

Debates on Europe Belfast 2019

13–15 September 2019
#BelfastDebate

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Thematic outline

After twelve events in Eastern and Southeast Europe, *Debates on Europe* for the first time makes a stop in the West – in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Debates on Europe, a series of discussions organized by the S. Fischer Foundation and the German Academy for Language and Literature in cooperation with local partners across Europe, has since its inception in 2012 been hosted in places where the idea of Europe is at stake; often in places of conflict, where a contested past is made active in the present, weaponizing politics and dividing societies, places where issues of borders and cultural, ethnic and religious identity are at the top of the agenda.

Belfast is in many ways such a city. This northwestern corner of the EU arguably poses one of the biggest challenges to the ideological foundation of 21st-century European politics, namely the idea of post- or transnational political communities as an integral part of preserving peace and stability in Europe.

In the wake of the political drama surrounding Brexit, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has become headline news. However, while the "backstop" has been a crucial part of the Brexit negotiations, in the public sphere, the EU demand that the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland remains "invisible" has largely been presented without historical background or context.

Up until now, Northern Ireland has served as an inspiring example of how deadly nationalism can be neutralized – without anyone having to acknowledge defeat or proclaim victory.

"Europe" was a crucial part of this experiment in democracy, and the strength of the idea of EU integration was manifested in the Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998.

This modern and to a certain extent post-national project is now under threat. Recent developments show that sectarianism and identity politics have never disappeared, but can be reactivated as soon as the political framework of the peace process changes.

By making the European dimension of the Northern Irish issue visible and discuss this regional conflict in the context of similar but unique frictions and clashes elsewhere, for example in the Balkans, the *Belfast Debate on Europe* will bring new perspectives into the

local debate and deploy insights and experience of scholars, writers and intellectuals from Eastern and Southeast Europe in a Western European context.

The *Belfast Debate on Europe* will take place from 13 to 15 September 2019 and gather leading writers, journalists, academics, experts, public intellectuals and representatives of civil society from Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain as well as mainland Europe, especially from the German-language realm and Central and Eastern Europe.

In speeches, panel discussions and debates, themes of borders, conflict and Europe will be explored from both the local and a broader European perspective. Literary readings will make visible and tangible the cultural engagement with the legacy of "the Troubles".

In addition to the S. Fischer Foundation and the German Academy for Language and Literature, partners include The John Hewitt Society, the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University Belfast, as well as numerous individual writers, academics and cultural managers. Though the main focus will be on the direct encounter and exchange between the participants of the debate, media cooperations with, among others, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Irish Times*, ensure that the talks in Belfast will have an impact beyond the time and place of the event itself.

Carl Henrik Fredriksson

Belfast Debate on Europe Programme Director