

CHAIRE GANSHOF van der MEERSCH 2005 - 2006

**Europe's Democratic Age 1945-73
An exploration of a world that has disappeared**

Martin Conway

Opening Lecture:

THE STRANGE CASE OF BELGIUM

Belgium. The state that got left behind.

Based on my forthcoming study of Belgium in the post-1944 years, this lecture and discussion will examine the reasons which underlay the Belgian “exceptionalism” of the post-war decades. At a time when the other states of Europe were experiencing a remarkable renaissance after the disruptions of the war years, the Belgian state moved in the opposite direction. Having been throughout the first hundred years of its existence, one of the most successful of the nation-states created during the nineteenth century, Belgium became embroiled in a complex web of constitutional, political and socio-linguistic disputes. Though these were apparently overcome by 1950-51, they re-emerged at the end of that decade, and led to the almost continuous cycle of constitutional reforms and regional demands which have characterised Belgium since the 1960s. This lecture, aimed at a wider public as well as the students of the Institute, is therefore intended as a historical explanation of the reasons for this Belgian peculiarity.