A Proposal for Creating a Named Chair in Comparative Politics

13 January 2012

Dear Members of the Research Council,

The Department of Political and Social Sciences proposes renaming the Chair in Comparative Politics in recognition of the late Peter Mair's outstanding contributions to political science. The purpose of renaming the Chair is twofold. On the one hand, it will honour the memory of a truly great scholar, colleague, mentor and teacher, whose work has shaped – and will continue to shape – political science. On the other, it will benefit the Institute by maintaining its association with an individual whose name is a byword for excellence within the discipline.

Peter Mair took up the Chair in Comparative Politics in 2005. From 2007 to 2010, he served as Head of the SPS Department and in 2011 he was appointed as Dean of Studies. Mair's association with the Institute spanned his career and his intellectual history is closely connected to the Chair and its former holders: Daalder, Wildenmann, Budge, Blondel and Bartolini. He arrived at the Institute as a Researcher in 1978, two years after the Chair was founded. He was appointed as an Assistant Professor in 1979 and stayed at the EUI until 1984. With Hans Daalder, he coordinated a major international project on Western European party systems. He was involved on a research project on 'The Future of Party Government' with the late Rudolf Wildenmann and he was a founder-member of the Comparative Manifestos Project, which began at the EUI under the direction of Ian Budge. He worked closely with Stefano Bartolini, producing a monograph that was awarded the Stein Rokkan Prize in Comparative Social Science Research. In 1997, he returned to the EUI as Visiting Fellow at the SPS Department.

The distinctive characteristic of Mair's approach to political science was his focus on 'big' and important questions, a virtue that he valued in the work of others and one that clearly guided his own research. He was “a committed public intellectual and defender of democratic values” and it was this focus on democracy that permeated his contributions to the discipline and the public sphere. He had what Campus and Pasquino identify as a characteristic of a 'master' of political science, someone “whose career... [has] been characterised by efforts to go beyond the narrow confines of single areas of the discipline and grasp the 'big picture'.” It is this, along with his scholarly excellence that makes him...

---

“the leading scholar on the study of political parties and representation”. The more-than 9,000 citations that Mair's publications have attracted are indicative of the influence of his work within the discipline, an influence that will, due to its focus on core questions for political science, continue long into the future.

Mair's groundbreaking contributions concerned, inter alia, party systems, party organisation and party positions. His work on party systems spanned his career, from an early edited volume to a monograph that collected much of his work on this subject. More recently, his focus on party system change addressed developments in the EU polity. On party organisation, Mair's work set the path. His data-gathering project with Richard Katz generated new, systematic, cross-national data on party organizations. On the basis of the data collected, new knowledge on party organizations was generated, producing a breakthrough in the literature on party models and what is now his most widely-cited publication. Recently, he added to this line of research with important contributions on declining levels of party membership and party patronage. On party positions, Mair introduced the expert survey method. His article with Francis G. Castles was subsequently nominated as a ‘Hall of Fame’ article, marking the 25th anniversary of the European Journal of Political Research. This article became a standard reference for party scholars and opened the way for the systematic cross-national study of parties' positions using this method. In 2009, Mair was a leading member of the EU Profiler project (directed by Alexander Trechsel), which developed a new method for estimating party positions, based on parties' self-placement and on expert coding. This provided the basis for an innovative voting advice application for the European Parliament elections of June 2009 and the first Europe-wide tool of its kind. In recent years, he directly addressed major questions concerning contemporary democracy and party

government, including in the EU.16 Mair also authored one of the few rigorous studies on the concept of party family and was a leading scholar on Irish politics.17

His contribution to political science was augmented by his services to the discipline, including his editorship and co-editorship of important journals and book series;18 his role in organising and professionalising the discipline through the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR); in initiating and leading collaborative projects; and in training young political scientists. At the EUI, he was co-director (with Luciano Bardi) of the Observatory for Political Parties and Representation (OPPR), one of the four observatories constituting the EUDO and co-director (with Adrienne Heritier) of the SIEPOL Project at the Robert Schuman Centre, which investigated institutional change at the European and national levels.

Peter Mair gave his time generously to researchers of all types and levels: students, supervisees, postdoctoral fellows and senior scholars. He was aware of the needs of young scholars and the demands placed on them due to changes in the discipline.19 The tribute paid to him by Max Weber Fellows who he mentored at the Institute reflects the nature of the contribution that he made to young scholars at the EUI and beyond: “With his steadfast encouragement, sound advice, and genuine faith in us, he fostered our confidence in the quality and import of our own work and made us feel that we had a valued place in the academy.” 20

In the course of his career, he supervised and co-supervised approximately 30 PhD dissertations to completion and he improved many others. During his time at Manchester and Leiden Peter Mair supervised prize-winning dissertations and mentored some of the foremost names in political science, including Ingrid van Biezen, Cas Mudde, Petr Kopecky and André Krouwel. His supervisees at the EUI have been awarded prestigious prizes, including the 2010 Dutch Political Science Association Best PhD Dissertation Prize (Joost van Spanje) and the EUSA Prize for Best Dissertation (Nikoletta Yordanova). Those who have completed their dissertations at the EUI have gone on, in recent years, to begin their careers in highly-regarded university departments and research institutes in Amsterdam, Leiden, the LSE, the CEU and Mannheim, as well as at European institutions and think tanks.


Researchers supervised by Mair used a wide range of methodologies, reflecting the intellectual openness that characterised his approach. Their dissertations covered diverse subjects, including:

- the relationship between populism and democracy in Poland;
- the effects of ostracism on the electoral support of anti-immigration and communist parties;
- executive accountability in Italy, Argentina and Romania;
- European-level political parties;
- party members' attitudes to immigration in Italy and Spain;
- the effect of anti-immigrant parties on mainstream parties' positions;
- party competition on European integration in Central Europe;
- party system institutionalisation in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia;
- the accountability of independent agencies;
- the relationship between political parties, social movements and representation in the Netherlands and Italy;
- the effects of parties and institutional constraints on social policy;
- the legislative organisation of the European Parliament;
- and the relationship between political parties and participatory forms of resource management.

Mair was also an award-winning teacher. Through the ECPR Summer School on Political Parties and Democracy, which he hosted at the EUI for three years, he taught and influenced many talented young scholars from Europe and beyond. His work also reached into lecture halls and classrooms all over the world through his textbook co-authored with Michael Gallagher and Michael Laver, which is now in its fifth edition.21

The Department's proposal that the Chair in Comparative Politics is not made lightly. It sets an unambiguously high standard for future holders of the Chair and for the Department itself. Peter Mair's outstanding contributions to political science and his exceptionally long and deep connection with, and commitment to, the EUI merits this rare form of recognition. As former fellow at the EUI, Dr. Paul Gillespie wrote in The Irish Times, “A way must be found to continue the work that properly reflects Mair’s critical, engaged and friendly spirit.”22 We suggest that renaming the Chair in Comparative Politics is a way of doing this. We commend the renaming of the Chair to the Research Council.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

László Bruszt
Head of Department