

## **„Writing Parliamentary History: Perceptions and Memories of MPs in Europe“. Report EuParl.net workshop on working with oral sources (Prague February 27).**

Workshop organized by two EuParl.net members, namely the Institute for Contemporary History and the Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien, took place in Prague on February 27, 2015. It brought nearly 20 European researchers together who shared the experience of working with oral resources when writing on parliaments in Germany, Britain, Finland, Slovenia, France and Czechoslovakia / Czech Republic.

The discussion started over quantitative analysis of interviewing and observing Members of the German Bundestag both in parliament and in their constituencies. Sven Siefken concluded there is an omnipresent discrepancy between what MPs say they do and what they in fact do. Sven Jürgenkes presented KGPParl's „Fraktionenprojekt“ which analyses the meetings of the Bundestag party fractions recorded in 1969-1990. The questions of context – what was recorded and what was not, did the speakers know they are recorded etc. – were brought to attention. Further dilemmas of low reliability and yet high value of oral sources were raised by Bettina Tüffers, Maja Gradenwitz and Joni Krekola.

Emma Peplow and Priscila Pivatto from the British History of Parliament Trust have focused more on the psychological part of interviewing: how to build the interviewed person's trust and how to translate the interviewing experience of “legacy building” into the written description of the recording so that it can be a part of the analysis.

Adela Gjuricova based her concluding speech on her team's interviewing experience within the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly 1989-1992 project. She referred to human memory as a natural capacity to rework experience into stories, a capacity which is used by politicians for specific purposes. She also pointed out that interviewing became a mainstream method in the social sciences in the 1960s when the social science began to give voice to lower social classes, minorities etc. Today's situation is special in the hypertrophy of „everybody interviewing everybody“, including the most privileged ones like MPs. Gjuricova concluded though that oral sources were a crucial instrument to „give measure“ to the presumably more reliable written documents in their research.

All in all, the workshop discussions stretched from technical questions (e.g. possibilities of quantitative analysis of re-written recordings), via philosophical ones (relation of memory to historiography and of both of these to historical reality), to psychological and moral ones. They showed the oral sources as remarkable material complementary to traditional written documents.

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