

In memoriam: Jean Blondel

“The world is so complicated that it is hardly ever possible to pin down large-scale developments to specific actions or individuals. Jean Blondel is an exception to this rule. Among everyone else in his generation, Jean Blondel was the political scientist without whom European political science would have looked much different than it does today. In what by the 1960s already felt to be a discipline divided by an ocean, Jean Blondel combined the best of both worlds. A pioneer of continental Europe's variable - as opposed to a case-oriented approach to comparative politics, Jean Blondel brought to the continent his appreciation for the precision and the empirical scrutiny of the American behavioural tradition.

These exact qualities Jean Blondel also brought with him when he joined the European University Institute. As member of the Political and Social Sciences Department, Jean Blondel left his long-term imprint both in the methodological and in the substantive profile of the department. It is with Jean Blondel that the department built its tradition in comparative institutionalism, with a focus on parties, party systems and political representation. An author of several working papers and articles on the development of ministerial careers; the decision-making process in coalition governments; and the relationship between parties and governments, Jean Blondel developed a research agenda while at the EUI that shaped the so-called "new-institutionalist" turn in comparative politics. With his teaching, mentoring and supervision, Jean Blondel promoted work of high conceptual clarity and analytical rigor. With Jean Blondel, the EUI gradually became a locus that brings together all major contributors in the study of comparative party politics, hosting historical workshops with the participation of distinguished scholars, such as Ian Budge and Peter Mair, among others. In short, thanks to Jean Blondel, the EUI Political and Social Sciences Department not only acquired a unique and persistent identity, but also entered into a very privileged nexus of departments that ended up transforming political science in the continent.

His legacy remains vivid and constitutes our most valuable guide and source of inspiration, as we try to build on his steps.”

- ***Professor Elias Dinas, Head of the EUI Department of Political and Social Sciences***

“Jean Blondel was an institutional builder as shown by his contribution to his British university, as well as the creation of the ECPR. I am convinced that his true passion for building a strong sense of community spirit and academic citizenship was strongly influenced by his own character, but also by his experience of the French university system where the formal institutions are often void of the living lymph, which makes such a difference.

He tried his best to emulate his past British experience in the EUI Department of Political and Social Sciences, but had to recognise that it was much more difficult given the high turnover, which is constitutive of the EUI structure.

This is why he believed strongly in the opportunity that the Robert Schuman Centre could offer. From the very beginning, he supported the new tiny centre put in place by the EUI High Council and the Academic Council. At the end of his contract, he joined *pro bono* the Centre since he had decided to stay together with Tess, his wife, in Florence. His contribution to the Centre was

multifaceted and intense. He took managerial responsibility for the project aiming at supporting the new Parliament of Georgia, participated in the many teaching and research activities of the Centre. He also brought to the place his sense of humour, his friendship to every member of the staff and his positive spirit in every matter be it important or secondary.”

- ***Professor Yves Mény, former President of the EUI and Director of the Robert Schuman Centre***

“Jean entered into contact with the EUI quite soon after the foundation. He began to regularly frequent the Institute as teacher in the Summer School in Comparative Politics that Hans Daalder had launched in 1979, and later in the “Party Government” project directed by Rudolf Wildenmann. In the mid-1980s he took the chair of Comparative Politics held first by Hans Daalder and then by Rudolf Wildenmann. If I remember right, he served in the Political and Social Sciences Department from 1985 to 1994 taking up also the role of head of department, which at that time rotated yearly. I succeeded him as the chair in 1994. But my more intense and profitable relation with him occurred somehow by accident when a few years later, in 2006, as Director of the Robert Schuman Centre, I discovered that Jean was an emeritus there since the early time of the Yves Mény directorship. Jean Blondel, who was living in Florence in those times, was regularly frequenting the Centre, pursuing his continuous launching of new research initiatives, and working as an advisor to my predecessors Yves and Helen. Having known me as a young student and assistant (I was the organizing secretary of the Summer School together with Peter Mair), he addressed me since then with a somehow affectionate paternal attitude that I accepted without inconvenience. I remember him always knocking to my door whenever he was at the Centre, always calling me, curiously, *grande capo* and sitting there for a while listening to my complaints about the state of the world. This usually ended up in some good advice in his unpretentious and charming attitude, which tended to always see the positive side in any situation and in any person. But he was of concrete help too to me in the context of several initiatives of the Centre. I remember an episode that shows his selfless intellectual generosity. I was trying to get financial support from Japanese banks for a Japan-EU Studies Chair. I had to set up a decent intellectual program for it, what I found difficult given my limited competences. I once complained with him about the lack of support from the colleagues for this initiative. He replied, “Let me think it over”. The following day, truly within 24 hours, I found on my desk a five-page research program to which I only had to add a cap about the EUI and an appendix with the financial implications. Others will tell about Jean’s merits as a scholar and institution builder. I remember him as one of the nicest, most cheerful, cooperative, and patient persons I have encountered in academia.”

- ***Stefano Bartolini, Emeritus Professor at the EUI Department of Political and Social Sciences***