

### **Conference Report: Giovanni Sartori: 90 Years of a Political Scientist**

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On Friday, September 26, 2014, an international conference entitled *Giovanni Sartori: 90 Years of a Political Scientist* was held in Prague on the occasion of the ninetieth birthday of the Italian political scientist. The conference was organized by the Institute of International Studies and the Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, in cooperation with the Embassy of Italy to the Czech Republic. The conference venue was the Italian Cultural Institute, which provided a dignified setting for the entire event. The conference was held under the auspices of the Rector of Charles University, Tomáš Zima, and the Italian Ambassador to the Czech Republic, H. E. Pasquale D'Avino.

The intention of the event in Prague was to present Sartori's important concepts, methods and theoretical approaches and to show their impact on current political science. Authors presented papers that pointed out problems and challenges for Sartori's legacy in the current quantified world of political science. Individual speeches covered Sartori's main contribution to world knowledge, from his methodology, through the theory of party systems and the theory of democracy, to constitutional engineering.

The conference was launched by Martin Mejstřík, the organizer from the Faculty of Social Sciences, who quickly yielded the floor to two honorary speakers – the director of the Italian Cultural Institute, Giovanni Sciola, and the Vice-Rector for Research of Charles University, Jan Konvalinka. In their contributions both stressed importance of this type of event taking place in Prague and emphasized the significance of collaboration

between the academic environment and the world of diplomacy. This was followed by a keynote speech delivered by Gianfranco Pasquino, Professor Emeritus at Bologna University, one of the Sartori's first PhD students and later his longtime collaborator. In his presentation, titled *On the Shoulders of a Giant: Giovanni Sartori, Political Scientist*, Pasquino focused on the Sartori's general contribution to the development of political science. He specifically mentioned the importance of Sartori's theories and approaches for his study of democracy, the analysis of parties and party systems, concept formation, the comparative method and constitutional engineering. He also underlined major innovations introduced by Sartori and focused on the differences to be drawn between Sartori and his contemporaries. Last but not least, Pasquino suggested the importance of Sartorian applied political science for the acquisition of valid, verifiable political knowledge.

Scientists dealing with the basic aspects of Sartorian concepts and their overlap with the present contributed to the morning session. The first speaker was Michal Kubát, who analyzed Sartori's methodological contribution to comparative political science and showed differences between this "traditional" approach in concept formation and the contemporary tendency towards quantification and universal theories. In this context, Kubát pointed out the importance and utility of Sartori's principles for current political science. The second speaker, Marek Bankowicz, analyzed a research focus of Giovanni Sartori that is not commonly known: his critique of Marxism. He showed that Sartori highlighted the difference between the "young" Marx and the "old" Marx at the beginning of his academic career. In this perspective, the "Young" Marx is a highly creative philosopher of human alienation, while the "old" Marx is the creator of a petrified "systematic theory" based on two false assumptions – historical materialism and the

principle of the primacy of the economy. Bankowicz also stressed that, to Sartori, the ideal of communism as a system of universal happiness is a utopian concept that belongs to a pure libertarian society, making Marx an heir of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Bankowicz was followed by Jorge Islas, who presented Sartori's relationship to liberal democracy and the importance of his concept of democracy for contemporary political science. Islas also mentioned Sartori's approach to threats currently faced by liberal democratic regimes as a source of possible inspiration in reinforcing the theoretical background of the concept. The morning session concluded with Oreste Massari's presentation on Sartori and the "Second" Italian Republic. His focus was Sartori's critique of the Italian political and party system and his suggestions for improving the system and eradicating its long-term structural problems. Massari also analyzed the collapse of traditional political parties in Italy in the early 1990s and the succeeding partial transformation from a proportional democracy to a majoritarian model of democracy. It is in this context that Massari discussed Sartori's definitive return to Italy from the United States and explained how Sartori became a frontline cultural protagonist and interlocutor in the debate on institutional and electoral reforms. He also indicated the reasons for the failure of these proposals.

The afternoon panel was dedicated to Sartori's most important academic contribu-

tion – the theory of party systems. First, Klaus von Beyme compared Sartori's approach to behavioral and other theories and outlined his analysis of the connection between parties and electoral systems. Von Beyme also hinted at new developments after Sartori, in an age when "catch-all parties" have declined and "professionalized voter parties" have arisen. Maxmilián Strmiska then continued, offering his assessment of Sartori's party system typology from two points of view, both overly neglected by current party theory. The first emphasizes the need to thoroughly re-examine how the properties of party systems relate to those of political systems; the second focuses on the capacity of party system typologies, taking into account links between "visible" and "invisible" politics. Strmiska argued that Sartorian typology offers valuable insights and suggestions in both respects. Capping off the session and the conference was a presentation by Miroslav Novák and Miloš Brunclík analyzing Maurice Duverger's party system typology in light of Sartori's conceptualization. They pointed out the continuities and differences between these two approaches and showed the extent to which Sartori drew inspiration from Duverger in constructing his concept.

The conference papers will be published in English and Spanish in a volume due for publication in 2015.

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