

## Portrait of Wojciech Gagatek

### Sciex Fellow and PostDoc in Political Sciences at the University of Zurich

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*Wojciech Gagatek (32) studied political sciences and law at Warsaw University before writing his PhD at the European University Institute in Florence. Since 2010 he has been Assistant Professor at the Centre for Europe at the University of Warsaw. Staying for 12 months, he's currently doing his PostDoc at the University of Zurich (UZH) with Prof. Hanspeter Kriesi, working on his Project 'The Formation of a Future EU Party System: Lessons from the Swiss Experience'.*

### A political scientist must not miss elections

Wojciech Gagatek started his Sciex Fellowship in Switzerland on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2011 and spent his first couple of weeks dealing with all the bureaucratic aspects of being a visiting researcher. Zurich being a tough place to find an apartment, he could rely on his Host Mentor's assistance providing him with a letter of recommendation that could pave the way towards getting one of the sparse flats in town. Gagatek would go as far as to advise future Fellows not to start their Sciex Fellowship in August or September at the beginning of an academic term. Then why did he start in this period? The answer is simple. He could not start earlier due to the didactic obligations at home nor later, as he would not miss the autumnal Swiss parliamentary election campaign for the world!

But the challenge to adapt to the new surroundings was not that big, Gagatek having been a fellow or an intern in Brussels, London and Florence before. The European University Institute in Florence, hotspot for political sciences, had actually been the Alma Mater where he obtained his PhD degree. His future Host Mentor Prof. Hanspeter Kriesi was a visiting fellow at EU

at the same time, therefore they had the opportunity to discuss the idea of comparing the Swiss party system to the European level, an offspring of Gagatek's PhD topic - the proposal was in the pipeline.




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### Two countries, two Mentors – building bridges

As a PostDoc researcher at UZH, Gagatek has been invited by his Host Mentor to participate in giving training on democracy theory and practice to Serbian and Bulgarian parliamentarians and journalists. The second part of his 12-months Fellowship will also involve giving an undergraduate course on the ‘Dynamics of EU Policy Making’. Moreover, the whole academic structure giving chairs a rather large financial and decisional autonomy is a concept that appeals to Gagatek. An idea, he says, he will definitely take back to his Home Institution, as he sees benefits in work organisation, decentralization and an enhanced sense of community inside a researcher team. At Warsaw University, his Home Mentor Prof. Alojzy Nowak is currently running for rector. Nevertheless they can regularly discuss current research results and plan the next research projects, as enlarging the analysis of the Swiss party system to the system of Swiss federalism altogether - a potential model for the EU's political system?

Next to enjoying his liberty of focusing all his activities on research and publishing, Gagatek is preparing the mutual visits of his Home and Host Mentors to the respective partner university. Not only will these Short-term Visits



be an integral part of the project's mentoring but also allow both departments to profit from workshops and presentations given by outstanding scientists.

But first he will have to attend to his seventh conference since his arrival four months ago. During the annual congress of the Swiss Political Science Association he will present a paper on comparing the Swiss parties and party system - a 'cas spécial', as it is referred to in the literature - to the EU-level party. Adding to the enhancement of his international visibility, this will not only get him a feedback from his Swiss peers but also give him the opportunity to do some serious networking.

Originally having read law at Warsaw University and additionally obtaining an MA in political sciences, Gagatek is now enhancing his already very international background. "Sciex represents a very good tool for visiting researchers from Eastern Europe. It yet needs to be discovered by academics in Poland, who are still concentrated on European or Polish grants", Gagatek observes. Furthermore Polish colleagues in humanities and social sciences mostly think that a Sciex proposal would require a research topic linked to Switzerland, although this is not a prerequisite.

### **When turning home**

Talking to fellow Sciex researchers at the annual Sciex Fellow Reunion in autumn last year, he notes that they "were most probably having the best time of their career during this Fellowship", underlining the benefits of Sciex Fellowships for academics from the EU's 10 New Member States. On the other hand, Sciex is not only building up and strengthening ties in academia between Switzerland and the New Member States but also "bringing out 'ambassadors' for Switzerland - an investment that will sooner or later pay off", says Gagatek.

Having been told by a colleague about the programme at a time when Sciex was not yet well known at his home university,

Gagatek was the first of his department to come to Switzerland. He enjoys the infrastructure's high quality and the large multilingual stocks in libraries as much as the quality of life in general. Language diversity is only one of the many impressions he will take back to his Home Institution, where he hopes to increase his academic status. However he believes this to be a challenge Polish academia has to face on its way towards larger internationalization. Due to a prevalent identity discourse, one is expected to publish in Polish, while people should also start publishing to a higher degree in English in order to have a wider impact on global scientific discourse.

Publishing is currently very high up on Wojciech Gagatek's agenda. The second half of his stay in Switzerland will be dedicated to this task. Going back to Warsaw, publications on further research projects are pending. Meanwhile, he is thinking of preparing a joint EU grant application for his new Swiss research partners and his Home Institution - the collaboration is hence well on the way to being perpetuated. An Erasmus Agreement was discussed; unfortunately the costs of living are too high in Zurich and cannot be covered by Erasmus scholarships. But a regular staff mobility programme is likely to be put in place - in terms of Sciex: a success.

### **Sciex-NMS<sup>ch</sup>**

Scientific Exchange Programme between the New Member States of the EU and Switzerland

Sciex-NMS<sup>ch</sup> is part of the Swiss Contribution to the New Member States of the EU. It provides research Fellowships for Doctoral Candidates (6-24 months) and PostDocs (6-18 months) from the 10 NMS (BGR, CZE, EST, HUN, LTU, LVA, POL, ROU, SVK, SVN) to pursue their research in cooperation with Swiss researchers in Swiss research institutions. It provides also Short-term research Visits for Senior Researchers of a granted Fellowship.

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