editorial

Writing this editorial is a sad business for a number of reasons. First and foremost because August of this year (2011) saw the tragically early and completely unexpected death of Peter Mair, a pillar of the ECPR and one of Europe's leading political scientists.

Peter Mair (1951–2011) was born and raised in Rosses Point, County Sligo on Ireland's Atlantic seaboard. He was educated at the local primary school, and was then sent as a boarder to Castleknock College near Dublin. After school he studied History and Politics at University College Dublin graduating with an M.A. in Politics in 1973. His first job was at the newly opened University of Limerick before moving on to a job at the University of Strathclyde where he encountered Richard Rose.

Participation in early ECPR events had brought him to the notice of some of the leaders of the organisation, and when the European University Institute (EUI) was established it was natural that Peter should gravitate towards this new centre of comparative West European politics. He originally arrived as a researcher in 1978/1979 but quickly became a junior member of faculty working alongside Stefano Bartolini in close association with Hans Daalder who was directing a major project called *Recent Changes in West European Party Systems*. The EUI was the beginning of Peter's international academic career. In 1984, he moved to the University of Manchester and from there to the Netherlands. He continued to collaborate with Bartolini and their prize winning book *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability* was published by Cambridge University Press in 1990.

Here is not the place to attempt an evaluation of Peter's extensive academic legacy. In good time there will be symposia, conferences and *festschriften.* His career bore all the hallmarks of success: editorships of prestigious journals (including the ECPR's *European Journal of Political Research* and, in more recent years, *West European Politics*) and monograph series; four authored or co-authored books; sixteen edited books; close to two hundred articles, book-chapters and substantive book reviews; translations of his work into Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, Danish, Hungarian, Korean and Russian; more than twenty supervised dissertations; numerous visiting fellowships and professorships; positions of increasing institutional responsibility especially at the EUI where he was chair of the SPS department from 2007–2010 and where he had recently been appointed Dean of Graduate Studies.

Peter was, from one point of view, the epitome of the globe-trotting academic. During his career he worked for lengthy periods in Ireland, Scotland, England, the Netherlands and Italy and who knows how many countries and continents he was taken to by visiting professorships, guest lectureships and conference-keynote speakerships? Yet, fundamentally he was a rooted man: rooted in his family life, his work, his nationality and his values. And as these were always with him, he felt at home wherever he happened to be and was the same person to everyone he met. As a political scientist

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he was trained to cast a cold and objective eye on social reality but he was also a committed public intellectual and defender of democratic values. He was a person of authority who could be approached by anyone to be given not just a sympathetic ear but also shrewdly realistic advice. Whenever a sensible compromise was needed, Peter was frequently the one to make the most acceptable proposal because he knew that while life might mean conflict between different values, a well-lived life meant reasonable compromise not only between the values a single person holds within himself but also between the values that different people and groups embody. When he spoke, people listened because he spoke calmly and with humour.

Peter appeared in the very first annual reviews issue of *EPS* which came out in 2005. In it he wrote: 'we see a sea shift in patters of mass politics, and one that is consistent in terms of both direction, which is towards disengagement from conventional politics, and location, which is more or less throughout the advanced democracies. In short, citizens are heading for the exits of their national political arenas' (Mair, 2005: 428). In his review we hear the voice of the calm political scientist worried about the state of contemporary politics but it was a voice that had increasing resonance beyond the academy. Here is Peter Oborne, a right-wing English political columnist, writing in the Guardian newspaper last year (Oborne, 2010):

> *In a series of brilliant articles and essays, Professor Peter Mair, professor of government at the European University Institute, has shown how western democracy has been hollowed out across the EU. He argues that a new notion of democracy has emerged instead, only stripped of its popular component – Mair calls it 'democracy without a demos'. This elite withdrawal from mass electoral politics, characteristic of so many modern European states, has closed out the euro as a subject of legitimate discussion. This failure of apparently mainstream politicians to engage with the social and economic consequences of the European single currency has handed over power without demur to the bankers*

Peter himself was also capable of writing for a non-academic audience. The review of Fintan O'Toole's book on the Irish crisis included this issue had originally been intended for publication earlier this year in the *London Review of Books* but the events of the Arab Spring meant that space had to be found for other contributions. At the time, I said jokingly to him that I would be happy to publish the piece in *EPS* as long as he removed the foul language but he replied that he wanted to re-work it into a piece he was writing on small democracies. Alas, it was not to be and I am grateful to Peter's wife, Karin Tilmans, for permission to publish the review which among other things show what a fine writer he was. Younger readers and those of a sensitive disposition may wish to avert their eyes from the end of the first paragraph. Irish readers may well be dismayed at his lucid pessimism about a country that went from international success story to quasi-failed state in the space of a couple of years. All of us, will sorely miss Peter's analytical perception and distinctive voice, particularly in these critical times. In Ireland it is traditional to end the obituary of a remarkable man with the phrase: *ní bheidh a leithéid ann arís* – 'we will not see his like again'. Those who knew Peter Mair also know that few deserve this accolade more than he.

Peter's last review for *EPS* also marks the last appearance of a special annual issue devoted exclusively to reviewing books. In order to ensure a more even flow of copy during the year, we have

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decided to add a reviews section to each of the 'normal' issues which will now appear four times a year. This development also coincides with the end of my term as reviews editor of *EPS* and I would like to thank all those who made the reviews issue a success. When *EPS* moved from being an in-house ECPR publication to being a proper academic journal published by Palgrave, it was decided to include book-reviews as a service to our readers. This service will continue albeit in a slightly different form and it is to be hoped that *EPS* as a whole will continue to go from strength to strength.

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References

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