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CONFERENCE REPORT

ENVIRONMENT.ENERGY.CLIMATE

INTERNATIONAL FFU PHD WORKSHOP

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In recent years, the issues of energy and the environment have become one of the most discussed in modern science. Development of such branches as environmental history, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy among the social sciences supports this thesis. At the same time, huge expenditures in technologies, innovations, and investments in area of energy, boost the development of exact sciences. Such a tendency has not bypassed political science, where issues dedicated to the environment (including climate) and energy seem to determine new trends in its development, especially since they do not discard high-level politics. Between scholars there is a need to discuss these problems in wider circle, considering their complexity and interdisciplinary. One of occasions for that was international PhD Workshop “Environment.Energy.Climate”, which took place on 6-7 June 2014 and was organised by group of PhD candidates from the Environmental Policy Research Centre (Forschungszentrum für Umweltpolitik, FFU) at Free University (Freie Universität, FU) in Berlin.

The two-day seminar gathered almost 60 young scholars and experienced scientists from 21 universities and research institutes from 14 countries.¹ During this time, the participants presented more than 40 papers (each approximately for 10 minutes), which were mainly their dissertations topics, but also research projects, results of already conducted research or articles published in political journals. The panel sessions were divided in four thematic sections: *Energiewende* (Energy Transition), Local Level, Renewables International, and Governance & Climate. In every session there were three panels in which three papers were presented. Over two days, 14 panels were completed. These deliberations were enriched with two keynote speeches lectured by reputable professors, one each day.

After the early registration on the first day (6 June) of the workshop, participants were welcomed by a short opening address by Prof. Dr. Miranda Schreurs, director of FFU. In her speech, she paid attention to the multifaceted character of the workshop and the high level of the prepared paper proposals. She also thought back to times when she was a PhD candidate and with a couple of friends organised a similar workshop. This endeavour resulted in the publication of papers and Professor Schreurs warmly encouraged current participants of conference to do the same. She remarked that such meetings give a unique

¹ Australia, Austria, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Lebanon, Nigeria, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, and the United States.

chance to confront our own knowledge with the ideas of people of another origin, from which we can mutually learn a lot.

On the first day, the panels dedicated to *Energiewende* attracted the biggest interest of the participants. In first session on this issue, Fabian Joas from Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research contributed with a thought-provoking presentation entitled “Goals of the *Energiewende*: Mapping Priorities and Arguments”. The young researcher presented the results of an empirical survey conducted among politicians, professionals, civil servants, scientists, and NGO activists, in which he questioned the goals of energy transition in Germany. The answers of respondents differed from each other significantly, which was relatively unexpected. Mr Joas observed, that the differentiation of responses did not only depend only on the area from which respondents came from (politics, industry, academia, etc.), because the answers were also different also among representatives of the same domain. The answers concerned climate (or environment) protection correspondingly with the export of renewable technologies and/or global leadership in the implementation of climate change mitigation policies. The main conclusion was that *Energiewende*, as a project on such a huge scale, does not have clearly defined goals. And without clearly defined goals, there are going to be contradictions among experts about its aims.

Amid papers in the second session, the “Leadership and the *Energiewende*: conceptualizing Germany’s role in promoting energy transitions worldwide” by Karoline Steinbacher from Free University created a dynamic discussion. The young researcher tried to concentrate more on the theoretical framework of her dissertation project, in which she explained the mechanisms of policy transfer, especially in case of leadership. The research design and assumptions were organised properly, although what focused the special attention of audience was Ms. Steinbacher’s fresh perspective on the international activity of Berlin when it comes to energy transition and climate protection. She focused on specific actions of the German government, such as climate negotiations during the United Nations Conference of the Parties, the establishment of the Renewables Club, the extraordinary activity of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and the Petersberg Climate Dialogue. The plethora of mentioned examples was impressive and described the outstanding role of Berlin.

In the afternoon, Prof. Dr. Frank Fischer from Rutgers University in New Jersey gave a keynote speech concentrated on the problem of “Climate Crisis and Ecological Democracy”. During the witty presentation he showed interconnections between issues of climate change and democracy on a high level, as well as on the local level. In the latter case, especially interesting was the observation that in local governance in the context of environmental improvements, communities often represent the attitude of NIMBY (not in my backyard).

After his speech, the third session started, Weila Gong from FFU presented a paper entitled “Comparative Studies on China’s Climate Policy Capacity” (a panel dedicated to Local Level), which was attractive and a little bit exotic from a European point of view. In her work, the author concentrates on low-carbon cities and the representative types of regional economies in China: the Municipal of Shenzhen, Xiamen, and Nanchang. As all mentioned cities are important pilots in exploring the pathway for green and sustainable development

in China, every one of them demonstrates the capacity of a climate policy with a different level of targets, enthusiasm, and distinct institutions, which are supposed to help to achieve climate protection goals. As Ms. Gong noticed, differences come from the competencies of local administration, the international network, and local resources; although especially astonishing was the role of local political leaders. The results of her research showed that in the case of three Chinese cities, the position of individuals and their connections to other authors play a crucial role by shaping and implementing local climate policies.

The second day of the workshop on Saturday 7 June, started with a keynote speech of Prof. Dr. Volkmar Lauber from the University of Salzburg entitled “Discarding EEG² philosophy – The Conservative-Social Democratic government’s policy on renewable power”. Prof. Lauber dedicated his lecture to the reform of the German Renewable Energy Act since the year 2000 and its transformation, as it succeeded the 1991 “Electricity Feed-In Act”.³ He paid main attention to the situation since 2009 and 2012 (4th and 5th reforms) and the current discussion in the context of reform, which is planned by the CDU/CSU-SPD⁴ government. Especially thought provoking were the statistics of this evolution compared to the activity of the main interest groups engaged in this process. As the data show, the energy companies that produce electricity in Germany based on fossil fuels did not record any loss due to the implemented legislative amendments. Although the Renewable Energy Act promotes renewables, key-players on the energy market still have a lot to say while shaping it in a legal matter.

The fourth session of the workshop brought more interesting papers. In a panel dedicated to Renewables International, Ms. Kira Giesicke from the University of West Scotland spoke about her dissertation project entitled “Development of an Indicator Set to Determine Sustainability on the Individual Level”. The task chosen by this young researcher seemed to be really challenging, as in literature there is a lot of arguments on how to define the notion of “sustainability” itself. As scholars try to tackle this issue on a systemic level, defining its indicators on an individual level is ambitious due to complex methodological aspects, different case selections, and the connected challenges connected, such as the different cultural backgrounds of individuals, etc. Nevertheless, the paper presented by Ms. Giesicke opened a dynamic discussion and brought fascinating conclusions.

During the last session of the workshop, in the panel dedicated to Governance & Climate, participants had a possibility to listen to three more presentations, including Cassandra Pillay’s (Autonomous University of Barcelona) “The Berlin Mandate to a Post-Kyoto agreement: what have we learnt?” In her paper, Ms. Pillay argued that putting issues of human health into the agenda and then underlying them during the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COPs⁵), could improve the decision-making process, and

² *Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz* (The German Renewable Energy Act).

³ In German: *Stromeinspeisungsgesetz*.

⁴ The abbreviation of the Conservative-Social Democratic government: CDU – Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany); CSU – Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern e. V. (Christian Social Union in Bavaria); SPD – Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany).

⁵ Conference of the Parties to The 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

as a result finally bring global agreement in the matter of climate change. She compared this case to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, when human health was put high on the agenda during its negotiation, and due to this, global agreement was possible. The innovative approach, a significant part of which is based on professional medical literature and facts concerned with the well being of the world population, is evidence of new, interdisciplinary ways of creating political science.

The workshop came to an end with closing remarks by the organisers, who summarised the sessions and were happy that the whole event had run without problems. Prof. Schreurs was satisfied with the high level of prepared papers and once again came back to the idea of joint publication after the conference. She thanked the organisers for preparing the workshop and encouraged participants from other universities to organise such a meeting next year, somewhere else, where young researches could compare the results of their work and again discuss the compelling issues in the area of the environment, climate, and energy.

The workshop organised by the Environmental Policy Research Centre in Berlin showed that there is a considerable group of young researches around the world who work on issues of the environment, climate, and energy. The organisers' claim that they needed to reject about 20 papers during the application process proves that this is an interesting scientific area of research in political science. The diversity of subjects on which researchers are working demonstrates that this area is developing in a dynamic way, and the meaningful discussions after every paper showed that it is impossible to exhaust this topic. Such a confrontation with plurality of opinions and ideas is helpful for young researchers at the begging of their scientific careers, as they have an incontrovertible chance to widen their horizons and improve their research work. The willingness of external financial support for such initiatives (in this case the Helmholtz Association) confirms the need for the development of this area of study for society, industry, and politics. The presented interdisciplinary and complexity of issues depicted interconnections between these branches. Having considered all of these facts, the international PhD Workshop "Environment.Energy.Climate" will hopefully be permanently calendared on the annual schedule of young political scientists.

Notes on Authors

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