editorial

Articles that in some way juxtapose or compare Europe and the US often feature prominently in the pages of *European Political Science*, and this issue is no exception in that respect. In one way or another most, if not all, of the pieces in the following pages reflect the widespread perception that Europeans are faced with an 'American challenge' that, much if not most of the time, they fail to meet. Thus, in our 'professional' section, Yves Mény (p. 3–6) suggests that a 'weakness [of] Europe is the insufficiency of the professional training available to young political scientists. We are', Professor Mény argues, 'still behind what American universities have achieved, and progress on that front is still too slow'. Andreas Follesdal, meanwhile, writes that most of his students who heed his advice on how to pursue an academic career head for the US, often never to return. In our 'teaching' section, it is significant that the two sources of material on case-based learning in politics to which Sarah Hale gives most attention come from the US. In our 'research' section Michael Smith notes (p. 41–51), in regard to the recent 'crisis' in transatlantic relations, that 'Instead of a Europe that can say "no" in the face of US demands – or even a Europe that can say "yes" and mean it – there has arisen the image of a Europe that can say "yes", "no" and "maybe" all at the same time and in as many as 26 different voices…'

As in the 'real world' of politics, so too, in the discipline, it would seem: In his article of welcome when this journal was founded four years ago, Jean Blondel (2001: 4–5) noted how ECPR Joint Sessions were 'a bit like the United Nations' with 'too many papers [being] country based'; and he was at pains to suggest that 'It is still the case that, in many sub-fields, we are dependent for 'true' comparative developments on the bold intellectual imagination of our American colleagues…' Meanwhile, among the most well-attended roundtables at the ECPR's recent General Conference in Budapest was the one on 'Why European political science is so unproductive and what should be done about it'.

What are we to make of all this? It is, of course, not surprising that – as juxtaposition of the Blondel and Smith articles makes clear – substantive political issues find echoes in the discipline, and *vice versa*. After all, politics, and the study of politics, are not separate worlds – in turn suggesting that the construction of a political theory is itself a political act and therefore that apparently 'objective' political science – of the kind inspired by positivism, for example – unavoidably entails the assumption of a definite political stance. (For this reason, though their own criticisms are driven by slightly different concerns, we think that Rhodes and Bevir make a point that must be taken seriously when they argue (p. 69–83) that 'the idols of hard data, experimental tests, and methodological rigour lose all allure once one renounces a positivist faith in pure experience'.) So, if the 'American political science' behind which Europe apparently lags is one that must be understood as predominantly 'positivist' in inspiration, many colleagues will legitimately wonder about the extent to which seeking to 'close the gap' is a goal worth pursuing.

(1–2) © 2006 European Consortium for Political Research. 1680-4333/06 $30 www.palgrave-journals.com/eps
https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210063 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But if it must be recognised that 'American political science' in reality involves much more than an adherence to the cannons of positivism, then it should probably also be recognised that whatever gaps there are, they are rather unlikely to be closed as long as Europeans dwell excessively on their supposed shortcomings. In a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, individuals who convince themselves that they do not 'have what it takes' usually end up failing. Collectivities may face a similar danger. If this is so, then a better way to meet the 'American challenge' might be to redress the balance somewhat and yes, be aware of issues that need addressing, but also be aware of the many features of European political science of which its practitioners can be proud: European political scientists may seem somewhat less unproductive by comparison with their American counterparts when what they have achieved is viewed against the background of the specifically European obstacles of language differences, divergences in education systems and, above all, resource disparities.

This is not to argue for submission to greater uniformity – at least not in the sense of single approaches, methodologies and substantive concerns to be emulated; for one of the most attractive features of European political science is precisely the rich variety of its traditions – as Yves Mény (p. 3–6) seems to suggest when he notes that 'Europe is bringing new ways and additional perspectives that complete nicely the immense contribution made by the US'. What it *is* to argue is that if the discipline in Europe is found by many to be wanting, then it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the most significant of the factors responsible is resource disparities – the fact that resources per student are lower in Europe than in the US; the fact that European academics are paid less than their American counterparts; that academic training is also constrained by lower levels of doctoral programme funding. These are problems that must be addressed if Europeans are to maintain at an adequate level the knowledge base of their economies. The central question, one around which there is room for many and varied debates, is *how* they should be addressed. In this issue, Andreas Follesdal addresses the problems from the perspective of research funding and the Commission's recent proposal for the setting up of a European Research Council. Articles in subsequent issues will address them from the perspectives of the reform of university systems, of career opportunities – or lack thereof – available to young academics, and of other issues. In this way will the journal seek to fulfil its remit of contributing to the creation of a European political science community as a self-conscious entity, the *sine qua non* of its progress.

jim newell and *martin rhodes*

Reference

Blondel, J. (2001) 'Greetings for the new journal', *European Political Science* 1(1): 3–9.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210063

https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210063 Published online by Cambridge University Press