

European University Institute – Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies



Workshop 13

Superpower Rivalry and the Third Way(s) in the Mediterranean

directed by

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Workshop abstract

This workshop examines the competing interests and political, economic and cultural influences of the Non-Aligned Movement against those of the Superpowers in the Cold War Mediterranean. From this region's perspective, we reconsider the meaning of non-alignment, its protagonists and its ramifications for a "third way" between the Blocs. Our Workshop seeks to bring together scholars with diverse disciplinary perspectives and expertise on the Non-Aligned Movement and the Superpower confrontation in the region.

Workshop Description

The Cold War was fought globally on a multitude of regional fronts. In the Mediterranean area it was shaped by the legacies of European colonialism, the competing interests of the Superpowers and local conflicts. The premise of this proposed workshop is that the Cold War was especially disruptive in the vast, diverse region encircling the Mediterranean Sea. The one-time European colonial powers withdrew or were expelled from the eastern and southern coasts, reorganizing themselves in the European Community with a North-Western and Trans-Atlantic orientation. American analysts remapped the area in terms of “security regions,” and Soviet experts, in terms of the USSR’s quest for strategic partners. The newly emancipated countries stretching across North African and eastern coasts were obstructed from forming cross-Mediterranean solidarities by Superpower interference and by local national, religious, and development conflicts aggravated by appealing to outside powers. To understand the Cold War’s impact in the region, we need a substantial effort to bridge areas of study—Southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East—that have come to be analyzed separately.

The purpose of this workshop is to explore the imprint left on the region as the two Superpowers stepped into European imperial shoes in the course of World War II, and struggled to mark out their areas of hegemony thereafter, playing on local national, religious, and political conflicts, mainly in the period from the Greek Civil War and Italian elections of 1948 to the 1970s proxy wars in the Middle East. Examining the nature of local intervention we are interested in how the Superpowers conceived their strategic interests – oil; containing communism; manipulating nationalism; sustaining Israel; - and the implications these interests had for thinking about the geopolitical significance, economic profile, and cultural identity of the Mediterranean area.

The Non-Aligned Movement was established to coordinate cooperation outside of the Cold War blocs. Born in the Mediterranean in the late 1950s, the movement sought to challenge Superpower influence. Its inaugural conference was at Belgrade, and the leading figures, aside from Jawaharlal Nehru, were Josip Broz ‘Tito’ and Gamal Abdel Nasser. Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia would join the movement, while domestic pressure for Greece to join became significant in the 1950s. The development of the Non-Aligned Movement was similarly shaped by the radicalization of politics in the Cold War Mediterranean, the Superpower confrontation, decolonization, and struggles in the Arab world set off by the founding of the State of Israel. From this region’s perspective, we reconsider the meaning of non-alignment, its protagonists, and its ramifications for a “third way” between the Blocs. Our Workshop seeks to bring together scholars with diverse disciplinary perspectives and expertise on the Non-Aligned Movement and the Superpower confrontation in the region. We are especially interested in new research on the topic of the Cold War carried out in the states and archives of North Africa. The movement provides another lens for examining Cold War alternatives and Superpower influence in the Cold War. This workshop will present the competing interests and political, economic and cultural influences of the Non-Aligned Movement against those of the Superpowers in the Cold War Mediterranean.