

ECPR STANDING GROUP ON SOUTHERN EUROPEAN POLITICS

ACTIVITIES
SEPTEMBER 2013-SEPTEMBER 2016

OUTGOING CONVENOR'S REPORT

This report covers the activities of the Standing Group on Southern European Politics (SG on SEP) during the period from the last SG Convenor election at the General Conference in Bordeaux in September 2013 until the formal handover to the new Steering Committee at the General Conference in September 2016.

1. ORGANISATION OF ACADEMIC EVENTS

Academic events have remained the ‘core business’ of the SG and have included both ECPR and non-ECPR events. In addition to our annual General Conference Section, we have participated in other ECPR events and organised one extra-ECPR event every year.

Sections at ECPR General Conferences

After Bordeaux in 2013, the ECPR General Conference (GC) changed from a biannual to an annual event. Concerns that our SG might not be able to maintain the momentum with an annual event were triumphantly disproved. The following Sections were organised:

- *‘Reshaping State and Society in Southern Europe’* (8 panels)
8th General Conference, University of Glasgow, 3-6 September 2014
Convenor: Susannah Verney, Co-convenors: Maria Kousis, Senem Aydin Düzgü
- *‘Challenges to Democracy in Southern Europe’* (6 panels)
9th General Conference, University of Montreal, 26-29 August 2015
Convenor: Myrto Tsakatika, Co-convenors: Evren Celik Wiltshie, Susannah Verney
- *Reconfiguring Southern Europe* (10 panels)
Charles University, Prague, 7-10 September 2016
Convenor: Georgios Karyotis, Co-convenor: Susannah Verney

Other ECPR events

- *‘Political Systems in Central and Eastern Europe and Southern Europe’*
Workshop at Joint Sessions, University of Warsaw, 29 March-2 April 2015
Convenors: Adam Szymański, Özgün Erler Bayır
- *‘Re-viewing the work of Richard S. Katz: Party-democracy and depoliticisation in Southern Europe from the perspective of “labour”’*
Research Sessions, Radboud University Nijmegen, 28 June- 1 July 2016
Convenors: Antonina Gentile, Noelle Burgi

Extra-ECPR Events

- *‘Active Citizenship in Southern Europe’* (2 panels)
Political Studies Association Conference, Manchester, 14-16 April 2014
Convenors: Cristiano Bee, Stavroula Chrona

- *'Responses to the Eurozone Crisis in Southern Europe'* (2 panels)
UACES 45th annual conference, Deusto University, Bilbao, 7-9 September
- *'Southern Europe and the European Union: A Relationship under Stress'* (2 panels)
UACES 46th annual conference, Queen Mary University London, 5-7 September 2016

Full programmes of all these activities may be found on the 'Events' page of our website
http://standinggroups.ecpr.eu/sep/?page_id=38

2. INTERVENTIONS IN SUPPORT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

2016 saw significant threats to academic freedom. The SG took a public stand in two cases:

- The murder of Giulio Regeni
Following the discovery on 3 February of the badly tortured body of postgraduate researcher, Giulio Regeni, the SG on SEP joined an initiative led by the SG on Participation and Mobilisation and supported by three other ECPR SGs (Political Violence, Human Rights & Transitional Justice, ECPR Graduate Student Network) calling on the ECPR Executive Committee to make a public statement. The EC responded immediately with a call for a full inquiry.
- SG Statement on Academic Freedom in Turkey
Following the attempted coup in Turkey on 15 July, the SG issued a public statement, declaring the Group's firm opposition to military intervention in politics and unwavering support for democracy and the rule of law in Turkey and expressing our deep concern about the limitations to academic freedom introduced in the aftermath of the coup.

Both initiatives were met with a warm response from SG members, indicating an appreciation of the Group's stand.

ECPR Executive Committee call for inquiry into Regeni murder:

<https://ecpr.eu/News/news.aspx?NewsID=258>

SG on SEP 'Statement on Academic Freedom in Turkey'

http://standinggroups.ecpr.eu/sep/?page_id=11 (scroll down to 27 July 2016)

3. ACTIVE PRESENCE WITHIN ECPR DEBATE ON STANDING GROUPS

The SG on SEP has played an active role in the internal debate on the role of Standing Groups within ECPR.

At the SG Convenors' meeting in September 2013, the ECPR Executive Committee presented a draft 'Framework for Standing Groups and Research Networks', inaugurating major changes in the functioning of SGs and their role relationship to ECPR. Our SG played an active role in the subsequent deliberations. This included:

- requesting more time for input from the SG Convenors before the Executive Committee voted on the Framework
- holding an email discussion within the SG on SEP about the likely impact of the new Framework
- writing and submitting our own memorandum to the ECPR Executive Committee, outlining our members' concerns
- participating in an email dialogue with other SG Convenors
- drafting a response to the draft Framework on the basis of the views expressed in the dialogue – the 'Joint Response' was signed by 25 of the then 48 Standing Groups

The interventions by SG Convenors helped to bring important changes to the Framework, including:

- the postponement for 5 years of the proposal to make membership fees compulsory
- activity levels (and not only membership numbers) to be taken into account when deciding whether to downgrade an SG to a Research Network
- SG membership not being limited to political scientists
- SG leaders continue to be eligible for membership of the ECPR Executive Committee.

For further details on the SG's concerns and the EC's response, please see the Minutes of the Standing Group business meeting in Glasgow, posted on our website:

http://standinggroups.ecpr.eu/sep/?page_id=11&paged=4 (scroll down to 4 December 2014)

4. MEMBERSHIP

The 'Framework for Standing Groups and Research Networks', implemented in 2014, requires a Group to have 100 members from ECPR member institutions to qualify as an SG. This was initially a cause for concern as our membership was below this level when the Framework was announced in Bordeaux. However, membership growth has been more than satisfactory:

- 97 members in September 2013
- 129 members in September 2014
- 185 members in August 2015

The process of registering members through the ECPR website, inaugurated in Spring 2015, resulted in the loss of some old members but an overall rise in membership.

The first annual re-registration brought some new members but overall proved very damaging to SG membership levels:

- 222 members on 31 December 2015
- 155 members on 1 January 2016

On a proportional basis, this loss of members has apparently been repeated across all SGs. The SG on SEP raised this issue at the Standing Group Convenors' meeting in Prague in September 2016, proposing that re-registration should take place every two or three years instead of annually. The issue will be discussed by the ECPR Executive Committee.

Since 1 January, membership levels have risen, owing to:

- campaign of repeated emails from SG Convenor to non-renewing members (membership at 208 members by 28 February)
- extensive registration of new members during the Steering Committee election (94 new members in election period from 19 April to 19 May)

On 7 September 2016, membership stood at 329 members, making the SG the 6th largest out of the existing 53 SGs.

However, annual re-registration poses a clear threat to our membership levels and this matters given the ECPR's numerical requirement for SGs. The incoming Steering Committee will need to monitor this issue carefully.

5. COMMUNICATION

The SG has always seen promoting communication among its members as a key part of its role. During the period 2013-16:

- the *email list* continued to serve as a central information point on SG activities, calls for papers and other relevant information
- the SG launched its own *website*: managed free of charge by ECPR Central Services. The site is basic but fit for purpose. At our suggestion, it now includes a page on members' publications as well as news and events

- the SG launched its own closed *Facebook group* in June 2016. The Group was an immediate success and 3 months after its launch, already has 208 members. Special thanks are due to Isabel David for this initiative and to both Isabel David and Myrto Tsakatika for serving as Administrators of the Group.

SG on SEP website:

<http://standinggroups.ecpr.eu/sep/>

Southern European Politics Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/956524667779683/>

6. SPONSORSHIP

The SG on SEP is a no-cost group, run on volunteer labour, which has taken a decision not to charge membership fees in order to maximise the number of those able to participate. This is especially important at a time when much of our region, Southern Europe, has been undergoing a severe economic crisis with significant impact on universities and academics.

In 2013-16 the SG received support from the Bettiko Foundation (cost of 2013 General Conference registration fees of 4 paper-givers who would otherwise have been unable to participate) and from Routledge (wine receptions following the Standing Group business meetings, 2014 and 2016). We would like to thank our sponsors for their generosity.

7. FIRST ELECTRONIC ELECTION FOR THE SG LEADERSHIP

In line with the new 'Framework on Standing Groups and Research Networks', the SG on SEP held its first electronic election (through the ECPR website) from 19 April to 19 May 2016. The new leadership now consists of a three-member Steering Committee, elected for a 3-year term.

The election indicated democratic vibrancy within the SG, with 6 candidates standing for 3 positions and a 47% turnout which compares well with the experience of other SGs.

Following the election, again in accordance with the 'Framework', the Steering Committee decided the following allocation of posts among its members: Susannah Verney (Convenor), Marco Maraffi (Co-convenor), Myrto Tsakatika (Treasurer).

SUSANNAH VERNEY
SG on SEP Convenor 2013-2016