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SYMPOSIUM

Towards a European political science? Opportunities and pitfalls in the internationalisation of political science in Europe

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Abstract

Political science has not remained on the side of the internationalisation road. While continental European political science was criticised for not being internationalised enough in the beginning of this century, much progress has been done since then. This symposium discusses the state of play of the internationalisation trend(s) in European political science. Building on the data collected within the COST programme PROSEPS, the contributions show that we have made progress toward building a scholarly community across Europe. European political research has, on a number aspects, become a more collective endeavour deployed across Europe. Opportunities for cumulative knowledge-building and intellectual exchange are, partially at least, supported by internationalisation. These opportunities have significantly increased over the last two decades. We are, nevertheless, not there yet. The articles shed light on a number of challenges and pitfalls on the path towards a truly Europe-wide political science.

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Towards a European political science?

The idea that science is an intellectual enterprise taking place across borders is as old as science itself. Universities, the most recognizable scientific institutions of our societies, have been thought of as places of international exchange since their very establishment in the Middle Ages (de Ridder-Symoens 1991). International flows of students and scholars have significantly increased during the second half of the twentieth century, and even more so over the last 20 years, as an outcome of the global trend towards the greater permeability of national borders that goes under the (disputed) label of "globalisation" (Norris 2020). This is particularly true in Europe, where the European Union has decisively expanded the opportunities for cross-border academic cooperation. The Erasmus programme established in 1987, the Bologna Declaration of 1999, and the expansion of the EU's research funding programmes, have been three of the most relevant milestones of this path towards increased internationalisation (Briggs 2016; Klingemann 2008; König 2019; Norris 2020). The Erasmus programme has proved pivotal in promoting student cross-country mobility (and later on also faculty mobility) and is unanimously considered one of the most successful European Union programmes in the area of European cooperation in education (Teichler 2009). The Bologna Declaration posed the foundations for the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, an area of uniform schemes of education paths that would allow an easier circulation of students across participating countries (Rezaev 2010). The EU's research funding programmes have increasingly emphasised the need for collaboration across the entire EU. While inequalities persist, they have significantly contributed to the increasing integration of scholars based in Central and Eastern European Europe into the "(Western?) European" research community.

Political science (and the social sciences in general) has not remained as a bystander in this process. At the global level, mobility has greatly increased (Norris 2020). Even if this mobility comes at a cost, Norris's recent study indicates that the appetite for international exchanges has remained intact. Additional evidence of a growing convergence across the global profession is related to working conditions and academic aspirations (Norris 2020). Continental European political science was criticised for not being internationalised enough at the beginning of this century, although much progress has occurred since then (Hay 2010; Schneider 2007, 2014). Indeed, beyond the issues related to productivity or competitivity, the peculiar objective of political research implies, more often than not, an effort to transcend the national borders, in order to avoid the perils of ethnocentrism in general and western-centrism in particular. Thus, Smelser (2003) describes internationalisation as an antidote for ethnocentrism in social science research. The circulation of ideas, methods and data, as well as research findings, steers scholars toward putting their own experience in perspective and placing their findings in the context of global scholarship (Norris 2020). While members of a given society have an unique advantage to understand contextual nuances, "those who have been thus socialized are blind to the understanding of their own, because so much of it is unconscious, taken-for-granted or not-to-be-discussed"

argues Smelser (2003, p. 655). That is to say, exposure to different cultural, social and political contexts is needed to have a deeper understanding of one's own context in the first place while as, Norris (2020, p. 154) rightly reminds us, "many scholars still choose to focus on somewhere, not 'everywhere' with concerns that are rooted in what happens within their local community and nation-state".

This symposium discusses the state of play of the trend(s) in internationalisation in European political science. The contributions build on the discussion and data gathering that have taken place within the COST programme PROSEPS (PROfessionalization and Social impact of European Political Science).[1] This programme was carried out between 2016 and 2020 and involved a broad network of scholars from 40 European countries and served as a vehicle for the development of an in-depth, unique assessment of the state of European political science. The main goal of the programme was to map the social impact of political science in the European countries, and to design possible strategies to make its scientific findings more socially relevant. International mobility and the internationalisation of research production and diffusion was one of the core issues of the project, both as an indicator and a possible strategy for improving the professionalisation of political science in the European context. Moreover, internationalisation was conceived not only in its supranational aspect, but also for the consequences induced at the national level, gauging whether, and how, a national community of political scientists is professionalised according to international standards.

For such reasons, one of the COST project Working Groups devoted specific attention to the internationalisation of political science. Data were gathered both at the individual level, from a large-scale survey of members of the European political science community, and at the systemic level, through the input of country experts from the different national systems.

Before proceeding to a description of the content of the symposium, we believe a short discussion of the crucial concept of internationalisation is in order.

What is internationalisation?

In the field of higher education studies, the concept of internationalisation has undergone numerous shifts through time. Limiting this short overview to the last decades, we can identify several overarching directions and rationales in the first place, from which a number of different actions can be derived.

After the Second World War, the internationalisation of the social sciences, including political science, was part of a wider effort on the part of the winning powers to expand their political and cultural influence to countries that lost the war and, later on, to former colonies that gained independence (Boncourt 2020; Daalder 2010; de Wit 1999; Eisfeld and Pal 2010; Ghica 2020; McKay 1988). UNESCO supported the launch of new international associations in the social sciences, among which was the International Political Science Association in 1949 (Heilbron et al.

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2008, 2017). The Ford Foundation supported the creation of the European Consortium for Political Research in 1970, mandating that only universities located in democratic systems could become institutional members (Daalder 2010; Boncourt 2020). Indeed, political science—especially the subfields of International Relation and Comparative Politics—was particularly relevant to this effort in providing background and applied knowledge useful for the establishment (or re-establishment) of effective democratic political institutions (Heilbron et al. 2008; Morlino 2000). In both camps, this was mostly presented by policymakers as an initiative for peace and mutual understanding, while in the subject countries the opinions about this policy (and the discipline of political science) were mixed: sometimes it was considered as a form of neo-colonialism, sometimes as an opportunity for political and economic development (Berndtson 2012; de Wit 1999; Morlino 2000). What was clear, instead, was the vertical direction of internationalisation, the unquestionable distinction between the central and peripheral countries in this relationship and the Western European features of "European political science" (Boncourt 2020; Ghica 2020). Within the European Union, especially since the establishment of the Erasmus programme in the 1980s and the development of the EU's research funding programmes since the 1990s, an effort has been made to promote horizontal internationalisation, where member states cooperate as more equal partners even if inequalities persist (Eisfeld and Pal 2010; Ghica 2021; Teichler 2009; Norris 2020).

The rationales of such policies were also different. While the vertical process of internationalisation implies a political logic (i.e. keeping or expanding the political influence of a country), the horizontal concept is often based on an economic argument (Smelser 2003). Two non-mutually exclusive variants of the economic rationale can be identified (Kreber 2009; Knight 1997). On the one hand, international curricula are perceived to meet the demands of an ever-integrated labour market; on the other hand, internationalisation refers to the effort made by academic institutions to attract foreign students and thus increase their income, especially in times of dwindling public resources. While the literature is often focused on the teaching dimension of the academic world, it is easy to apply the same rationales to the realm of research. The political logic is pursued, for example, by enhancing the possibilities for the leading country's scholars to deepen their knowledge of peripheral countries' institutions and political cultures. The economic logic is reflected, for instance, in an effort to build cross-national research networks and comparative data gathering infrastructures and, more recently, by frequent requirements to build international consortia in order to apply for European grants.

The economic rationale, it has been noted, poses significant risks of establishing a sort of neo-colonial hierarchical geography, behind formal horizontal cooperation between equal countries. Murphy (2007, 178; see also Norris 2020 for global political science), identifies three potential risks for countries internationalising their higher education systems: the adoption of foreign models, possibly inadequate to meet the demands of domestic institutions and society; the loss of human and intellectual capital caused by outgoing students and researchers; and finally, as a consequence of the first two processes, the weakening of the domestic university system, that becomes "a conveyor of strategies and ideas alien to the national context" and that sees its own higher education programmes hindered by the expatriation of

significant numbers of students and scholars. While Murphy bases these considerations on a Mexican case study in relation to the USA, similar risks are present within the European Union between countries with more and less wealthy economies and more or less institutionalised disciplines of political science. Several articles in this symposium tackle issues related to imbalanced internationalisation and to the imbalances brought by internationalisation *within* the domestic context.

Moving from the policy rationale to the many concrete activities that substantiate the process of internationalisation requires further systematisation. Internationalisation can take place abroad (e.g. opening a branch campus in a different country, or requiring students to spend a study period in a foreign country) or at home (e.g. inviting visiting scholars from abroad, or introducing curricula taught in a foreign language). Furthermore, it can involve decisions and activities taking place at the individual, institutional, national or supranational level. What is certain is that internationalisation cannot be limited to the practice of physical border-crossing (Knight 2004; Heilbron et al. 2017; Norris 2020). Thus, in this symposium, we embrace a broad definition of internationalisation encompassing a number of activities and forms of cooperation, such as publishing with international co-authors, being involved in the management of international journals or publishing houses, competing for grants from supranational organisations, or being involved in teaching programmes in a language that is different from the majority language of one's own country. What all these practices share is that they drive the scholarly activity towards reaching an audience and connecting with colleagues or students that extend beyond the national community.

Opportunities and pitfalls in the internationalisation of political science in Europe

The articles making up this symposium tackle different aspects of the internationalisation of political science, with different methodological approaches and data sources. The main focus is placed on Europe, although in a few instances other Western countries are usefully included in the picture as points of reference. Each article provides a contrasting answer to the driving question of the symposium: How far are we from a European political science? The articles show that we have made progress toward building a scholarly community across Europe. European political research has, on a number aspects, become a more collective endeavour deployed across Europe. Opportunities for cumulative knowledge-building and intellectual exchange are, partially at least, supported by internationalisation. These opportunities have significantly increased over the last two decades. We are, nevertheless, not there yet. The articles shed light on a number of challenges and pitfalls on the path towards a truly Europe-wide political science. Internationalisation is still very much dependant on the incentives and resources provided by scholars' institutions. These incentives and resources vary across institutions, both within individual academic systems and also across academic systems. As a result, we still face a situation of multi-speed internationalisation with a differential in opportunities for internationalisation that remains concerning. While

there is probably no easy fix to this differential in opportunities, it is a discussion that needs to be continued. This symposium provides a further basis for continuing the discussion about how to achieve a truly European political science in the future.

In the first article, Filippo Tronconi and Isabelle Engeli provide an overview of the different meanings of internationalisation and the different types of international scholars. Contrary to several existing studies, the meanings of internationalisation are built inductively, based on the experiences of political scientists as reported in the PROSEPS survey. This brings them to identify three ideal–typical international political scientists that the authors label as the "networked researcher", the "editorial manager", and the "traveller". The article then proceeds to identify the main factors affecting the propensity of individual scholars to engage in international activities. The organisational and financial support they receive from their own institutions appears as a particularly relevant explanation in this case. This article reminds us that strong imbalances still exist between universities located in different European countries but also, on an optimistic note, that good policies can be implemented to reduce such imbalances.

The next two articles adopt a "small N" comparative approach, focusing on the systemic characters and determinants of internationalisation. One interesting point here is that while different patterns of internationalisation across geographical areas have been sometimes explored, it is normally assumed that countries in the same region follow similar trajectories. The contribution by Dobrinka Kostova, Marc Smyrl, Vladimíra Dvořáková and Tero Erkkilä tackles the limitations of such an assumption in comparing the policies of internationalisation carried out in four countries (two from Western Europe and two from Eastern Europe). They begin by asking whether specific historical factors such as enduring legacies of different political systems and the different timing of EU membership, result in persisting differences in the degrees of international exposure between and within geographical areas. Their ultimate conclusion is that factors such as these are best understood through their impact on a much more general pair of variables, resource availability and career incentives, and that focussing on these more abstract elements allows observations to be generalized and tested beyond the peculiarities of recent European history—and indeed beyond the geographical bounds of Europe. Drawing on the PROSEPS survey, the article by Damir Kapidžić, Diana Janušauskienė and Peter Csanyi investigates the contrasting patterns in internationalisation across Central and Eastern Europe. They show that historical legacies continue to slow down internationalisation and that this effect is only partially mitigated by an increase in research funding and opportunities for mobility.

In their in-depth investigation of the French case, Thibaud Boncourt, Jean-Vincent Holeindre, Jean Joana and Nonna Mayer zoom into the tensions that internationalisation creates within a single country. A globally dominant country like France reveals itself to be internally segmented between institutions and individual scholars with remarkably different levels of access to international resources. Qualitative and quantitative data are employed, from journal citation analysis to patterns of recruitment of university departments, from the scientific output of research centres to expert interviews, to reach the conclusion that the internationalisation of

political science is best portrayed as a conflictual process and a point of contention, rather than as a smooth process of gradual convergence.

In the last contribution to this symposium, Marcello Carammia analyses an original dataset of publications and citations in some 67,000 articles from 100 of the most reputed political science journals between 2000 and 2019. The article points out the fact that a few countries (the USA and the UK, above all) still dominate publications in the most high-impact academic journals, although there is a clear trend towards increasing geographic diversity and cross-national collaborations, including the involvement of what were once considered as peripheral countries in European political science.

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