

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

# The Future of Representative Democracy

Berlin, Germany, 13-15 December 2007

Convened by:  
**Prof. Wolfgang Merkel <sup>①</sup> and Prof. John Keane <sup>②</sup>**

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**Main Objectives of the Workshop:**

What are the current contours and probable futures of representative democracy? In practice, there has always been a gap between the ideals of representative democracy and its actually existing forms. Some observers draw from this the conclusion that expressions of dissatisfaction with representative democracy are normal, even healthy reminders of the precious contingency of a form of government that has no other serious competitors. According to other observers, euphoria about representative government is unwarranted. The mechanisms of representation that lie at the heart of actually existing democracies are said to be afflicted with problems. These observers claim that such difficulties are nurturing public concerns about the future of representative democracy itself. In democratic systems as different as the United States, India, Germany, Great Britain, Argentina and Australia, these observers point to evidence of a creeping malaise: formal membership of political parties has dipped; voter turnout at elections is tending to become more volatile; levels of trust in politicians and government are generally in decline; public perceptions of the deformation of policy making by private power, above all by organised business interests, are rising. When considered together, these disparate trends have encouraged some analysts and citizens to draw the conclusion that the system of representative democracy is breeding political disaffection. Others have argued that the ideals of representative democracy are themselves now under siege, even that we are heading towards an epoch of ‘post-democracy’.

How plausible are these claims about the decline or decay or disappearance of representative democracy? The purpose of the workshop is to address such claims by taking stock of the present and future ideals and institutions of representative democracy. Our aim is to combine a small group of key academic figures of the study of democracy and a group of younger scholars whose ongoing research focuses on this subject and to engage them into a discussion. The design of the workshop is straightforward. There will be a brief introductory presentation, “Visions of Representative Democracy”, and two main sessions: “The performance of existing representative democracies” and “The future of representative democracy”. Each session will seek to clarify the overall contours of the subject through detailed presentations and discussions.

## PROGRAMME

### Thursday 13 December 2007

morning	<i>Arrival</i>
14:00-14:15	<b>Welcome</b> <b>Wolfgang Merkel</b> , ( <i>Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), DE</i> )
	<b>Introduction</b>
14:15-14:45	<b>Rethinking the Origins and Future of Representative Government</b> <b>John Keane</b> , ( <i>Centre for the Study of Democracy, London, UK and WZB, Berlin, DE</i> )
14:45-15:15	<b>Discussion</b>
15:15-15:45	<b>Contemporary Forms of Representative Democracy</b> <b>Klaus von Beyme</b> , ( <i>Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, DE</i> )
15:45-16:15	<b>Discussion</b>
16:15-16:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
	<b>First Session</b>
16:30-17:00	<b>Performance and Deficits of Present-day Representation</b> <b>Bernhard Weßels</b> , ( <i>Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), DE</i> )
17:00-17:30	<b>Discussion</b>
17:30-18:00	<b>How to Improve the Performance of Political Parties... and Why Bother?</b> <b>Philippe Schmitter</b> , ( <i>Central European University, Budapest, HU</i> )
18:00-18:30	<b>Discussion</b>
19:00	<i>Dinner at WZB</i>

### Friday 14 December 2007

	<b>Second Session</b>
09:00-09:30	<b>Do Parliaments Have a Future?</b> <b>David Beetham</b> , ( <i>University of Essex, UK</i> )
09:30-10:00	<b>Discussion</b>
10:00-10:30	<b>Democracy on Trial: On Some Recent Conceptions of Political Deliberation</b> <b>Nadia Urbinati</b> , ( <i>Columbia University, New York, US</i> )
10:30-11:00	<b>Discussion</b>
11:00-11:15	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:15-11:45	<b>Multinational States: Threat or Opportunity for Representative Democracy?</b> <b>Sonia Alonso</b> , ( <i>Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), DE</i> )

11:45-12:15	<b>Discussion</b>
12:15-12:45	<b>Engendering Representation</b> <b>Drude Dahlerup</b> , ( <i>Stockholms Universitet, SE</i> )
12:45-13:15	<b>Discussion</b>
13:30-14:30	<i>Lunch at WZB</i>
	<b>Second Session, continued</b>
14:30-15:00	<b>Representation and Democracy: Revisions and Possibilities</b> <b>Michael Saward</b> , ( <i>Open University, Milton Keynes, UK</i> )
15:00-15:30	<b>Discussion</b>
15:30-16:00	<b>Representation beyond the Nation-State</b> <b>Michael Zürn</b> , ( <i>Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), DE</i> )
16:00-16:30	<b>Discussion</b>
16:30-16:45	<i>Coffee break</i>
16:45-17:15	<b>The Limits of Representative Democracy</b> <b>Bhikhu Parekh</b> ( <i>House of Lords and University of Westminster, UK</i> )
17:15-17:45	<b>Discussion</b>
17:45-19:00	<b>Concluding Remarks and Follow-up Research Activities</b> <b>John Keane</b>
19:00-19:30	<b>Discussion</b>
20:30	<i>Dinner (Café Einstein, Kurfürstenstr. 58, 10785 Berlin)</i>

## **Saturday 15 December 2007**

*Departure*

## European Science Foundation

### **Objectives of the ESF Standing Committee for Social Sciences (SCSS)**

The mission of the **ESF Standing Committee for Social Sciences (SCSS)** is as follows:

- to promote high quality social science research at the European level;
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- to help support innovative research ideas and approaches emanating from the scientific community, and
- to play an institutional role in strengthening European social science research infrastructure.

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