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Report on the ECPR General Conference Hamburg, 22-25 August 2018

From 22 to 25 August 2018, the University of Hamburg hosted the 12th General Conference, which is the largest annual meeting for representatives of political and administrative sciences as well as other social sciences organized by the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) – a learned society established in 1970 by a group of twelve founding European universities and as the result of a project led by eminent political scientists, Jean Blondel and Stein Rokkan. The objective of the ECPR was to break down the barriers between the national traditions of the discipline and create a truly international community of scholars within Europe. Some fifty years on, we are the leading scholarly society for political scientists in Europe; we have over 300 institutional members in nearly 50 countries, which amounts to a global community of tens of thousands of scholars. In order to develop social sciences, the ECPR delivers methodological and professional training and career development to PhD students and early career researchers; provides forums for the development of research and the formation of networks; issues grants and runs a scientific publishing programme.

For the 12th General Conference in Hamburg the organizers planned a rich academic programme as well as plenary speeches. The plenary lecture was delivered by Reiner Forst, professor of philosophy and political theory at the Philosophy Department of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Mein. His lecture was entitled: "Normativity and Reality: Thinking Politically About Politics". During his lecture Professor Forst asked a crucial research question: "If social and political reality is a reality of justifications, what distinguishes better justifications from worse ones – and what distinguishes different forms of exercising power?". Conference participants also took part in workshops during which they discussed current topics in the area of social sciences. The Hamburg Conference was divided into 78 research sections, each comprising one to forty panel meetings. All in all, the conference comprised 515 panels. During its conferences the ECPR assigns so-called Open Scholarship panels to discuss certain new trends or political problems so that the academic community could talk them over and decide how best to adjust their research practice to the newly emerging environment. The ECPR planned three Open Scholarship panels to be held at the Hamburg Conference:

Gender and Diversity in Political Science, which was organized to mark the 2018 release of the third Gender and Diversity Monitoring Report of the International Political Science Association (IPSA). This Panel reflected on contemporary issues relating to gender and diversity in the discipline of political science from both an international and comparative perspective. One of the main topics during the panel were the processes of the rise of new social movements such as those promoting gender and racial equality and indigenous rights, and it was also noted that political science was

sometimes slow to engage with these new political actors and with issues of inequality more generally. The panelists tried to answer the following questions: To what extent is the discipline of political science, including its professional associations, inclusive and representative in terms of focus and composition? What practices have professional associations or other institutions of political science adopted to foster diversity, and what lessons can be learned from these? Is the discipline accommodating diverse perspectives and approaches or is there still a hierarchy of knowledge favouring particular frameworks and preoccupations?

EPS Debate: Teaching Populism in the Era of Trump. During that debate its authors put forward the following thesis: “In the 21st century, populism is sweeping the world. Populist leaders are in power in the most powerful country on the globe, the United States of America. They form governments in regional hubs such as Poland, the Philippines and Venezuela, and they threaten some of the most established Western Democracies, including France and Italy.” Later on, it served as a basis for a reflection how this state of affairs affected political science and how it should be taught. An answer was sought for the question how should populism be integrated into an International Relations, Comparative Politics, or Women’s Studies class? To answer all those question scholars representing all the discussed areas took part in the debate: Alison McCartney (Teaching and Learning and International Relations), Daniele Caramani (Comparative Politics), Dick Katz (American Politics and Political Behaviour), Isabelle Engeli (Women’s Studies).

Political Values and Norms Shaping Political Behaviour: Evidence from Comparative Social Research. In this panel it was noted that political behaviour was an essential element

of political culture of the population and an important indicator and predictor of the democratic political system development. In one of its broadest definitions, political behaviour is considered as an aggregated category for all those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence – select, support or challenge – government and politics. The panel did not reflect on the most classical forms of political behaviours such as voting, organising demonstrations, writing letters to a governmental official, focusing instead on relatively new and evolving forms which presume using the resources of the internet and social media. The panel included papers analysing available empirical evidence from these and other quantitative research programs describing patterns, factors and consequences of political behaviour in different world regions and in a global comparative perspective. The interventions were based on the following data bases: Eurobarometr, European Social Survey, International Social Survey Program, World Values Survey, European Values Study, Comparative National Elections Project, Comparative Study of Electoral System as well as the group of regional barometers – Afro Barometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer, Eurasia Barometer, and Latinobarometro. The main question which the panellists tried to answer in their interventions was how the scholars could use data and empirical evidence to deepen their understanding and prediction skills with regard to different forms of political behaviour and the role of values and norms in shaping participation patterns.

Another tradition of the ECPR General Conference is organization of four roundtable discussions, two of which are always organized by local scholars. One of this year's roundtables was entitled: "Cosmopolitan Metropolis and Parochial Hinterlands: New Social Cleavage". It was an attempt

to answer the following questions: What explains the push towards populism and the phenomenon of ‘democratic regression’? Are the explanations all the same for Poland and France, Great Britain and Germany, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, for the United States of America and for countries like Turkey?

The second roundtable: “Multilateralism in Crisis: The Re-Nationalisation of Governance and the Emergence of a Neo-Westphalian Order” addressed the causes and consequences of the move away from multilateralism and towards greater emphasis again on the role of the nation-state as the principal unit of decision-making.

The roundtable entitled: When Does Teaching Matter in Academic (Career) Development? It emphasized the discussion of the increasing trend to distinguish between research and teaching job profiles, and how to react to higher education systems, where university administrations talk about the importance of teaching, but then hire according to publication records.

During the roundtable entitled: “Political Communication in a Post-truth Era: Much Ado About Nothing?” scholars of political communication and journalism discuss the latest developments with respect to post-truth politics, scrutinise its effects, and analyse implications for future research.

The ECPR General Conference is every year attended by over 2000 academics from all over the world, so it is impossible to sit on all panels or at least read all available interventions. In 2018, very popular were subject connected with authoritarianism, crisis of democracy, elections and populism. All those subjects were addressed in the panel during which I had the pleasure to present my paper: “Does ‘Western’ Democracy Still Mean ‘Liberal Democracy’?”.

It comprised the following interventions: Daniel Bochsler (Central European University) and Andreas Juon (University College London): “Authoritarian Footprints: the Transformation of Democracy, 1990-2016”, Anna Lührmann (University of Gothenburg) and Staffan Lindberg (University of Gothenburg): “Layers of Liberal Constraints: Institutional Decay and Democratic Breakdown”; Jorgen Moller (Aarhus University): “The Janus-Faced Political Legacy of Catholicism: Representative Government and Absolutism”; Efe Sivis (Altinbas University): “Trump’s Impact on Democracy in U.S.: Statements and Actions”; Jarosław Szczepański (University of Warsaw) and Paulina Kalina (University of Warsaw): “The Road to Autocratization? Redefining Democracy in Poland”.

The thread that was common to all papers were deliberations on liberal democracy and departure from its model in the US and certain highly developed EU Member States. The ever more frequent claims that “Western democracy” no longer stands for “liberal democracy” made the panellists to examine theoretically and empirically the degree of development of non-liberal democracy. It was discussed whether the concept of non-liberal democracy is suitable for analysing the contemporary development of “Western” democracies and what are its strengths and weaknesses. A large part of the discussion was devoted also to deliberations on the place of liberal democracy in this changing world, as well as whether the model of “non-liberal democracy” does in fact endanger democracy and its fundamental principles.

As it frequently happens in the world of science the panellists differed on many issues and even after the Q&A session they did not agree on all issues. However, it is the greatest value of such conferences that they offer a meeting space for people from different environments, with totally different

experiences (including research), who can see that not everybody shares their views, not everybody follows the same current, which will always remain a value as it makes us think, revisit certain assumptions, and in consequence pushes science forward.

Another place for this revitalising exchange of views and opinions is the book and software exhibition, which offers a natural meeting space for participants in between sessions and an ideal opportunity for getting acquainted with most recent publications. It is also an ideal opportunity for publishers to talk with potential authors about the proposals of books and articles in magazines, and for scholars an opportunity to meet editors of the European Political Science (EPS), published in cooperation with Palgrave Macmillan; the European Political Science Review (EPSR), published in cooperation with Cambridge University Press; the Political Research Exchange (PRX), published in cooperation with Routledge, Taylor i Francis; the Political Data Yearbook (PDY), published in cooperation with Wiley.

During the conference 28 meetings of standing groups were also organized. ECPR standing groups organize major sub-fields or extensive long-term research subjects. They have an extensive membership base and offer a wide range of activities, such as summer schools, awarding of prizes, publication of bulletins and periodicals.

The next ECPR General Conference will be held in Wrocław on 4-7 September 2019. There is a two-stage process for submitting proposals to the Academic Programme. The first stage is the call for sections, which starts on 17 September and will last until 19 November 2018. The second stage, from 5 December 2018 to 18 February 2019, is the call all for full panels and individual papers.

Chairmen of individual sections will evaluate proposals for panels and papers in their sections.