On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Wilhelm Röpke’s death, a 2 days international conference will take place on April 14th and 15th 2016 in the Maison de la Paix, Geneva, Switzerland.

Organizing institutions:

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies Geneva (Switzerland), Liberales Institut Zurich/Geneva (Switzerland), Wilhelm-Röpke-Institut Erfurt (Germany), Aktionsgemeinschaft Soziale Marktwirtschaft Tübingen (Germany), CICC/AGORA Centre de Recherche sur les Civilisations et Identités culturelles comparées / Université de Cergy-Pontoise (France).

Papers by Röpke specialists (economists and historians) on issues as described below are welcome. Papers by historians of economic thought, philosophers, political scientists and historians of international relationships working on European history of this period (1920s to early 1960s) are strongly encouraged.

Conference title:

Wilhelm Röpke: a liberal political economist and social philosopher in times of multiple European crises

Keynote:

Hernando de Soto,
President of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy, Lima, Peru

Focus of the conference:

Wilhelm Röpke (1899-1966) is widely known as an economist of the founding generation of ordoliberalism who had a seminal impact on the German liberal economic policy after World War II. However, he never returned to Germany after having left in 1933 and started an international career, first in Istanbul, then from 1937 onwards in Geneva, where he became Professor for International Relationships at the Graduate Institute and stayed until his death in 1966.

At first glance, his wide-ranging work as a social philosopher - where he repeatedly expressed his uneasiness about symptoms and causes of the possibility of self-destruction and disintegration of the modern Western civilization - does not match with his early writings as an economist specialized on problems of the business cycle.
To what extent could he even be put in a row with the German speaking tradition of conservative and “decline” historians and philosophers (Nietzsche, Spengler, Burckhardt)?

Röpke’s detour through social philosophy and history urged him to focus on the link between the spheres of economics and politics, already in his early period, which will be the center of the first part of the conference. He insisted, starting from his observations of the politico-economic processes in the Weimar Republic, that no Western democracy was perfectly protected against the risk of dictatorship: a mixture of unlimited private profits, economic and societal problems of the free market, the resulting call for governmental interventionism and protectionism and its self-reinforcing properties could be the early signs of a democracy being on the slippery slope to dictatorship.

Was Röpke alone in denouncing excessive interventionist measures in economic policies as early threats of dictatorship? How does his position match with his contribution to the Brauns-Kommission in 1931 when he himself proposed state-driven emergency measures to address the acute problems of unemployment and deflation during the Great Depression?

A second part of the conference will address Röpke’s publications and activities in Istanbul between 1933 and 1937, and as Professor for International Relationships at the Graduate Institute in Geneva between 1937 and 1966. In this time he was active as scientist, as public intellectual in the media and as networker in various international contexts.

Röpke’s reflections upon symptoms and causes of the recurrent crisis of capitalism in modern times also led him to possible political solutions: which solutions did he delineate for Germany, Switzerland and Europe in general after World War II, and for what politico-economic reasons?

After World War II, “International Relationships” was yet to become an autonomous scientific discipline. To what extent were Röpke’s questions on international disintegration risks and his ideas of international order ‘communis opinio’ within the scientific reflection in International Relationships during the 1950s and 1960s?

To what extent did Röpke see an ethical crisis as the basis of possible financial crises?

What is his understanding of a “humane market economy” and to what extent can it be a basis for stable International Relationships?

Why is Free Trade not a sufficient condition for a stable international order? What are necessary complements to establish a stable international order?

Submission Details

Please send your proposals as a short abstract in English to Patricia.Commun@u-cergy.fr

Submission deadline is September 15.

Deadline for confirmation of paper acceptance is September 30.