

EWIS 2019 Call for Papers

The International Dimensions of Unilateral Secession

Workshop convenors:

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Workshop summary

Twelve years ago, Walter (2006) suggested that secession is the main source of conflict but little has changed since. Unilateral secessions, efforts of a group to separate from a state, continue to be of paramount importance for international relations because they often link to intractable conflicts. Furthermore, some of those efforts have resulted in secessionist state-like entities that are not recognised by the international community. Territories effectively outside international law, these unrecognised states come with their own challenges to regional and international security, such as organised crime or forced migration. Although these conflicts start as a disagreement between the parent state and the secessionist group, they have repercussions far beyond the local level and see the involvement of major regional and global actors. These include regional powers that seek to assist secessionist movements (e.g. Russia in the many secessionist entities of the post-Soviet space), global powers with interests in conflict-ridden areas (e.g. the UK in former colonies like Cyprus or Palestine) as well as international organisations, which often lead efforts at conflict management, such as the UN, the EU, the OSCE or the AU.

This workshop seeks to explore international dimensions of unilateral secession and thus contribute to the debate on the challenges associated with secessionist entities. So far, this debate has centred on reasons for secession (e.g. Cunningham 2014, Wallesteen 2015), international responses to secessionist movements (e.g. Caplan 2006, Fabry 2010, Coggins, 2011, Griffiths 2016), the emergence and survival of unrecognised states (e.g. Geldenhuys 2009, Caspersen 2012) and diplomatic aspects of unilateral secession (e.g. Pegg 1998, Ker-Lindsay 2012). This workshop will build on this scholarship with the aim to provide the foundation for a more systematic, comparative analysis of international strategies and practices of engagement with secessionist entities.

We are looking for contributions by scholars working on contemporary and historical cases of secessionist conflicts in different geographical areas, ranging from Europe (e.g. the Balkans) and the post-Soviet space (e.g. Eastern Ukraine, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria) to the Near East (e.g. Cyprus and Palestine) and Africa (e.g. Somaliland and Western Sahara). Both comparative and single case studies are welcome.

We expect paper proposals to concentrate on one or more of the following questions:

- How do the principles of territorial integrity and recognised sovereignty impact the ways in which the international community treats secession claims?
- How do international organisations (IOs) promote the resolution of secessionist conflicts and how do they approach unrecognised states? What explains the choice of specific instruments, strategies and practices of IOs?
- How can 'remedial secession' inform international practices in the 21st century?
- What lessons can we draw from comparative studies of unilateral secession? What research methods are most useful?
- How does international engagement affect locals in de-facto states? What is the impact at the state, the civil society and the individual level?
- What strategies do secessionist entities use vis-à-vis the international community?