

Call for Papers for an International Conference in Budapest  
Organised by The Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

# *“Ratio Civilis”*

*The Transformation of Urban Political Cultures  
in the Age of the Reformation*



As recent scholarship tends to stress, the early modern period was not one of decline in the history of European cities. While scholars traditionally used to claim that European cities were over the peak of their development by the end of the 16th, or at the latest by the middle of the 17th century, modern historiography tends to emphasize the opposite: many cities were quite successful in preserving their political breathing space even after the treaty of Westphalia.

Taking into consideration that early modernity gave birth both to the modern territorial state and the newly established Reformed centres and networks of ecclesiastical power, one wonders what kind of political cultures urban elites helped to foster in this context?

There can be no doubt that – beside the state-city political relationship – the answer is largely to be found in the dynamic relationship between cities and the Reformation. This answer is searched for in a more and more nuanced and complex fashion in the secondary literature. While earlier claims held that the Europe-wide movement of Reformation was mainly based in the cities, recent scholarship either emphasizes the distinction between urban and rural reformation (Rublack talks about a “*bürgerliche Reformation*”, while Schilling refers to “*Stadtreformation als Bürgerbewegung*” and focuses on the process of confessionalization), or defines the dividing line differently (as in Peter Blickle’s case, whose use of terms like “*Kommunalismus*” or communal reformation encompasses both the political culture of cities and of villages, both of which are put in contrast with traditional feudal social structures).

But what exactly was the political philosophical rationale behind the practices of those city councils, which determined the fate of the religious reform-movement in their own cities in tight, and sometimes chaotic socio-political contexts? Perhaps we should not simply enquire into the reasons behind the choices of certain city magistracies in particular contexts, but

should look at the consequences their choices had on the political cultures of the urban communities. For if we recall Weber's still relevant insights we cannot suppose that denominational conversions had no impact on the manners and customs of a given political unit, whether it was a city, a region, a principality or a language community. All of these minor units necessarily had different conceptions of the common good, of the proper mechanisms of governing a community, and all of them had a rather different perception of what politics is finally about in the hot political climate of the newly established states and their reasons of state (see Viroli's thesis of a change from virtue politics to reasons of state in this context).

Talking about changing patterns of political culture, we also need to discuss differences in terms of ecclesiastical affiliation, geographical location and economic arrangements of the European cities in question. To be sure, the mere fact that the political elite of a given community endorsed the Catholic or one of the Reformed faiths obviously had a major impact on the city's political culture (and also, in particular in the latter case, the question whether a town endorsed Lutheranism or Calvinism could have considerable impact on its attitude towards humanism and the arts). But it is needless to say that conditions, like location, local customs, economic patterns, and social hierarchy all had major impacts. It can also be assumed that a distinguishing mark was whether any given town was located on the trans- or cisalpine part of the map.

The aim of our conference is, hence, to bring together scholars from different fields (political philosophy, political and social history, the history of political thought, church history, social geography, historical anthropology etc.) in order to investigate the European-wide changing landscape of cultures of urban politics in the early modern period (c. 1500-1800) and to try to make sense of how urban elites tried to interpret their world (which we call "reason of the city" – *ratio civilis*). All in all, we invite participants to describe, analyse and discuss the dramatically transforming political cultures of European cities in the age of the Reformation.

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**Proposals** (with a title and abstract of the length of 3-500 words) should be sent to the following address by 30 April 2017: [fi.titkarsag@btk.mta.hu](mailto:fi.titkarsag@btk.mta.hu).

**Keynote speakers:**

*H e i n z S c h i l l i n g (Berlin)*

*H a n s B l o m (Rotterdam)*

**Venue:** the conference will be organised in Budapest, at the headquarters of the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

**Organisers:** Prof. Ferenc Hörcher, director, Institute of Philosophy, HAS and Adam Smrcz, assistant researcher, Institute of Philosophy, HAS

**Date of the conference:** 17-18 November, 2017.

**For further questions** please contact: [smrcz.adam@btk.mta.hu](mailto:smrcz.adam@btk.mta.hu)