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The reluctant activists: The ‘Greek case’ and the Scandinavian states’ ambivalence toward international human rights norms

ABSTRACT:

The human rights policies of the Scandinavian states give a complex, ambiguous impression. On the one hand, their foreign policies have shown a commitment to international human rights norms that few other states can rival, leading some commenters to dub them ‘moral super powers’. On the other hand, the Scandinavian states have been quite reluctant to grant international human rights norms any influence on their domestic politics.

In this talk, I will seek to explain this seemingly ambivalent tension between the external and internal human rights policies of the Scandinavian states. Adopting a comparative long-term perspective, the talk accounts for the Scandinavian states interactions with international human rights norms in three episodes: (1) How they engaged with the founding of the United Nations and Council of Europe international human rights regimes after the Second World; (2) how they expanded their foreign policy activism for human rights from the 1960s, a policy era that arguably started with the so-called ‘Greek case’, when Scandinavian states filed an inter-state complaint against Greece under the European Convention on Human Rights; and (3) how the increasing domestic impact of international human rights law since the 1980s has also contributed to moderating their foreign policy activism for human rights.

*The lecture is part of a series hosted by the Danish Institute, the Netherlands Institute, the Swedish Institute and the Norwegian Institute at Athens in the context of the conference **The ‘Greek Case’ in the Council of Europe: A Game Changer for International Law and Human Rights?** (Athens, 12-14 December 2019). Perceived as a prequel to the conference that commemorates the 50th anniversary of Greece’s withdrawal from the Council of Europe, the lectures engage with the broader issues involved, concerning human rights, European institutions and international law in the past and contemporary times. They will feature leading scholars, journalists, writers and human rights practitioners, among others. All lectures will take place at the Danish Institute at Athens from April to November 2019.*