

# Two Italian Political Scientists in the governing body of the European Consortium for Political Research

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*An interview of IPS to Professor Simona Piattoni (University of Trento), the new Chairperson of ECPR and to Professor Luca Verzichelli (University of Siena) new Italian Member of the ECPR Executive Committee.*

## Professor Simona Piattoni

**IPS: Simona, if we are not wrong you are the third Italian chair of the ECPR executive after Freddi and Bardi and the first woman. This is an important achievement for Italian political science and for you personally. Can you comment on this and tell also on the basis of your previous experience as a member of the Executive Committee what is the situation of ECPR, the future challenges, your projects, etc...**

**SP:** It is an honor for me to follow in the steps of Giorgio Freddi and Luciano Bardi as Chair of the ECPR, and I am particularly happy to be the first woman ever to be elected chair of the ECPR! I have made myself available for this role as a service to the community of political scientists in Europe and elsewhere, and this is the spirit with which I intend to fulfill my duties. The ECPR is by now a very large organization, with lots of activities (conferences, schools, standing groups, research sessions, publications, etc.). The role of the Chair is to make sure that these activities are performed to the satisfaction of the membership and that exchanges between European and international political scientists are increasingly frequent and fruitful. I believe that the main challenges for the future of the ECPR are: 1) to keep these activities going while securing their increased quality; 2) to expand membership in those countries whose political scientists are not yet fully integrated in international scholarly circles; 3) to promote political science (while it is still considered in an "ancillary" role to other sciences) and to protect it from the funding cuts that are planned a bit everywhere (also in Europe).

**IPS: what role has played ECPR in your formation as a political scientist?**

**SP:** I remember attending both the Research Sessions and the Joint Sessions at a very early stage in my career as a political scientist. I was trained in the United States, so my first professional association experience was with APSA. However, as soon as I came back to Europe (Norway at the time), I became involved with the ECPR (and with the SISP!). I remember my first Joint Sessions in Oslo: I was very impressed by the quality of my workshop and I literally loved the idea of meeting for three-four days to discuss in depth one topic rather than delivering a paper in 10-15 minutes (as is common at large conferences). Unfortunately, I never attended the famous Summer School in Methods and Techniques, but if I could express a wish, it would be that "refresher courses" could be offered also for senior scholars who desire to bring their methodological skills up to date!

**IPS: ECPR in Europe: where it is still weak and what can be done?**

**SP:** Yes, our plan is to strengthen Political Science throughout Europe and to extend ECPR membership particularly to eastern Europe, to Russia but not only Russia. We realize that there is a great potential for political science in countries in which the social sciences have been kept, for a long time, on the back-burner. We would also like to extend our reach to North Africa, even though that is a bit more complicated (although interesting!) right now.

**IPS: ECPR in global Political Science. What about the relationship with American Political Science (APSA), and with other international organizations active in our field?**

**SP:** ECPR has already fairly established collaborations with APSA, IPSA, ISA, EUSA, etc. which it wishes to keep up and expand on.

**IPS: what can you say about the presence of Italian political scientists in ECPR? Is it adequate?**

**SP:** Italians attend ECPR events in great numbers, particularly Italian graduate students. However, Italian political scientists do not propose workshops (at the Joint Sessions or the Research Sessions) to the same extent as other political scientists particularly from northern European countries nor are Italian universities particularly forthcoming in offering to host ECPR events.

**IPS: Thank you Simona!**

## **Professor Luca Verzichelli**

**IPS: Luca, you are a new member of the Executive Committee of ECPR and you were assigned a specific portfolio. How was your impact with this new experience, what are your duties and goals?**

**LV:** the work as an EC member is very demanding but very stimulating at the same time. I started a couple of months ago and I am still learning about procedures, priorities and duties of the Executive committee. At this moment, my responsibilities are "Publications", a huge portfolio which I will share with other colleagues, and the "Research Sessions", an old ECPR activity which has been recently re-launched, with very good feedbacks I have to say.

At the induction meeting of the new EC, in Colchester, we had an interesting kick off session during which each EC member could introduce, by way of an electronic forum, ideas and expectations for the years to come. Significantly, there was a good convergence of views on a few items. Among them, creating a good inter-generational dialogue, helping young scholars to socialize with the European political science, preserving the traditional mission of ECPR (mainly the diffusion and the dissemination of good political science all around Europe) without ignoring new themes, new techniques and cooperation with extra-European communities.

Of course we will have to discuss about other crucial aspects and challenges, including the role of ECPR in the other areas of the planet. Governing ECPR is more and more challenging, since we have to consider a system of complex relationships with individuals, academic institutions (which are traditionally our organizational "units") and other national or regional communities of scholars. We are talking of an organization formed today by more than 400 institutional members and having to deal with more than 50 national communities. However, I think this is a motivated group of people and we have the chance to make a great job. Personally, I am very honored to be included in such a group and I am sure I will learn a lot from this experience.

**IPS: what role has played ECPR in your formation as a political scientist?**

**LV:** ECPR has always been very much present in my life as a political scientist, and I perceived its crucial role since the beginnings of my career. I was in the methods summer school in 1990, and my first experience in a ECPR workshop was in 1994. Since then, I have attended 10 joint sessions, plus a number of other events like general conferences and summer schools. I think I was very lucky to have the opportunity to get in touch with a good number of "ECPR people". This allowed me to be included in important research projects and, above all, to observe what the best professional social scientists do in order to develop a better research.

From my ECPR experiences I did not simply learn “substantive” political science: a fundamental aspect of such an organization is the impressive stimulation it can provide, putting old and new scholars at the same table. Indeed, the ECPR experience helps avoiding parochialism and prevents us from developing extrapolations based on limited confrontations. This is particularly true in my specific field, the analysis of comparative political institutions, which is at the core of the ECPR mission of “real word comparison”, This is a simple but crucial lesson I learnt from one of my mentors, Jean Blondel, many years ago. And it’s time to get back to Europe to tell this story to the young fellows.

**IPS: what can you say about the presence of Italian political science in ECPR? Is it adequate, or what?**

**LV:** Over the years, many EC members and three chairpersons have been elected from among Italian scholars. This is a good indicator of the credibility of our community within the ECPR organization. The Italian presence at the ECPR events and within the standing groups is also very relevant. However, I think we can still improve. Particularly, we should make an effort to link the younger generation of scholars to the ECPR organization and to help them to publish at the international level, perhaps using the different opportunities offered by the ECPR series and journals. This is one of my goals for the years to come, and I do hope to give a little contribution in this perspective.

**IPS: thank you Luca and good luck to both of you!**