benedetto Zaccaria (HAEU)



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