

The Canadian Centre for  
German & European Studies



Le Centre canadien d'études  
allemandes et européennes

York University

Université de Montréal

**The German-Canadian Transatlantic Forum 2010**  
**February 26/27, 2010**  
**CCGES, York University, Toronto**

**Call for Applications**

As the current DAAD professor at The Canadian Centre for German and European Studies at York University, I would like to inform you and your colleagues about an exciting opportunity. We are pleased to be able to offer faculty members from across Canada the opportunity to participate in a two-day discussion forum on matters of current relevance to both Germany and Canada. This year's seminar is entitled *The Peaceful Revolution(s) in 1989: History, Memory, Mythology* and will take place February 26/27, 2010 (Friday and Saturday) at CCGES York.

In his recently published, award-winning book "*Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen*" the German political scientist Herfried Muenkler stated that Germany, unlike the United States or France, lacks a unifying national myth. According to Muenkler, both the West German myth of "the economic miracle" and East German references to revolutionary national myths have collapsed since unification, but have not been replaced by a modern myth appropriate to a liberal democracy. For obvious reasons historically older, very powerful myths are of no use anymore. Muenkler argues that such foundation myths - powerful images, symbols and grand narratives - are not a luxury, but rather a necessity for liberal democracies as they can fulfill important political functions by creating points of orientation and confidence in a society's ability to meet challenging circumstances. Bemoaning the absence of "sacredness" in German politics, he criticizes the (West) German political establishment for its unwillingness to integrate the legacy of the East German civil rights movement and the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 into the Federal Republic's collective self-understanding, choosing instead to focus its attentions the process of German unification, where they were clearly the decisive actors.

Timothy Garton Ash repeatedly addressed similar issues in a European perspective. Writing this fall, he suggested that 1989 was Europe's finest hour but offered that, twenty years later, "1989 seems to be like the last, late flowering of a very aged rose". He suggests that Europeans in the former East and West have largely missed the historic opportunity to build on the strategic boldness and historical imagination which political leaders and visionaries and the broad public on both sides of the former divide seemed to share in the immediate aftermath of the momentous changes. In order to take part in shaping the world today, Ash sees the urgent need for Europeans to revitalize and

reconsider the legacy of the Peaceful Revolutions across Europe: non-violent political change for freedom and civil rights.

Both authors (and many more) would agree that more abstract concepts like "constitutional patriotism", as commendable they might be, leave an imaginative chasm and do not have the power to create a long-term positive identification. Given this, it is all the more surprising that 1989 - with the fall of the Berlin Wall as its iconic event and image - has not emerged as a foundation myth for a new German tradition of democracy and freedom. Even in other Central and Eastern European post-dictatorial states the myth of the 1989 revolutions has either faded or never really existed, while the enlarged European Union also appears to have missed the opportunity to incorporate the experiences of 1989 into its mythological arsenal in order to create deeper emotional ties between its central bureaucracy and the wider population.

At the 2010 German-Canadian Transatlantic Forum we will discuss the following themes:

- 1) Does a modern liberal democracy actually need a unifying myth? To modern, rationalist and enlightened citizens political mythologies belong to a world of the past, and even more so for academics and intellectuals trained to critically deconstruct any mythological sentiment. In addition, there is the question at what specific point particularly national mythologies turn into manipulative political ideologies. In this first session the theoretical foundations of political mythology will be discussed as well as its relation to history as an academic discipline deconstructing as well as creating grand narratives at the same time and memory as an ongoing process of representing the past in the present
- 2) In the second session some concrete examples of modern (democratic) political mythologies will be compared. In addition, we will discuss the different significances of the Peaceful Revolution(s) in various European states and look at their also quite different, sometimes competing meanings in their specific national contexts but also in a broader European perspective.
- 3) The final session will contain a discussion of already existing potential fundaments for a 1989 mythology in different media such as literature, film, music, and fine arts. Here, form and aesthetics as much as content will be at the core of the discussion as it is worth exploring if the 1989 Peaceful Revolution in certain places has produced its own iconography of a new quality.

As always we will prepare a reader with key texts on the subjects in order to facilitate our discussions. At the end of our Saturday program we will open the event to the broader public with a round-table discussion featuring prominent speakers. The round-table discussants will be asked to pick up the topic and relate it to the Canadian discussion on the question of identity-building through national myths.

The Transatlantic Forum's main objective is to facilitate open discussions on topics relevant to Germany, Canada, and transatlantic relations. Therefore, the organizers are planning to reserve as much time as possible for formal and informal discussions as well as networking among the participants. As well, we are hoping to convene in a downtown location in order to attract a greater audience for round-table discussion.

The registration fee for the Transatlantic Forum is \$100.00, however, selected participants will be reimbursed the costs of round-trip economy transportation and ground transfers at either end of the trip as well as have their hotel and food expenses covered for duration of the event. We are particularly interested in attracting faculty from a wide range of universities and from a variety of disciplines. The forum will be conducted in English.

Interested applicants may apply by emailing a letter including their academic interests and a short CV to [ccges@yorku.ca](mailto:ccges@yorku.ca)

Please note that the deadline for application is **January 8, 2010**.

If you know of colleagues who might like to be on our contact list of Canadian colleagues interested in Germany, other European countries, the European Union or transatlantic topics in general, please forward their contact information so that we may extend them an invitation.

The Canadian Centre for German and European Studies at York University has a fourfold mandate: 1) to promote research on Germany and Europe, 2) to educate the next generation of experts on Germany and Europe, 3) to organize activities on Germany and Europe for the broader community, and 4) to further academic contacts between Germany and Canada. For more information on the Centre's activities, please refer to our website at <http://www.ccgges.yorku.ca>

Thank you very much for your interest,

Marcus Funck  
DAAD Visiting Professor

## **Planned Proceedings**

### 27 Feb 2010

6 p.m.-7 p.m.

Welcome Address

7 p.m. -

Dinner and Social Networking

### 28 Feb 2010

9.00 a.m. - 10.30 a.m.

Session 1 "Political Mythology and Democracy"

10.30.a.m.-10.45 a.m.

Coffee Break

10.45 a.m. - 12.15 p.m.

Session 2 "National Myths of the Peaceful Revolution(s) in Comparison"

12.15 p.m.-1.30 p.m.

Lunch

1.30 p.m.- 3 p.m.

Session 3 "The Iconography of the 1989 Revolution(s) and Their Mythological Potential"

3.30 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.

Round-Table discussion

7 p.m.

Dinner