

POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL časopisu / URL of the journal: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk>

Autor(i) / Author(s): Karol Chwedczuk-Szulc
Článok / Article: International Scientific Conference: “22. Annual Conference of Central European Political Science Association: Integration Vs Disintegration? CEECs towards the European Union and Its Challenges”
Vydavateľ / Publisher: Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica

Odporúčaná forma citácie článku / Recommended form for quotation of the article:

CHWEDCZUK-SZULC, K. 2017. International Scientific Conference: “22. Annual Conference of Central European Political Science Association: Integration Vs Disintegration? CEECs towards the European Union and Its Challenges”. In *Politické vedy*. [online]. Roč. 20, č. 4, 2017. ISSN 1335 – 2741, s. 207-210. Dostupné na internete: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk/archiv-vydani/2017/4-2017/karol-chwedczuk-szulc.html>.

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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE: “22. ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION: INTEGRATION VS DISINTEGRATION? CEECS TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS CHALLENGES”

Karol Chwedczuk-Szulc*

The 22nd Annual Conference of Central European Political Science Association took place at the University of Wrocław (UWr), at the Institute of Political Science, on 14-15th of September 2017. The conference was organised by the Institute of Political Science (UWr), together with the Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA) and the Regional Centre for International Debate in Wrocław. The Program Committee included **Ladislav Cabada**, PhD. from CEPSA and following staff members from the University of Wrocław: **Piotr Sula**, PhD. (main organiser) prof. **Robert Alberski**, prof. **Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska**, **Karol Chwedczuk-Szulc**, PhD. (head of organising team), **Dorota Dralus**, PhD., prof. **Dariusz Skrzypiński**, prof. **Leszek Sobkowiak**, **Monika Wichłacz**, PhD., prof. **Robert Wiszniowski**.

The conference received honorary patronages of the European Commission Regional Representation in Wrocław, the Mayor of Wrocław and the Marshall of Lower Silesian Voivodeship. The financial support for the conference was provided by the Marshall of the Voivodship and the Regional Centre for International Debate in Wrocław. The organisers teamed up in their efforts with students' organisations: Students' Circle of Young Political Scientists and the Forum of Young Diplomats. The organisers created a website entirely for the participants of the conference, where they could find all the necessary information, including call for papers, the programme, information about organisers etc.

In terms of numbers, the conference:

* Dr. Karol Chwedczuk-Szulc is a lecturer at the Institute of Political Science, University of Wrocław, Koszarowa 3, 51-149 Wrocław, Poland, e-mail: karol.chwedczuk-szulc@uwr.edu.pl.

- attracted 123 applications and over 160 participants from all over Europe and beyond;
- involved directly the team of 13 organisers;
- had 130 speakers, who presented 120 papers;
- consisted of 30 panels, ran up to six panels in parallel.

Additionally, we have prepared a publication as one of the components of the conference: *Political Phenomena in the Theoretical Perspective* (in Polish), edited by the members of the Institute of Political Science at the University of Wrocław. Altogether, 28 authors contributed to the publication. It is also worth noticing that the conference had a bilingual character. While most of the panels were in English, a few of them were held in Polish. Most notably, a series of three panels was held to honour a long career of prof. **Andrzej Jabłoński**, who developed his career in the Institute of Political Science.

The conference was opened with the welcoming remarks of prof. **Adam Jezierski**, Rector of the University of Wrocław and prof. **Robert Alberski**, director of the Institute of the Political Science. The conference followed with the lectures of the keynote speakers. Prof. **Andrzej Jabłoński**, the first keynote speaker, delivered a presentation on *Theories and discourses on European identity* and he theorised in a complex and concise manner the issue of European identity. It was a very important lecture, as the question of European identity is at the core of every contemporary discussion about the future of the EU and is pointed at as a *sine qua non* of the future success of the EU. The second keynote speaker, prof. **Alexander Sczerbiak**, from the University of Sussex, gave his speech entitled: *Will there be a Eurosceptic backlash in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe?* Prof. **Szczerbiak** presented, in a very interesting and insightful way, possible scenarios of political developments in CEEC's vis-à-vis a right-wing populism's wave still sweeping through Europe.

The Executive Committee of CEPASA met on 14th of September, during the conference. The Committee discussed the future plans of the Association and prepared a plan for the 2018 CEPASA Annual Conference that will take place at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) in September, 2018.

In substance, the conference focused on the challenges that the European Union faces and what role in this situation is to be played by CEECs countries. In recent time, due to the turmoil within the whole of the EU and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the region seems to be gaining more political significance. Efforts are made to invigorate the political cooperation within the CEE region, most notably within the Visegrad Group. On

the other hand, scepticism is still widespread as to whether CEE itself is a real, well-grounded political entity or rather just a loose cluster of countries, with an *ad hoc* and temporarily created community of interests. It seems it is high time for serious and conclusive discussions about the future of the European Union, and CEE as a part of it. Therefore, the conference aimed at delivering to the academic community an opportunity to meet and reflect on the major issues of our region and continent. We are convinced that amidst political conflicts sweeping through the EU, we met the urgent need for substantive discussions and recommendations from the academic community. Discussions and contributions of the participants revolved mainly around such topics as: CEE as a political entity in the EU and international relations; political trends in CEE; CEECs and EU towards Russian invasion in Ukraine; CEECs towards the idea of military integration in the EU; CEECs and Brexit; CEECs and the liberal democracy; rise of right-wing populism in CEE; CEECs' conceptions of security of the EU; CEE towards refugee crisis.

The conference was closed by a joint panel, early afternoon on Friday, 15th of September, led by two speakers: prof. **Jerzy Wiatr** from the University of Security in Poznan, and prof. **Anton Bebler**, from the University of Ljubljana. Prof. **Wiatr** spoke about *National Security in the Unsafe World – A Central European Perspective*, where he presented a very important take on the basic concept of national security. The added value of his presentation was that he showed how the Central European perspective on the security differs in some points with the perspective of Western European countries. Prof. **Bebler** gave a speech on *Security Interrelationship between Central and South Eastern Europe* and, in a very convincing manner, showed that the regions of CEE and SEE share a lot of the same security issues and attributes.

In general, the conference appeared to be a success. Not only did we manage to discuss the most important issues of the current situation of the EU and CEE region, but we also created the space for the exchange of thoughts and integration of the community. At the University of Wroclaw and the Institute of Political Science, we perceive the 22nd Annual Conference of Central European Political Science Association as very important part of building up our institutional capacity. We already have a significant proof that this strategy brings fruit. Shortly before the CEPASA Annual Conference, we learned that our Institute and the University of Wroclaw would host 2019 ECPR General Conference. This huge success would not be possible without advancing the process of internationalisation of the Institute. Naturally, such a major event like

the Annual Conference of Central European Political Science Association is a part of the process. Therefore, we hope that the ECPR General Conference in Wroclaw will be another occasion to meet with the scholars and researchers of our region and to present their work to the wider, truly global audience.