Exchanging Ideas on Europe 2009: Views From France, Views Beyond the Mainstream

Angers, France
3-5 September 2009

The 39th Annual UACES Conference took place in the gorgeous city of Angers, France. Participants met for the three-day conference, held between 3-5 September, 2009, deep in the lavender-filled Loire Valley. Titled 'Exchanging Ideas on Europe 2009: Views From France, Views Beyond the Mainstream', the conference revolved around the trinity of panels, papers and presentations, bringing together 184 presentations and 257 participants from more than 30 countries.

Maria Fletcher, Hylke Dijksra and Michael Pearson

This year's Conference provided a forum for the research undertaken by UACES partner and Conference host ESSCA, as well as tackling the familiar territory of European institutions and integration. Many panellists also reacted to the European and global financial shocks of the past year, explored the emerging role of the EU as an environmental force, discussed its foreign policy orientations with and beyond its Neighbourhood, and argued over its various post-Lisbon possibilities. Participants included a pleasingly wide range of academic staff and graduate students to practitioners, media and publishing reps, and individuals from various areas of business and industry. The opening day saw the first two research sessions in the morning, followed by a post-lunch welcome by Alex Warleigh-Lack, UACES Chair and Catherine Leblanc, Director of ESSCA, both of whom launched the Conference in cordial style. As reported by Alex himself, 'this was followed by an extremely stimulating plenary Round Table, chaired by Andy Smith (IEP de Bordeaux) and brought together three provocative presentations on the potential for contributions to EU studies from political geography (Allan Williams, London Metropolitan), political sociology (Sabine Saurugger, IEP de Grenoble) and critical interdisciplinary studies (Ian Manners, Roskilde) - see also front page. Challenging those in the UACES mainstream (political science, law, economics, history) to broaden their horizons, ask new questions, and try new methodologies, the three speakers set out the recent trajectories of their respective areas of enquiry, offering critical assessments of what they could add to the research undertaken by other scholars. The three interventions are beyond reductive summaries, but respectively argued eloquently for scholars in mainstream EU studies to focus more on place and migration, power and agency, and transdisciplinary work with an emphasis on immanent critique and engagement with major social challenges such as climate change and global development.' The evening of the first day was rounded off with a reception hosted by the Deputy Mayor of Angers, Olivia Tambou, and took place in the beautiful Jean Lurçat Museum, where the stunning and rather unsettling Lurcat's tapestries could be observed on all four sides of the 'Hôpital Saint Jean'. The Conference's second day saw two more research sessions in the morning, followed by the 'back by popular request' Author-Meets-Readers Session. Author Francis Snyder of the LSE discussed The European Union and China, 1949-2008: Basic Documents and Commentary (Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2009) with Readers Emil Kirchner (Essex) and Jing Men (VUB/College of Europe) in a wide-ranging and instructive discussion. The social highlight was of course the Conference dinner, held in the impeccably opulent surroundings of the Chateau de Brissac, in the village of Brissac itself. The dinner for most was a masterclass of French haute cuisine and stirred the appetite for the third and final day of the Conference. After the penultimate research session, participants then had the opportunity to hear the thoughts of Vivien Schmidt (Boston University), who gave an incisive and enlightening series of perspectives on contemporary Europe as part of the JCMS Annual Review Lecture. This was immediately followed by the Awards Ceremony. The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Beate Kohler-Koch, the UACES 2009 Prize for Best Book to Urfan Khaliq (for his book entitled 'Ethical Dimensions of the Foreign Policy of the European Union: A Legal Appraisal', Cambridge University Press) and the UACES 2009 Prize for Best PhD Thesis to Frank Häge, Leiden University (for his dissertation entitled 'Decision-Making in the Council of the European Union: The Role of Committees').

Jing Men

Conference Dinner at Chateau Brissac

The final research session of the Conference was followed by a Networking Session for the newly-launched UACES Collaborative Research Networks (CRNs), bringing together those with existing and future CRNs. The Conference closed at 4pm, with some participants taking advantage of the guided tour of Cointreau and a chance to visit the Langlois-Chateau winery the following morning. With deep thanks to Albrecht Sonntag and Catherine Leblanc of ESSCA for a professional, enjoyable and stimulating Conference, UACES now turns its sights to Bruges and its College of Europe, the host of its 40th Annual Conference.

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