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## Report on the 9th Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars “Democracy and Europe” (Meissen, 21–26 August 2023)

International cooperation, intergenerational dialogue and partnership – these were the key values behind the 9<sup>th</sup> Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars 2023 “Democracy and Europe”, organised after several years’ hiatus, by the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen (Hochschule Meißen (FH) und Fortbildungszentrum). The ambition of the organisers was to create a space for discussing the current state and future of democracy in Europe. Over two hundred students and academic took part in the scientific event. They represented the partner universities from the Czech Republic (Czech Technical University in Prague), Germany (Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen), Poland (Academy of Applied Sciences in Konin, Witelon Collegium State University, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and University of Wrocław) and Ukraine (Western Ukrainian National University in Ternopil). Thanks to the cooperation between the Institute of Administrative Sciences of the Faculty of Law, Administration and Economics of the University of Wrocław (WPAE UW<sub>r</sub>) and the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, initiated in 2015, a group of eleven students from WPAE UW<sub>r</sub>, accompanied by dr hab. Renata Kusiak-Winter,

dr hab. Przemysław Pest and mgr Paulina Pietkun, took part in the Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars.

The programme included the core part, with lectures, panel discussions and Q&A sessions with invited guests, as well as the informal part, during which participants in the Summer Faculty explored the history of the region and visited local architectural landmarks and selected tourist sites in Saxon Switzerland. Since German was the main language of the event, the organisers also sought to mitigate communication barriers among the participants (if any) with simultaneous interpretation from German into Czech, Polish and Ukrainian.

The opening ceremony of the 9th Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars took place on 21 August 2023. Prof. Dr. Frank Nolden, Rector of the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, welcomed all participants and, in a symbolic gesture, handed over the reins of the university to the Meissen students for the duration of the Summer Seminar. This was followed by speeches from representatives of the partner universities from Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine, who thanked for the invitation and the opportunity to be part of this major international scientific event.

The central topic of the first day was the contemporary understanding of the concept of democracy in European countries. The paper titled “Climate Change, War in Ukraine and Other Current Challenges” was delivered by the supervisor of the 9th Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schimmel. In his paper, he outlined the challenges that all European countries are facing at the moment, stressing the crucial importance of inherent and inalienable human dignity. It is human dignity that underpins civil society. The democratic system inherently involves public debates, contradictory positions and even disputes. However, the speaker believes that these should lead to consensual solutions that are acceptable to the majority, but with respect for the beliefs of the minority.

Another item on the agenda was a meeting with the Minister President of Saxony – Michael Kretchmer from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The politician started by familiarising the audience with his biography and outlined the main objectives of his political activities. The Minister President’s appearance was an interactive Q&A session, during which participants in the Summer Seminar had the opportunity to ask questions in real time, using a mobile app prepared by the organisers. Michael Kretchmer stressed the significance of informal dialogues in reinforcing democratic values, as well as addressing the German migration policy and the need to put in place solutions to properly secure the external borders of the European Union.

The first day concluded with a paper titled “Climate Change and Democracy,” delivered by dr hab. Renata Kusiak-Winter from the Department of Public Administration System at the Institute of Administrative Sciences of the Faculty of Law, Administration and Economics at the University of Wrocław. She outlined the major problems that Europe is facing today as a result of climate change and

identified possible corrective scenarios. According to the speaker, the condition for successfully combating the effects of the climate crisis is to have access to reliable and credible information and to undertake educational activities aimed at increasing environmental awareness among society. Professor Kusiak-Winter also underlined the critical importance of local and regional level initiatives, mentioning, for example, the “100 Climate-Neutral Cities by 2030” mission.

After all the agenda items had been covered, the participants of the Summer Seminar visited the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory (Meißner Porzellan-Museum) with the Schauwerkstatt demonstration workshop. Meissen porcelain is the first European porcelain, manufactured from the early 18th century in Meissen. The Meissen porcelain factory is still in operation today, being one of the few manufactories to continue the tradition of artisanal manufacture of luxury products. Another point on the programme included a tour around the historic centre of Meissen, including the Frauenkirche and the late Gothic Town Hall in Meissen.

The second day of the Summer Seminar titled “What is Democracy: Democracy Contextualised” focused on issues covering an assessment of the state of democracy in selected European countries. The first lecture in the morning session, titled “What is Democracy?” was delivered by Agnes Scharnetzky from the Dresden University of Technology. She drew attention to selected definitional and argumentative problems in the debate on the state of democracy in Germany, as well as offering an authoritative definition of the democratic system. The next guest, Jonas Löschau, councillor of the city of Bautzen in Saxony from the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), acquainted the audience with the experiences of the younger generation living in and around the city of Bautzen. In his speech, Mr Löschau spoke about the dangers of an ageing population and encouraged participants in the Summer Seminar to get involved in their local communities. The next speaker in this session was Julian Strechel, an activist of the SPD youth organisation in Görlitz. Julian Strechel presented SPD’s core demands, i.e. guaranteeing equal opportunities and taking steps to counteract the exclusion of young people due to their place of residence, improving public transport and transport in rural areas, protecting the environment and promoting renewable energy investments. Once again, a call was made from the stage to boost the involvement of young Saxon citizens in local affairs and to make an active use of the tools available to enable the younger generation to participate in shaping public spaces.

The second part of that day’s session concentrated on public finance management in Poland. All papers were delivered by students of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. Małgorzata Lenga, Izabela Frątczak and Iwo Stanisławski gave a paper titled “The Citizens’ Budget as a Co-Governance Mechanism.” In their paper, Wiktoria Anna Woźniak, Kacper Kostrzewa, Małgorzata Ryfa and Klaudia Samorajczyk focused on the participation of local government units in covering investment, modernisation and renovation expenses and the costs of

maintenance and operation of police organisational units in Poland. The last paper in this session, delivered by Nina Kurpios, Zofia Mytlewska and Piotr Olender, concerned the principle of openness of public finances in formal and material terms and the principle of transparency of public finances.

Another point on the agenda was a session of lectures addressing fundamental democratic values from the perspective of the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine. The first speaker, Dr. Rudolf Heidu from the Czech Technical University in Prague, gave a lecture on the current challenges of democracy in the Czech Republic. The speaker believes that the greatest challenge faced by modern democratic political systems is “an adventure called freedom, which, although demanding, is nevertheless achievable”. The democratic values that are particularly cherished in the Czech Republic are a freedom of press, an independent judiciary, social security and a market economy. Another paper, showing a Polish perspective, was delivered by Paulina Pietkun, a doctoral student at the Department of Administrative Law of the Institute of Administrative Sciences of the Faculty of Law, Administration and Economics at the University of Wrocław. In her paper, she discussed the basic features of the Polish political system, with classification according to the type of political regime, the principles of organisation of the state apparatus and the territorial structure of the state, as well as the most important constitutional principles of the state system. The speaker also drew attention to the ongoing problems with meeting the standards of the normative model in Poland. The next paper concerning the current situation in Ukraine was delivered by Prof. Olga Tsaryk, PhD from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Information and Communication Technologies of the West Ukrainian National University in Ternopil. She began by showing a moving film depicting the reality of everyday life for people in war-torn Ukraine. Next she gave an overview of Ukraine’s political system and highlighted the wide range of powers vested in the head of state. The lecture concluded with the words: “the future of Ukraine is not without uncertainty, but it is also not without hope”.

At the end of the framework programme, the participants of the Summer Seminar took part in a sports picnic on the premises of the Meißen-Bohnitzsch student dormitory. FLAE UWr students took an active part in team games, including a volleyball match, a football match and egg throwing.

The third day of the Summer Seminar began with participants visiting the late Gothic Albrechtsburg Castle in Meissen. Afterwards, the participants listened to an organ concert in the nearby Cathedral of St John and St Donatus. The first item on the agenda was a panel discussion: “The Future of Europe: How to Cope with War, Populism and Nationalism?” with MEPs. The meeting was an exchange of views between representatives of three different parties: Anna Cavazzini spoke for the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), Matthias Ecke outlined the views of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands – SPD) and Dr. Peter Jahr represented the position of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU).

Following a panel discussion with MEPs, three papers were delivered. The first was delivered by Michelle Tredup, working for OXFAM International, an international humanitarian aid organisation for people in poverty crisis. She spoke on the European model for the protection of human rights, as well as their legal-natural character. The next paper, by Dr. Matthias Ernst Probst from the Saxon State Ministry of Justice and for Democracy, Europe and Equality (SMJusDEG), addressed the concept of defensive democracy and the ways of coping with the enemies of democracy. Dr. Matthias Ernst Probst gave the participants an overview of, among other things, the legal regulations related to the procedure for initiating disciplinary proceedings against public officials and judges in Germany.

Another speaker was Sophie Pojar from the Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies at the TU Dresden (HAIT). The lecture concerned a radical movement called *Reichsbürger* (which translates as Citizens of the Reich) and the treatment of enemies of democracy in Germany by the public administration. The speaker presented the extensive results of quantitative research, according to which 2.8% of the 23,000 respondents demonstrated inclinations to express far-right views.

The fourth day of the Summer Seminar included a trip to the Bautzen II National Memorial in Bautzen. The “Stasi” (short for Staatssicherheitsdienst, East German State Security Service) prison was a political prison from 1956 to 1989. The National Memorial was established in 1993 upon the initiative of the Bautzen-Komitee, bringing together former prisoners, and is now under the auspices of the Foundation for Saxon Memorials (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten). Some participants of the Summer Seminar spent Thursday afternoon exploring Königstein Fortress, the pearl of Saxon Switzerland. The other participants took part in a rafting trip on the River Elbe.

The last official day of the Summer Seminar and debates was an open space session. The organisers of the Summer Seminar invited eight experts to give a brief overview of the topics to be discussed further in smaller groups. Each discussion panel was a venue for an active exchange of ideas and views, with participants being able to explore different perspectives and seek compromise solutions together. The experts for the first panel were Prof. Dr. Samia Härtling from the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen and Dr. Paweł Kobes, from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Witelon Collegium State University in Legnica. The facilitators led a discussion on prejudices and cultural stereotypes. The host of the second discussion panel in the open space session was dr hab. Przemysław Pest from the Department of Financial Law at Faculty of Law, Administration and Economics at the University of Wrocław. The discussion concerned a dilemma: “Should the rich help the poor? If so, can the rich make their aid conditional?”. Another expert, Daniel Andrae, lecturer in the Department of General Administration at the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, invited participants to a debate on: “Democracy at municipal level”. “Democracy

is the only form of state that needs to be learnt” – with this quote Andrea Büttner, Managing Director of the Saxon Youth Foundation (Sächsische Jugendstiftung), invited the participants to a discussion on the role of higher education in fostering democratic attitudes. Claudia Conradi, lecturer in the Department of General Administration at the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, started a discussion on the concepts of representative democracy and direct democracy. The host of the following panel was Alaa Yahya, a student at the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, who concentrated on migration policy and integration issues. Referring to the current geopolitical situation in Europe and the world, Dr. Rudolf Heidt strove, together with the participants of the Summer Seminar, to answer the following question: “Does accession to NATO require the consent of the great powers? Prof. Dr. Thomas Schimmel centred his attention on the reasons for the increasing popularity of controversial political parties with undemocratic views. The goal of discussion was to find an answer to the question: “How to cope with political extremism?” The last expert, Valentin Lippmann, Member of the Landtag of Saxony, invited participants to discuss the topic: “How does education contribute to the development of a democratic mindset? What are the threats to democracy at the moment?” The open space session ended with a brief summary of the discussions in all the groups, provided by the experts at the podium.

The last lecture during the Summer Seminar was given by Dr. Rudolf Heidt, on Madeleine Albright’s role in laying the foundations for universally accepted democratic principles. The first woman to serve as US Secretary of State had a tremendous impact on international security policy. Dr. Rudolf Heidt made it clear that Madeleine Albright was the *spiritus movens* behind the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to the North Atlantic Alliance. The speaker concluded his speech with the following remark: “I hope that we all have Europe at heart, even if we do not live in it but next to it.”

The 9th Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars of Administration Scholars “Democracy and Europe” 2023 concluded with a formal address by the Rector of the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, Prof. Dr. Frank Nolden. The Rector extended his thanks to the lecturers, administrative staff, translators and students involved in the preparation of the Summer Seminar in substantive and technical terms, as well as to all the participants. The Summer Seminar’s framework programme culminated in a group photo in front of the main building of the Saxon School of Public Administration campus in Meissen.

On 26 August 2023, participants had an opportunity to go on a trip to Dresden. The tour around the capital of Saxony included, among other things, a walk around the historic part of the city, a visit to the Semper Opera House and an opportunity to have a look at the Panometer, paintings by Yadegar Asisi with the panorama of Dresden in 1756 and in 1945.

As Ernest Gellner said, “no civil society, no democracy”. The 9th Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars of Administration Scholars “Democracy and

Europe” 2023 provided an international space to discuss the current condition and future of democracy in European countries. The core part of the event included discussions on a range of crucial problems that most countries are currently facing, e.g. combating the effects of the climate crisis and taking effective steps to achieve climate neutrality, improving the organisational stability of national public administration structures, ensuring peace, security and public order in a national, European and global perspective, as well as creating and implementing a coherent migration policy. The unique character of the event, organised by the Saxon School of Public Administration in Meissen, is also reflected in the successful combination of the traditional form of lectures and conference papers with interactive panel discussions and an open space format. Among the speakers at the Summer Seminar, there were not only academics from the partner universities, but also politicians, civil servants and representatives of social organisations. The informal part of the programme was also an excellent addition to the framework programme, fostering ties between students from the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and Ukraine. We extend our sincere thanks to the organisers of the event for the invitation and for the opportunity to be part of the 9th Summer Seminar of Administration Scholars “Democracy and Europe” 2023.