
The 2013 Meeting of the European Public Choice Society

Zurich, Switzerland

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Martin Gregor*

A week after Easter, the European Public Choice Society met in Zurich, Switzerland. The ruling EPCS president, Professor **Jan-Egbert Sturm** (Director of the KOF Swiss Economic Institute and Professor of Applied Macroeconomics at the ETH Zurich) served as the local organizer of this conference which is one of the major events in the fields of political economy and public choice.

The undoubted highlights of the conference were keynote speeches of three renowned academics. Professor **Alberto Alesina** (Harvard University) spoke on the design of fiscal adjustments. His speech combined the topical discussion on the austerity measures, namely a tour into the topics on the macroeconomic effects of tax increases versus spending cuts, with insights from politics. The political economy component of the speech was mainly in the discussion of the electoral consequences of large fiscal adjustments, where Professor Alesina in particular discussed his research on the electoral consequences of austerity and closely related findings by Alan Drazen about the absence of political cycle in deficit spending.

Professor **Andrew Oswald** (Warwick University) gave an engaging talk on herd behavior and “keeping up with the Joneses”. In his perspective, economists and

many social scientists see herd behavior as the result of informational advantage. They are not aware of a zoological literature on rational flocking caused by concern for relative position within animal herds. Professor Oswald suggests that, just as in non-human animals, much human herd behavior is triggered by mass relative feelings, and quoted growing evidence for positional concerns in humans.

Professor **Torsten Persson** (Stockholm University) presented one of his most recent working papers, called “Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man: Theory and Evidence from Sweden”. Professor Persson first presented a model on how political parties choose the composition of their lists, with regard to gender and competence, in competition with other parties under proportional representation. The model shows that the elected shares of women and competent men increase with the quality of the party leadership. This prediction is then confirmed in a unique dataset with rich individual data on all political candidates, in all parties, in all Swedish municipalities, since 1988.

In addition, the annual meeting offered many stimulating parallel sessions. The complete program is available at the conference website: <http://www.epcs2013.org/>

* Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Economic Studies, Czech Republic.