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Peter Mair and the *Political Data Yearbook*

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(former co-editors of the Political Data Yearbook*)*

Along with the entire international community of political scientists, we were shocked and deeply saddened by the untimely death of our friend and colleague Peter Mair.

Among Peter's many services to the discipline of political science was the initiative with one of us to start the *Political Data Yearbook* as an annual special issue of the *European Journal for Political Research* (EJPR). After consulting with other colleagues about the format of the *Yearbook*, they set up a network of established political scientists who were to write individually authored reports on developments in their country during the previous year. Peter's contacts in the field, both with the publishers and scholars, were crucial to making this initiative a success. Together with his co-founder, Ruud Koole, Peter Mair served as the co-editor of the *Yearbook* during its first four years. Both were then at the University of Leiden, where Peter was appointed professor of comparative politics in the same year that the first edition of the *Yearbook* was published (1992). Their experience in an international research project on the organisation of political parties, of which Peter was the director together with Richard Katz, laid the groundwork for the *Yearbook*. It had proven that it was possible to collect data on a large scale with the help of a network of colleagues and to make these data accessible to the wider discipline.

A comparable approach was taken with the *Yearbook*, with one major difference: in the *Yearbook*, the data were to be updated annually. The lack of accessible, comparable and reliable data on rather basic political variables was an obvious impediment to comparative research. Peter convinced the EJPR of the need to publish this kind of data, resulting in a long-term and still very much appreciated commitment of the journal to make these data accessible for all scholars.

Information about national elections, cabinet composition, national referenda, institutional changes and issues in national politics were collected by more than thirty country specialists. The collection of countries in 1992 witnessed the period of the transition that had just begun with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Next to established democracies in the Western world

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(including Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Israel) and Japan, the *Yearbook* also included entries from the newborn democracies in Czechoslovakia (not yet split), Hungary and Poland. This reflected Peter Mair's interest in transitioning democracies not only because he welcomed the democratic development in these countries, but also because these new democracies were going to be a rich source of new information about the functioning of political institutions in democratic settings. It would make comparative politics all the more interesting, allowing for new ways to compare established democracies with newer ones.

Many of the collaborators of the *Yearbook* remained in contact with Peter Mair after he handed over his co-editorship to Richard Katz in 1996. Often, the professional link with Peter within the network of the *Yearbook* grew into personal friendship. After Peter moved to the European University Institute in Fiesole (Florence) in 2005, where he was appointed professor of comparative politics and government in its Department of Political and Social Sciences, he continued to be the charming political scientist who was able to combine his outstanding scholarly work with real interest in the people with whom he worked. Very stimulating, both to established colleagues and the younger generation, Peter Mair has been of great importance for the recent development of the discipline. With his death, international political science loses a colleague of worldwide repute.

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