



## The European Public Policy Conference 2012 Conference Report

### > Introduction

The European Public Policy Conference of 2012 (EPPC), like its predecessors, was an incredibly successful event which exceeded all expectations. To date, the EPPC is an international student-organized event, with students taking on the responsibility of organizing the initiative independently from their respective school administrations. It is a demonstration of the dynamic and vibrant spirit of this initiative that it has successfully been passed from generation to generation and school to school, increasing every year in both size and scope. This is a testament to the skill of the organizing committees of each year's conference, as well as a strong indication of this initiative's value as year after year it continues to



attract a growing variety of keynote speakers, sponsors and international students. Looking back at the founding year of the EPPC in 2009, it is impressive to note the growth of this initiative over the last 4 years. This conference report summarizes the proceedings of EPPC 2012, so the participants and non-participants alike can have a record to benchmark the expansion of the EPPC initiative in years to come.

### > Summary

The EPPC 2012 was held at the Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI) on 18-20 April 2012. The school served as an superlative venue and IBEI staff was instrumental in assisting conference organizers to ensure that the conference ran smoothly. The world class city of Barcelona served as an excellent backdrop for EPPC and in between proceedings, conference participants had the opportunity to visit many of the cultural highlights that the city has to offer. Barcelona provided many opportunities for the participants, many who had never met one another prior to the event, to network professionally and establish new relationships.

The conference was comprised of two panels and one keynote speaker who ended the conference proceedings. Incredibly, the EPPC organizing committee was able to ensure that every high profile speaker it invited to participate ended up making it to the event. This fact is a significant assertion of the increasing importance of EPPC as a high level international public policy event. The first panel, *Rethinking Economic Crises*, generated significant debate among participants and produced many



original ideas regarding implications for future governance. It was very impressive to witness the interplay and interaction among all of the panelists as they responded to each others' arguments.

The second panel, *Austerity vs. Debt*, was fascinating given the fact that the analyses which some panelists put forth suggested a radical rethinking of the way in which Europe ended up in the current crisis and what the best policy solutions for solving this fundamental policy challenge could be.

This ideas debated amongst these panelists were all the more relevant given that most of them were politicians and practitioners who had been active in making policy in their respective countries in the years immediately preceding the crisis. As such, student participants were able to gain an invaluable perspective from policy makers who could directly address why they had taken specific actions in the run up to the crisis.

The keynote speaker who closed the conference was former Icelandic Prime Minister, Geir Haarde. It was remarkable that Mr. Haarde chose to honor participants with his presence, not only because he is a former Head of State; but more significantly, because he chose to make EPPC 2012 the event where he delivered his final public address before returning to Iceland to face the verdict of his trial delivered on April 23. To date, Mr. Haarde is the only Head of State in the world who was brought to trial to face charges stemming from the 2008 financial crisis during which Iceland's top three banks collapsed.



Mr. Haarde delivered an eloquent speech and invited students to ask him as many questions as they wanted about his perceptions of the crisis and the policy decisions that he took in 2008. Mr. Haarde was incredibly generous with



his time - not only did he attend the entire two day conference, but he even joined students participants at a social event after the conference to further discuss the policy lessons he has learned from a lifetime in public office.

Beyond the panels and the keynote speaker, the content of EPPC 2012 was enriched by the variety of public policy presentations which many students from participating schools delivered to their peers.

Student presenters were given added incentive this year to compete with one another to deliver the most compelling presentation knowing that they had a chance to win the *IPLI Best Presentation and Best Paper Award*. Presentations were vetted by panels of expert judges and a "panel of peers."



At the end of the conference, the *IPLI Best Presentation Award* was given to Alvise Lennkh, Alexander Ballantyne and Julian Ebner. The *IPLI Best Paper Award* was received by Khayti Malik.

## > Panel Outlines

### Panel I – Rethinking Economic Crises

The purpose of this panel was to discuss innovative ideas related to economic crises. The speakers impressed participants with a wide range of topics and surprising insights, urging the participants to think about economic crises from fresh perspectives.



Jacint Jordana, director of the hosting university IBEI, started the discussion by highlighting the political aspects of the current economic crisis. The focus of his presentation rested on the process of dismantling public policy as a consequence of the current crisis, especially in Spain.

Matt Davis, professor of political science at Newcastle University then went on to discuss a topic few people had previously considered, namely the 'aesthetics' of the financial crisis. Mr. Davis touched on a variety of ideas, such as the general financialization of



relationships, most importantly the financialization of work as a purely transaction based activity.

Nicholas Dunbar, author and financial journalist carried on to uncover the narratives behind the current crisis. Mr. Dunbar's described the rather poorly constructed institutional frameworks within politics as well as within the private sector. His description of some of the mistakes that led the EU to the state it now finds itself trapped in provided the audience with the following valuable insights: Policy makers should stress-test their policies within their institutional frameworks to predict the wide range of incentives that can be created by new rules; and secondly, policy makers should learn more about the importance of discount rates.



Mr. Alan AtKisson, author and founder of the AtKisson group, which focuses mainly on sustainable development, was the last speaker and he ended the panel discussion by readjusting the focus onto the big picture. According to Mr. AtKisson, historic levels of growth cannot continue, especially given the global population explosion and increasing demand for western-style lifestyles. Pursuing public policies of unrestrained growth risks the sustainability of the planet's resources and fundamental paradigm shifts need to be considered more seriously.



## Panel II – Austerity vs. Spending

The purpose of this panel was to discuss the current European debate of Austerity vs. Spending. This topic has come to the forefront with the recent crisis in Greece and throughout Europe. However, this issue is also fundamentally centered within the larger topic of Keynes vs. Classical economic theories.



António Martins da Cruz, former foreign minister of Portugal, ambassador and president of the Portuguese Commission of the European League for Economic Cooperation moderated and introduced the panel by outlining the bleak and dramatic situation in which the European project finds itself. Quoting Jacques Delors, da Cruz found that the EU is "on the verge of social and political destruction." He asked a crucial question to the panelists: "will fiscal austerity be regarded as the fatal decision to accelerate the downfall?"



Nikos Christodoulakis, former finance minister of Greece in the years of 2001-2004 was the first panelist to underline the dangers of the continued recession, which austerity is forcing not only on Greece but also on other southern European states. The causes of the crisis are seen to lay with asymmetry problems within the EU, namely the differences in competitiveness,

for which no counterbalancing policy tool is in place. Mr. Christodoulakis convincingly argued that stimulus programs and a mutualization of European debt through Eurobonds combined with more integrated economic governance is the only way out of the current situation.

Prof. Ansgar Belke, lecturer and economic researcher at the DIW began his presentation by stressing that we are dealing with a current account crisis, which means that fiscal austerity cannot be the entire answer. Acknowledging that unlike Ireland, Greece will not be able to pull it itself out of the crisis through draconian spending cuts, he went on to claim that, historically, countries have rarely "grown themselves out of debt." Overall, Prof. Belke did not follow the argumentation of a classic "fiscal hawk", however he was the panelist who was the least critical of the German political position regarding the current EU crisis.



Mr. Carles Gasoliba, former member of the European Parliament, and current president of the Spanish Commission of the European League for Economic Cooperation, ended the panel by putting the current crisis into a larger European perspective. Mr. Gasoliba argued in favor of an Agenda 2020, to attempt to set the European project on a stable future trajectory, however unlikely this may now seem. He stressed the tiny relative economic weight of each EU country on the new world stage of large rising economies and argued that only as an integrated whole can the EU be an influential player in this new game.



## > Presentation and Paper Winners

During this year's conference, two winners were selected at the end of the event to receive the *IPLI Best Presentation Award*. The winner of the *IPLI Best Paper Award* was selected at the start of the conference.

### IPLI Best Presentation Award

Breakout 1: Origins and Impacts of the Economic Crisis  
Alvise Lennkh (SIPA) – *Eurobonds*

Breakout 2: The Role of Financial Markets  
Alexander Ballantyne & Julian Ebner (GSE) - *Living with bubbles: What do they do and what should we do?*

### IPLI Best Paper Award

Khyati Malik (Sciences Po) - *Is Global Financial Regulation 'captured' by Private International Financial Firms?*



## > More Information

The EPPC 2012 team has made a large effort to make all of The pre- and post-conference information available online at the [www.eppconference.com](http://www.eppconference.com) website.

Pictures, speaker bios, student information, and detailed schedules about the conference can be found on the website. Also, more detailed Panel Outlines are available.

The EPPC 2012 organizing committee would like to extend its thanks to all who helped plan and participate in this year's conference and lastly extends its sincerest gratitude to the *International Policy and Leadership Institute* for being the main sponsor of this year's event: [www.policyleadershipinstitute.org](http://www.policyleadershipinstitute.org)

