

CONSORTIUM FOR EUROPEAN SYMPOSIA ON TURKEY

CEST Symposium 2027**Illiberal Peace, Conflict Societies and Political Futures****10-12 February 2027 · Bilbao, Spain****Call for Papers****ABSTRACT DEADLINE: 30 October 2026**

Unresolved conflicts and various manifestations of violence against civilians continue affecting societies globally. These conflicts manifest themselves as organised armed rebellion, intercommunal riots, forced migration and massive violence against civilians. Meanwhile, confidence in conflict-resolution methods rooted in democratisation, power-sharing, human rights advocacy, and transitional justice has waned significantly. These frameworks, which historically served as universal paradigms for just conflict resolution and societal reconciliation, have been critically undermined, in part, by their own designers. Institutions, legal mechanisms, and moral lexicons have increasingly been withdrawn precisely where their intervention is most requisite. The genocidal violence perpetrated by Israel in Gaza starkly exemplifies this deterioration, rendering the pattern impossible to ignore.

We also observe a discernible trend towards an increasingly authoritarian paradigm in conflict management and social governance, frequently characterised as the so-called “illiberal peace” (Lewis, Heathershaw & Megoran 20108). This model focuses on denying the grievances that led to the conflict in the first place, maintaining stability through state coercion, and neglecting democratic principles, civil liberties, and human rights. It emphasises stopping active conflicts rather than addressing structural injustices or implementing transitional justice by controlling three domains from the top down: discourses, space and economic resources (Lewis, Heathershaw & Megoran 20108). Consequently, conflicts continue to polarise and divide successive generations and remain embedded in the collective consciousness of those who did not witness active conflict and are unfamiliar with its origins.

The Consortium for European Symposia on Turkey (CEST) solicits original and unpublished scholarly contributions concerning the concept of “illiberal peace” and conflict societies from theoretical-ethical, political, and social perspectives. The ongoing efforts to disarm the PKK and resolve the Kurdish conflict in Turkey serve as a foundational case study to foster an inclusive and rigorous academic discourse on illiberal peace and conflict societies. We also invite submissions offering original insights or comparative analyses of illiberal/non-democratic peace initiatives, including the current Turkey-Armenia normalisation process, the Azerbaijan-Armenia settlement, and the Board for Peace initiative in Gaza. Furthermore, submissions are welcome with comparative references to Turkey regarding ongoing transitional justice for forcibly disappeared following the end of massive violence in cases linked to the symposium’s broader theme of illiberal peace and conflict societies, such as Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain (Basque Country), Mexico, Syria, and others.

That the conference convenes in Bilbao is not incidental: the Basque case is a reminder for the ongoing process in Turkey that the official commitment to closure of a conflict, or its containment within constitutional frameworks, rarely exhausts the political work that conflict societies demand.

We are particularly interested in work that engages three interlocking developments.

01 The Illiberal Turn and Conflict Resolution

An increasing number of states are redefining peace processes, ceasefires, and reconciliation initiatives as mechanisms to reinforce authoritarian rule or democratic backsliding rather than promote democratisation and safeguard human rights. As international law and norms become progressively sidelined or ignored, peace efforts increasingly rely on illiberal strategies in many contexts. Turkey's current "terror-free Turkey" initiative and top-down negotiations related to the PKK's dissolution seem primarily designed to consolidate executive authority and suppress opposition parties, rather than to expand political participation and civil liberties. How do illiberal peace processes shape the current understanding of conflict resolution and reconciliation? Can illiberal peace last, and for how long? We invite original scholarly submissions that examine the nexus between democratic/autocratic governance and conflict resolution. While we seek a particular focus on the peace process in Turkey, we also strongly encourage analyses drawing on original insights from ongoing or past peace initiatives.

02 Politics of Spatial and Transitional Justice

We invite scholarly contributions concerning topics such as forced migration and resettlement, destroyed villages, cultural heritage loss, expropriated farmland and pastoral commons, renamed landscapes, disappeared persons, unmarked graves, and erased archives. These issues transcend mere "memory politics"; they constitute the lived landscapes through which political futures are negotiated. How can judicial and non-judicial mechanisms help address truth-seeking and criminal justice? Can the obstacles of lack of political will be overcome; if so, how? How is mourning for disappeared people carried out, and how are ravaged landscapes restored? What roles do ruins, absence, and toponymic changes play in perpetuating political contestation, denying genocide, and fostering state-sponsored amnesia as forms of ongoing conflict? We are equally interested in countermeasures: local and community-based approaches to recognition and remediation, as well as agonistic and radical-democratic strategies for future development.

03 Post-(il)liberal Futures

What alternative pathways for conflict societies emerge in opposition to illiberal peace? How do these alternatives engage with the material and spatial legacies of unresolved conflict? What mechanisms facilitate conflict resolution? Is the healing of conflict-affected societies even feasible? If so, what procedures, actors, institutions, and negotiations are involved? This inquiry seeks to incorporate decolonial, feminist, and indigenous perspectives that emphasise alternative futures, supported by empirical field insights.

WHO CAN APPLY

Advanced PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers and senior scholars. Please do not submit published research.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please combine all materials into a single PDF file, named with your surname only. DO NOT SEND separate documents. Abstracts of 350 words should be submitted, along with author affiliation and title, a short bio (up to 150 words), and 5–7 keywords to cest.bilbo@gmail.com. Selected contributors will be invited to submit full papers of 8,000–9,000 words (including references) before the symposium. We plan to publish an edited book with selected contributions.

TIMELINE

Abstract deadline	30 October 2026
Notification of acceptance	20 November 2026
Full paper deadline	20 January 2027

EXPENSES

Single accommodation for two nights and conference meals will be provided. Return flight tickets will be covered up to 400 Euros.

CONVENERS

Bilge Yabanci — University of Deusto & Basque Foundation of Science (Ikerbasque), Bilbao, Spain

Kerem Öktem — Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

This symposium is convened as part of the Consortium for European Symposia on Turkey (CEST), funded by Stiftung Mercator and administered by the Stockholm University Institute of Turkish Studies. Consortium members are based at SciencesPo Paris, the University of Vienna, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the University of Naples L'Orientale, Stockholm University, the University of Copenhagen, and the University of Deusto. CEST is also generously supported by the Keyman Modern Turkish Studies Program at Northwestern University.