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## **Rational choice or deliberation? Theory and practice**

*MIREES' open lecture*

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On the 21th and 22th of April, among the MIREES (Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe) Open Lectures, there was a seminar held by professor of Political Science from Switzerland - Jürg Steiner. Professor Steiner published in 2012 "The Foundations of Deliberative Democracy". He taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at the University of Bern and at the European University Institute in Florence. In this two days interactive open lecture professor Steiner presented rational choice and deliberation theories, discussed with a practical approach.

In the first session Jürg Steiner explained the philosophical background of the rational choice and deliberation theories. Firstly, he explained the basic assumptions of these two theories in politics. So, rational choice in politics is concerned with power. Rational choice assumes that all people are egotistical, and as voters they need material goods, such as low taxes or for instance, health care. Likewise, politicians need to be elected or reelected. First assumption of the rational choice approach is related to internal rewards: everything what we do in a life, we do it for ourselves. Secondly, people have fixed preferences. Third assumption concerns operation in market ways. The fourth point explains operation with rewards and punishments of accepted or not accepted behavior. The last point is that rational choice theory also contains a notion of common good.

Professor Steiner presented deliberation theory with a particular focus on theories of deliberative politics. Deliberation assumes that people care not just about their family members or close friends but also about people all around the world. He mentioned three countries- Columbia, Bosnia and Brasil, where at the moment the political situation is still difficult. He discussed how, for example, in ordinary people's conversations traces of deliberation are much more recognizable than in parliamentary debates. He discussed the philosophical basis of deliberation, made by famous philosophers Emanuel Kant, Jürgen Habermas, Aristotle. The first aspect was focused on justification of arguments: in parliamentary discussion participants need to give their reasons and link these reasons in a logical way to the conclusion. Secondly, referring to the common good and listening to others is connected to truthfully respecting their arguments. Moreover, he has developed a measurement instrument, called Discourse Quality Index (DQI).

Professor Steiner involved students in an interactive discussion of deliberation and rational choice implementation in practice. He analyzed the major findings of the parliamentary debates comparing them to other debates. For instance, the interesting parallel was made between plenary sessions and committee meetings. In plenary sessions, more aggressive behavior was found

compared to committee meetings. This was related to the fact that in committee meetings discussion actors have a possibility to have more individual communication. Therefore there was more mutual respect and participators were more deliberative. It was also related with an influence of the media. Furthermore, he discussed the advantages of deliberation which could help in constitutional engineering. According to professor Steiner, good institutions are often necessary but not an indispensable condition. For instance, in Iraq or Bosnia and Herzegovina some major institutions are not really working. So institutions alone are often not sufficient without a culture of deliberation and a more deliberative system. This approach is related to social justice, where deliberation plays an important role. "If in a competitive system, parties or coalition of parties try to hold on to power, there is a danger for the environment, climate change, education or health care" (Jürg Steiner). Deliberation could show the positive effects by involving the ordinary citizens in the decision making process.

Overall, many departments and institutes nowadays are in a conflict, but choosing the way of discussion, by explaining arguments or taking decisions strategically could have a direct influence of how we are dealing with conflicts. "You can construct or deconstruct the world; it depends how you see the world, and how you are socialized" (Jürg Steiner).

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