

Josip Peić

In memoriam



Sombor 1985 – Florence 2015

*Josip was one of life's great enthusiasts.
So much heart, so much hunger for learning,
so much zest for life and so utterly unselfconscious about all three.
What a wonderful way to live.*

*Josip je živio sa entuzijazmom.
Toliko srca, toliko gladi za znanjem,
toliko životnog poleta, a toliko lakoće u svemu tome.
Kakav divan način da se živi.*

Josip was born in Sombor, in northern Serbia, on 13 February 1985. He received a BA in Philosophical Studies from the University of Novi Sad in 2010, an MA in Political Science from the University of Belgrade in 2012, and a second MA in Political Science from the Central European University in Budapest, in 2015. In 2013, he worked as a reporter at Spektar Television, Sombor. He was a member of the Libertarian Club Libek. In September 2015, he joined the EUI as a doctoral researcher in the department of Political and Social Science. Three months later, on 24 November, he died in his flat in Florence, suddenly and unexpectedly.

He is survived by his mother Zlata and Sladjana, his partner.

Diego

Josip was interviewed with other non-EU candidates in March 2015, and accepted as a doctoral researcher with no hesitation by the SPS selection committee. His academic credentials were strong, his project interesting and unusual, and, as it amply transpired during the interview, he was highly motivated and capable of reasoning 'on his feet' about his intended project. We were all impressed.

There was one obstacle. He did not have a scholarship for regrettably Serbia does not (yet?) have an agreement with the EUI. So we told him: "You have a place, but see if you can find a public or private institution that can support you." In the end, thanks to the good offices of Pasquale Ferrara, our Secretary General, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs came to the rescue in late April and agreed to award him a scholarship as part of the programme for foreigners. We were very relieved, as it would have been extremely disappointing to lose such a promising candidate. After the news reached him he wrote me a message, which still sits in my Inbox, exuding sheer elation. His most ardent desire was being fulfilled.

On September 1st, 2015, he "reported for duty", and we met two days later, with Krzysztof. Josip took furious notes during the meeting, so much so that I felt the need to point out that once one joins the doctoral program one should consider oneself as a peer. What matters – as I learnt by being educated in the traditional British collegiate system – is the quality of one's arguments, not the position in the hierarchy. He beamed, almost surprised. I think that, as the genuine scholar that he so effortlessly was, he liked to hear that.

He set to work with tremendous energy and enthusiasm, toiling long hours, and sending me drafts of what was to evolve into his prospectus. The drafts were followed by intellectually intense meetings – his passion tempered by his wit and good humour making our meetings fun. He wanted to study 'nudging'. This is a way in which government can correct our cognitive and emotional shortcomings so as to better the quality of our decisions – whether for the sake of improving our welfare or the collective welfare or both, without resort to the more familiar governance means of 'stick and carrot'. A lasting ethical concern of his, with regard to this approach, is expressed in the title of a lecture he gave to undergraduates in 2014, "Nudge: Influencing Decisions, Preserving Autonomy".

When we last met, the week before he died, he had developed a preliminary design for running some experiments to test whether our responses to such seemingly patronising interventions – which he considered with a fair but critical eye – varied depending on the type of decision and on the transparency with which the ‘nudge’ is imparted on the subjects being nudged. His promise, that we all expected, was beginning to materialise, to my delight. But it was not to be.

I have lost a few friends and kindred spirits over the years, people I occasionally daydream to meet again around an otherworldly table to resume our conversations and intellectual companionship. Yet, I never lost one so young, with so much promise ahead of him. In his CV, under the heading “personal qualities”, he wrote: “A victorious mentality and a creative spirit, certain that the most important human task is assuming full responsibility for one’s own life, aims for mastery and competence, always sets goals high and never gives up.” He never gave up. The thin thread that kept him on this earth was to be suddenly and brutally cut. There is a place for Josip at that table.

Adrián

Few scholars have taught me as much as Josip Peić did in such a short period of time. Every word that he used to say, every experience that colleagues have shared after Josip's death, portrays him as a great *breakthrough* in our professional and personal life. From Josip I have learnt invaluable lessons of integrity, loyalty, respect, humility, curiosity, hard work, generosity, concern for others, creativity in our research and of fighting for excellence. We have lost a necessary *outlier* in our lives. Academia and future students in our discipline have lost the opportunity to meet an admirable professor. However, I will do my best to teach and work through the role model of Josip. He is an example to be pursued. My most sincere condolences to Josip's family and girlfriend.

Diana

Josip was one of my closest friends and he was also the first person I met at the EUI.

The first thing that struck me the most about Josip was his kindness. I met Josip for the first time at the Housing Office for the EUI flats. He tried for almost an hour to help me connect to the internet with my laptop. Even though he did not know me, he was very warm and I could feel that we instantly had a connection. As our friendship progressed, I have started to realise that Josip did not have conversations with people but he had *meaningful* conversations. He didn't like small talk but, instead, he liked to 'make love with people's minds'.

Josip had an amazing gift in his ability to express his feelings. He was not afraid that he would break some social norms by being very honest and expressing his feelings. He was so genuine! Josip was not afraid to open his beautiful heart to the closest friends. I could always have sincere conversations with him about feelings, people's behaviours and social norms. Yes, discussions about the social norms were our favourite! I can still remember that Josip asked me "How would the world be without social norms?" and I answered that it would be "fantastic, as we should not worry what other people think of us." That conversation brought a very long series of debates, which were incredibly intellectually stimulating.

Josip was in love with his work and with science in general. He was like a 'sponge' – always trying to absorb knowledge around him. I think he was the most grateful person among EUI researchers for being in an environment where you have the opportunity to grow intellectually. I can remember that I asked him about his plans on Friday night and he replied to me very enthusiastically: "You know, Diana, I found a great article for my research! I cannot wait to read it!" He was incredibly passionate about his research and you could feel the pleasure he got from doing research. Not only was he extremely passionate about his own research and happy to share his thoughts, but he was also interested in other people's work. He would always be the person to ask me about my academic progress. I know that he did not ask me because he was polite but because he cared.

I will always remember his enthusiasm, positive energy and warm smiles!

Even if Josip's death is a moment full of sorrow, I cannot help but smile. I feel incredibly privileged and blessed that I had the chance to meet him.

Farida

I will always remember Josip's smile. His energy, his strength... and his smile. We first met the day of the interview at the EUI, he was giving me so much courage already. He was so happy about the discussion he had with the jury. We were both hoping we would be accepted into the Institute. And we were. The day of the registration, we immediately recognised each other. The last words he shared with me were about the terrorist attacks in Paris. He showed compassion, empathy. Josip was a beautiful person. Strong, clever, committed, never indifferent. It was an honour and a pleasure to meet him

Feike

Josip was the kind of person you immediately notice. His presence was of a great intensity, as if he wanted to experience everything to the fullest; his appearance radiated confidence, enthusiasm, and eagerness. He was particularly eager for academic knowledge. There were few times that he was not working on his project – because there was always more to read and more to learn. When you would see him during lunch, it seemed that

even eating was to him a mere distraction from his purpose. I admired his dedication and his passion for research more than anything.

Josip also seems to have belonged here. Only after his death did I learn about the struggles he had gone through in order to be able to come to the EUI – as well as about the fights the SPS Department put up in order to make that happen. All the professors were convinced that Josip deserved a place in this department and were willing to go to great lengths to get him here. It shows what an incredibly promising scholar he was, and how lucky we have been to meet such a beautiful mind.

Josip seemed so very happy here. His happiness was an inspiration to me, and hopefully to many of us. An inspiration to follow our dreams, to do what we love, to stay true to ourselves and to be persistent. To be grateful for the chances we get and to never take things for granted. And to always remember Josip.

Gerrit

There have been very few people whom I've ever met who have been as passionate and happy about the life they lived as Josip. Although I didn't have the privilege of knowing Josip very closely, the weekly sessions we used to hold together to work on our assignments gave me a little glimpse into the person he was. Coming to the EUI, being part of this community and (in his own words) "becoming a competent academic" was his ultimate dream, a dream that he was so extremely happy about seeing fulfilled. Josip embodied ambition, passion and, most of all, sincere and humble gratitude for the chance that was given to him.

It was, however, not until I encountered Josip in Fiasco with a guitar and a beer – it was the weekend before he passed so suddenly – that I realised how sincere his ethos was. Josip had no stress; there was nothing or nobody forcing him to work as hard as he did. During the scarce moments in which he was not working on his research or his coursework, one could really see what a strong person he was. Josip was entirely confident about his way of life. Whether it was the music he played on his guitar or the passion with which he communicated with others, it could not be misunderstood – here was a man who had no doubt about how he wished to live.

I am terribly shocked and saddened by his unexpected and horribly premature passing away. Josip will be missed and remembered – he leaves behind a group of friends who will always be inspired by his ambition, his humbleness, his gratitude and his love for everything and everyone that surrounded him.

Giuliana

I remember a day at the beginning of October, when I met Josip on the 1A bus from the station to our flats' bus stop. I was going home after a little trip. He had just been to see the dentist and fixed a broken tooth. It was about 13:00.

As our eyes crossed I saw a big smile and we started talking. Immediately a crowd of teenagers invaded the whole bus and our space, screaming and pushing as only teens can do. As I was looking for some more room to have a quiet chat away from the crowd, I realised that he wasn't. His words were already flooding out and it seemed as though the crowd wasn't a problem for him. He talked as passionately as ever, as if nothing was going on around us!

During that bus trip I learnt a lot about his life: before and after the EUI, his sweetheart, the distance relationship, Serbia, Italy, his progress with speaking Italian, his girlfriend's Italian, the plans to see her and some ideas about the future... I realised there was a whole life behind his research ideas. A nice person behind what I thought to be a working machine! And definitely, lots of love for his girlfriend and his work.

The rush-hour bus ride took an exceptionally long time, about 50 minutes, that day. I'm glad it allowed us to talk for that long.

Joe

The biggest compliment I can pay Josip is that everything I have heard about him after his passing has only made me wish that I had known him better when he was still with us. Though we only spoke meaningfully together a handful of times, sharing lunch with Josip and watching him at work in the library conveyed all the finest qualities that his closest friends speak so warmly of. He combined true commitment and a clear

focus with an insatiable intellectual appetite that encompassed both his own work and our projects whenever we spoke with him. We have lost an outstanding colleague and the wider world has been deprived of a scholar with great promise. But as the shock and sadness of their loss subsides in time, I hope Josip's beloved friends and family look back and glow with pride at the man he was and the way he lived his life.

Johanna

Josip and I shared the same PhD supervisor. I wanted to share a few words about my encounters with Josip to give you a better idea of his life here in Florence. I experienced Josip as a self-confident and dedicated young man, who was intensely curious about the world. Josip talked to me with great enthusiasm about his research project, and he was eager to learn from my experiences as a more advanced student at the EUI. He was beaming when he spoke about his ideas and future plans and he was determined to succeed. I am sure that his enthusiasm, dedication and intellect would have made him a brilliant social scientist and it is a great loss to us all that he was taken from us at such a young age.

Julia

After weeks of hard work for his prospectus, Josip came to Bar Fiasco on a Friday night. We were amazed to see him there and kept on making little jokes that he finally also thought Friday night was a fair reason to take a break from studying. Later on during this evening, I had a long and inspiring conversation with Josip. He told me that on that day he had woken up in the morning and realised that there are two important things in his life: first, academic excellence – “Of course, academic excellence”, he was saying. But the second most important thing in his life, he continued, are the relationships that make his life special. The relationships at the EUI with his fellow researchers, the relationships with his closest friends, the relationships with his beloved ones. “Aren't we extremely privileged to study for ten hours in the library and then just come here to enjoy ourselves in Bar Fiasco with our friends?”, he asked, presenting this idea fully convinced and proud of just having gained this evidence. Of course, I agreed that we are extremely privileged. But at the same time, I understood something more important: what made Josip so

truly special was the way he came to this conclusion, the way he was reflecting on things that appear so natural to most of us, the way he was appreciating these little things in his life, the way he could share all his great thoughts with others. What made Josip so truly special was the way he was creating true and deep friendships without anything superficial in them. This is what fascinated me about Josip, this is what I will miss most without Josip, and this is how I will always remember Josip.

Krzysztof

I guess some of Josip's most happy moments at the EUI were the meetings with his supervisor, Diego Gambetta. I remember a few occasions when I talked with Josip right after his meetings with Diego. The first time, we were in Diego's office together. These were our first days at the EUI and Diego welcomed us, giving us some practical advice whilst explaining his expectations from us as his new supervisees. Josip was taking notes on this over the one hour meeting. Once it ended, Josip offered me a coffee and suggested we go through his notes together. He enjoyed this meeting so much that he wanted to live through it again, virtually repeating aloud everything that was said in his notes. I cannot express in words his enthusiasm and joy when he read through the notes.

The further Josip went with his academic work, the more rewarding his meetings with Diego became, and the bigger was his enthusiasm for being at the EUI. It was remarkable to see such passion. I can still see Josip's smile when he was pointing at his notes and saying, "It's great what Diego says, that's exactly what I was thinking!". It is for his joy that I'm so sorry that he is not going to finish his PhD. He was probably the most satisfied person with the programme among the first-year researchers I know at the EUI. He never complained that the workload was too heavy or that the quality of seminars was not fully satisfying, as all of us tend to do. He was living in the best moment of his life, and it pains that this moment lasted so short a time.

At the same time, I think that Josip's joy from doing the PhD came principally from the possibility to learn and discover new things. My impression is that he thought of a PhD programme as a time to learn, not as an occasion to get a degree or write publishable papers. For him, doing science was a lifelong enterprise and in that sense he accomplished it.

Oscar

Josip Peić was truly one in a lifetime kind of man. Someone who could inspire and elevate your own spirits, but frighten you with the determination and veracity of his intelligence. A beautiful mind. He soaked up everything he studied and built his own moral philosophy, augmenting it with a superb understanding of the restrictions of human cognition and social reality. Not that I agreed with everything he said, but we never stopped discussing until we found a conclusion or an unbridgeable gap of inter-subjective truth. Even then, we recognized and accepted it, we respected each other, understood that differences, even in the fundamental decisions of what to accept and fight against, were personal choices. Things that cannot be reasoned out together, but must be learned and taught through experience. Josip, in his three months with me, gave me so many experiences, so many ideas. I am eternally grateful for his thoughts, and the pieces of wisdom he left with me. The glimpse of a mind which I would say found a balance. He would vehemently disagree, he would say “You must suffer for your productive achievements” – and I can see the (almost violent) determination that would grab hold of his face, the clenched fist and his frown. The ever confident, open and challenging squared shoulders. He would look me straight in the eyes and convey his absolute determination to suffer for what he wanted to achieve, for his belief in the justification of that suffering and, once achieved, that his suffering would be nothing compared to his feeling of elation, of his pride in his achievements and the fulfilment of his prime goals, the creation of knowledge and academic excellence.

I miss him every day because I want to share my experiences with him every day, and only now do I realize how much he stimulated my intellect. But to focus only on his intelligence is neglecting the passion, the empathy and the care he showed. When Josip was emotionally involved, the force of his passion would be immense. It didn't matter if we spoke about nationalism, methodological individualism, beauty or a rock song, he expressed his passions. He became fully animated – the excitement came through in his voice, his tone, his body language. If ever I told him over dinner that something was not okay, he would deliberate with me, he would care and throw himself at resolving the issue. He often said, you cannot change how you react emotionally, but you can change your mind set, you can change your values which dictate what you react emotionally to. It was this re-framing that helped me many times, but it

was not simple re-framing. It was a reinvention preceded by a well-reasoned examination of principles and priorities. Through these conversations I saw his versatile mind, the resilience he had built up, which he shared with me freely. His friendship had great impact on me and it is invaluable, however, he only made it into my diary twice. This is because I write to process, to bring closure or develop thoughts. With Josip, there was nothing to write about, we had already decided and we felt satisfied with our conclusions. Each conversation was a self-contained expression of ideas and our ability to interact this way created our friendship.

Paula

He was the first person that made me feel safe when I arrived at EUI. I felt surprised and a little bit disoriented among all those new people, so different from me. I felt afraid I would feel disconnected and I wouldn't make any true friendships. I had learnt before that meaningful connections are the tissue that holds you together when you are abroad, reaching your dreams. So there I was, feeling awkward because I am clumsy with chitchat. Fearing that maybe my clumsiness makes me boring. And I met Josip. Since the day we met, I felt his whole attention directed towards me when we spoke. He always smiled sincerely and asked me how I was doing. He didn't do chitchat and he didn't judge me for being bad at it. Many times I found myself thinking, "As long as he is around, I am safe. There will be someone to talk to, there will be someone who cares."

The last conversation I had with Josip happened a few weeks ago, I didn't see it coming. I don't remember telling him that I was sad. That I had a difficult personal situation going on. Maybe someone else told him. Maybe I did. I am usually reserved, but Josip inspired my confidence. So one day during lunch he sat next to me and asked, "How are you, Paula?", facing me completely. I said, "I am ok Josip, thanks." And he said: "I know these past days have been emotionally very difficult for you. But that's the thing with emotions, you have to deal with them Paula." I was surprised, and he continued, "When you are a focused, driven person and emotions come, you just want them to go, so you can keep working. But sometimes they are so strong they don't go. And then you have to deal with them. Live them. Only then you will be able to continue. And you can

do it, Paula, you are strong.” He continued a little bit longer. Explaining to me about emotions. It reminded me of Elster’s emotions as fire, and we talked about it. At the end, I felt grateful for the kind words and the sweet attention I had received from this beautiful and strange person that I liked so much. Now I wish I had listened more carefully, so I could remember exactly every word of that conversation. Josip’s words came back to me in the last few days.

I used to tell Josip that he was the true researcher, the platonic idea of the ‘researcher’. And also the person most happy of doing science and research that I have ever met. During the first weeks we were going to Italian class in Villa Schifanoia and there was a fire that seemed close to the EUI flats. No one thought it was serious, but everyone was wondering if we should be worried. And Josip came along to see and turned and said, “My research!”, and then he touched his pocket and said, “Ah! I have it in my pen drive.” He smiled and we started walking to class while I laughed and said to him, “That is the attitude of the true researcher when his home is catching fire.”

Sam

Dear Josip, I have not known you long or particularly well. Yet, there are numerous moments that I have shared with you over these first couple of months at the EUI.

When you first saw me, you said that I look like Billy Corgan, the lead singer and guitarist of the Smashing Pumpkins. I was not sure what to make of it, since I could not remember what he looked like and I would not consider myself a fan of the band. So, we googled for a picture – and I was disappointed. I did not like to be compared to this bald and, as it seemed to me, somewhat scary looking guy, though I am bald and perhaps also somewhat scary myself (who knows?). But Josip, you meant it as a compliment – you really liked him. And this was your way of saying you liked me.

However, as I was openly disagreeing with the comparison, you feared you had insulted me. Over the next couple of days, you repeatedly approached me to apologise. I insisted that it was no problem – and that I cherished the thought of you, Josip, wanting to compliment me. That was all that mattered, and with time, you accepted the fact that it was just

fine. The verve with which you tried to make sure that I was not insulted impressed me. We barely knew each other, yet you cared so much to get the right message across as if I had been a close friend of yours for a long time. It is this verve you have put into everything: your work, your relationships, and your dreams - that has deeply touched me. Thanks for sharing it with me.

In deep sadness,

Sam

PS: Later, I realised how much you must have liked the Smashing Pumpkins. At Fiasco, you were playing the guitar, and I had the pleasure of being there and listening. Remembering the event described above, I told you I would like you to play a song by the Smashing Pumpkins. And within a second, you began to play – again, with the verve you have put into everything.

Tore

The week before he died, I joined Josip, Svetlana and Oscar for lunch. They were already eating and in the middle of a discussion. While putting my plate on the table I was asking what they were talking about and Josip promptly answered, “Death.” For a second I thought about finding another table with a more positive subject to discuss over lunch, but finally I sat down. Josip elaborated, “We are asking ourselves the question that if we knew that we had only four years left to live, what would we do? Would we still do the PhD or would we stop and do something else?” I said, “Okay”, and added that many would probably choose to stay with family and friends in such a situation, before asking Josip what he would choose himself. Shoulders back he answered, “I would without hesitation do the PhD”, and continued, “If I had only four years left to live, the most important thing I could do would be such an academic achievement.” People around the table nodded in respect. These days I am sad that he did not get the chance to finish that great achievement that I know he worked so hard on. But on the other hand, I know that he was in exactly the place he wanted to be.



Katy

I have this lovely picture above of Josip (L), with Oscar and Diana, taken on our very first weekend in Florence in September 2015. It was a baking hot Sunday afternoon and we are sitting in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Piazza della Signoria. Whilst waiting for the showing of a film about Renaissance art, we were admiring the ludicrous beauty of our setting, the discovery that public water fountains in Florence dispense sparkling water and pondering the very fact of being in Florence, embarking on the next chapter of our lives.

The film was about Renaissance art and conceptions of beauty and I talked about the film intensely with Josip as we crossed the Arno to Piazza Santo Spirito to find something to eat. Josip was really struck by the fact that the film characterised beauty (a word he pronounced magnificently, like no one else I have ever met) as not only something that you see but also something that you experience. As so often with Josip, his enthusiasm for this idea was infectious and I think about this conversation often, when I turn a corner in the city centre and catch sight of something beautiful: it's something that I see but also something that I feel, vividly.

Josip was one of life's great enthusiasts. So much heart, so much hunger for learning, so much zest for life and so utterly unselfconscious about all three. What a wonderful way to live.