**Title:** Ottoman Justice and Political Economies of Empires: European merchants in Ottoman courts (16th/17th centuries)

By Dr. Tommaso Stefini, PhD, Yale University

**Date:** 19 October 2023, Thursday

**Time:** 16.30

**Venue:** A 130 Seminar Room

*Abstract:*

This presentation deals with Ottoman politics of justice towards European merchants in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By focusing on the sultan’s own court (the Imperial Council, divan-ı hümayun­­­) and on the Venetian merchants, it illustrates how Ottoman commercial and political interests affected the production and application of Islamic law (Sharia) for European merchants in Ottoman courts. In order to promote Venetian trade, Ottoman political and legal authorities introduced new norms and procedures in commercial and criminal disputes between Venetian and Ottoman subjects, and they promoted settlements in favor of Venetian merchants. Such politics of justice, I argue, demonstrate the dynamism of the Ottoman legal system in a period of global commercial development and the strong commitment of Ottoman authorities towards regulating and promoting international trade.  Overall, this presentation shows the fallacy of widely held-views of pre-modern Islamic legal and economic systems as unchanging before the Europeanizing reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and of Ottoman passivity and anti-mercantile attitudes towards long-distance trade.

*Bio:*

Tommaso Stefini is a social and economic historian of the early modern Ottoman Empire. His research focuses on Ottoman/European political and commercial relations, comparative history of Islamic and European legal and economic institutions, and Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations in the pre-modern Mediterranean. He holds a PhD from Yale University (2021) and was Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence between 2021 and 2023. He recently joined Sabanci University in Istanbul as a senior postdoctoral fellow in the project OTTOLEGAL, The Making of Ottoman Law: The Agency and Interaction of Diverse Groups in Lawmaking, 1450–1650, which is sponsored by the European Research Council. His research has appeared in American, Turkish, French, and Italian journals and currently he is currently revising his book manuscript titled Ordering Difference: Justice and Cross-cultural trade between Istanbul and Venice in the Seventeenth century.