



SIMON HIX

Harold Laski Professor of Political Science
London School of Economic and Political Science

Laudatio by Alina Bârgăoanu, Vice-Rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, for awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Professor Simon Hix, London School of Economics

Distinguished Rector,

Dear professor Simon Hix,

Dear professor Dan Korn,

Distinguished guests,

Dear members of the academic community,

Dear colleagues,

Dear students,

It is a great honour to hold this *Laudatio* on the occasion of the award of the title Doctor Honoris Causa by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration to a distinguished member of the academic community, Simon Hix, Harold Laski Professor of Political Science, London School of Economics, and Fellow of the British Academy.

When awarding the Harold Laski professorship to Simon Hix this September, the director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, Craig Calhoun said that, in case of personalities such as the one that we are celebrating today, one can easily resort to the following rhetorical device: “Simon Hix needs no introduction”. And indeed, for most of us in this auditorium, Simon Hix needs no introduction. We know his works very well, we



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quote from them rather heavily and rely on concepts such as “limited democratic politics” when looking at EU politics. And yet, in spite of the fact that his works are very popular among the Romanian scholars dealing with EU affairs, let me make an extended presentation of his career as an academic intellectual and thus highlight the reasons for which the Senate of our university decided to bestow the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to professor Simon Hix.

Professor Simon Hix is Director of the Political Science and Political Economy Group at the London School of Economics and the co-editor of the journal *European Union Politics*. He has held visiting appointments at several top universities, including Stanford, Berkeley, UC San Diego, Sciences-Po in Paris, the Hertie School of Government in Berlin, the College of Europe in Bruges, and Korean Institute for International Economic Policy in Seoul.

He has extensive consultancy experience, including for the UK Cabinet Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Policy Centre, the Asian Development Bank, and has given evidence to the European affairs committees in the House of Lords and House of Commons.

In 2008 he won the prestigious Fenno Prize from the American Political Science Association for his book (co-authored with Abdul Noury and Gerard Roland) "Democratic Politics in the European Parliament" (Cambridge, 2007); in 2005 he won the Longley Prize of the American Political Science Association for the best article on representation and electoral systems; and in 2004 he won a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award. Other



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Honours and Prizes, too numerous to mention integrally, include: Senior Fellow award (UK Economic and Social Research Council, 2015), Best Article in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, in the decade 2002 – 2011, Bernard Crick Prize for Outstanding Teaching, awarded by the UK Political Studies Association (2000), and many more.

Please allow me to add a few more words on Professor Hix's significant achievements.

He took his undergraduate and Masters degrees at the London School of Economics and Political Science and his PhD at the European University Institute, in Florence. After lecturing in European Politics at Brunel University from 1996 to 1997, Simon Hix joined the London School of Economics and Political Science and was promoted to Professor in 2004.

His main research interests include: the European Union politics and policy, the EU legislative process and the European Parliament, parties and elections, and rational choice theory. He authored and co-authored 6 books ("The Political System of the European Union" being at the 3rd edition, and translated into 8 languages), as well as numerous chapters in edited books, articles and working papers, thus influencing the scholarly debate on the European Union politics and policy.

His uniquely incisive and thought-provoking contribution expands into three broad directions: the EU envisaged as a political system, the voting behavior in Parliaments (in particular the European Parliament) and the democratic deficit of the EU.



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Professor Hix's earlier work focuses on political parties in the European Union, European integration and the political system of the EU. He had the vision to publish his book "The Political System of the European Union" in 1999, when it was still somewhat controversial to conceive of the EU as a political system. His choice was justified by the awareness that politics in the European Union means party politics. The groups with the most powerful and institutionalized position in the EU system are the governments of the EU member states, and the political parties that make up these governments. Moreover, as in domestic politics, competition between party elites for political office and public policy outcomes is an essential feature of EU politics. Professor Hix's work provides valuable insights into how the EU can function as a full-blown political system without a complete transformation of the territorial organization of the state.

Another outstanding contribution is his APSA Fenno Prize winning book "Democratic Politics in the European Parliament (Themes in European Governance)", published in 2007 in co-authorship with Abdul Noury and Gérard Roland. The aforementioned volume focuses on the internal cohesion of the European Parliament, especially the voting behavior of the members of this institution. With the European Parliament comprising politicians from many different countries, cultures, languages, national parties and institutional backgrounds, one might expect politics in the Parliament to be highly-fragmented and unpredictable. This was contradicted empirically in October 2004, when the European Parliament refused to elect the new Commission, the European Union executive branch. In spite of this, parties and politics inside the European Parliament had been developing for some time before becoming visible to the general public or even to EU scholars. The work of Simon Hix and his colleagues has the merit of



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explaining how this process developed: why MEPs chose to organize as supranational parties in the European Parliament in the first place, why these parties then evolved as powerful agenda-setting actors, why voting along supranational party lines gradually replaced voting along national party lines as the dominant form of behavior in the Parliament, and ultimately how democratic politics emerged in the only directly elected institution at the European level.

Simon Hix is not afraid of controversial and pressing issues, such as EU's incapacity to undertake economic reforms and define its place in the world, or the worrying trend of constantly increasing public apathy towards the EU, as citizens feel isolated from the institutions in Brussels and see no way to influence decisions made at EU level. Simon Hix tackles these problems in his book "What's Wrong with the Europe Union and How to Fix It" (2008). He sees three explanations to this question: political gridlock, lack of popular legitimacy, and EU's democratic deficit. There is a "democratic deficit" in the EU, but solving it does not imply giving power back to the states or assuming even more power on behalf of the EU. Rather, what the EU needs is, and I quote, "a battle for control of political power and the policy agenda at the European level, between rival groups of leaders with rival policy platforms". In simpler terms, what the EU needs is a shift towards political contestation; meaning (and I quote) "an institutional design that allows for a contest for leadership and control of a policy agenda and a pattern of elite behaviour where contestation is accepted and where losers in decisions are willing to accept the legitimacy of the winners". What is also needed, if I may, is a pattern of elite behavior where winners in decisions are willing to accept the legitimacy of the losers, too. The refugee crisis offers a case in point, a case in point in reverse, where neither such



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acceptance of contestation nor an acceptance of the losers' position could be found. The vote against mandatory quotas for refugees was not accepted as legitimate; instead, such an "incompliant" vote was slammed by the winners of such a proposal. I happen not to be particularly happy with the vote against accepting mandatory quotas, but this does not mean that I agree with this "slamming the losers" strategy, with threatening the "incompliant" member states for taking a different stand on a very sensitive issue.

Coming back to the issue of democratic deficit, Professor Hix's proposals on how to overcome it include sensible measures, such as: holding an open contest for the position of commission president, making the Council of the European Union more transparent, giving the European Parliament more power and many others. Again, let me quote from Craig Calhoun, director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, who underlined that these proposals were not taken in as deeply as their promoter may have wished. Which is a pity.

I dwelled on this contribution related to this problem of EU democratic deficit in order to make the point that professor Simon Hix is not only a theoretician, but also a passionate advocate of improvements in the EU. One of the chapters on this book is called "Why the European Union is more necessary than ever". In the midst of the economic crisis (2011), he wrote: "EU is in crisis. But it is worth saving. If it was scrapped tomorrow, more than 70 per cent of it would have to be rebuilt exactly as it is. [...] My hope is that Europe's politicians and policymakers realize this before it is too late. There is time to save the EU, and the best way to do so is to be more creative about how to make the EU open and democratic". His words sound as loud in 2015 as they did at the time of their writing.



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Professor Hix,

Let me take the liberty and talk on the behalf of such an outstanding Romanian audience with a high interest in EU affairs – scholars and students alike. I think that it is the common belief of people in this room and outside this room working in the academia, in the business area, in politics, of regular Romanian citizens that, just as you said, Europe is worth saving, that Europe is more necessary than ever. The tragedy of the EU (not particularly my choice of words, but of S. Soros') is of utmost interest for a country like Romania, lying at the EU's Eastern border in an ever-increasingly complex geopolitical environment. What Tony Blair once said, that had it not existed, the EU should have been invented, is all the more true, even more dramatically true, for a country like Romania. Romania has a fundamental interest in EU's existence, in its proper functioning and "revival". The EU, together with NATO, offers the most important and comprehensive security umbrella for Romania. The EU offers the framework and promise for prosperity and development, and NATO, those of security, stability, and recently, peace itself. The two are interrelated, and so are the two promises. Because there can be no peace without development and prosperity. Just like there can be no prosperity without the means to protect and secure it. So, yes, professor Simon Hix, you are right, Europe is worth saving, Europe is worth fighting for. My university and the Romanian community of EU affairs specialists widely share this view.

You identified yourself as a British pro-European or, more accurately, as a European pro-European. I am glad that, in this capacity, you have agreed to come to Bucharest and to our university to talk about Europe.