

DIFFERENT ERA, SIMILAR PROBLEM: POLARIZATION

It may not be a fresh new topic but polarization is now stronger than ever and so is our common exposure to its outcomes. It has cultural, political and economic grounds throughout the West. The 23rd annual meeting of the European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC) took as its theme, polarization, an aged monster with very contemporary appearances.

As the confidence in democracy declines globally, the people are becoming more supportive of strong leaders who would not bother with parliamentary processes. As the refugee crisis still remains to be among the most urgent topics of our era, we need more than ever to think about the future of politics and shared future of our societies. The vanishing of the grounds for rational and facts-based debates due to the proliferation of fake news and the increasing popularity of nationalist and extremist leaders with anti-globalization and anti-immigrant sentiments are the common symptoms that we all face because of the rising levels of cultural, economic and political polarizations. Today, similar topics are making the same headlines in almost every country: income inequality, border security and immigration & integration issues.

The 23rd annual meeting of the European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC), bringing together politicians, academics, campaign managers and marketing professionals from 21 countries to discuss all these issues, took place in London on March 13-14 under the theme of "Polarization". The delegates debated on various topics including what campaign tools they could use to overcome polarization problems, ways to re-establish voter confidence, strategies to implement to harness women's votes, paths to construct a truths-driven arena in a postmodern era and techniques to advance for better data analysis and polling methods in the future elections. The conference, consisting of 19 different sessions, also presented workshops on the insights and outputs of the recent elections such as UK, Holland, Italy, Germany, Norway, Austria and Chile.

Among the participants were former Greece Prime Minister George A. Papandreou; Dr. Selin Sayek Boke, Vice Chair of Turkey's Republican People's Party; Mark Mellman, President of the American Association of Political Consultants; Dr. Nigel Griffiths, former Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry of British Labour Party; Dr. Matther J. Goodwin from Political Science Department of Kent University; Stephen Dorrell, the Chair of the NHS Confederation; Baroness Anne Caroline Jenkin, Conservative member of the House of Lords and Thomas Borwick, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) for the Vote Leave Campaign.

The annual EAPC conference also hosted the Polaris Awards, a global competition for campaigners, campaign managers, leaders, NGOs, innovators and exceptional work within the political communications, elections campaigning and public affairs industries. Being held for the second time, Polaris Awards welcomed applicants from United States, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Turkey, Sweden and Norway among other countries. An international jury of 22 people consisting of campaign managers and political strategists evaluated the participating projects and after a comprehensive evaluation process, a total of 39 works were awarded worldwide. Taking its brand name from the Pole Star, the brightest star visible that guided humanity for centuries, Polaris Awards has 21 main categories ranging from mobile and social media campaigns to fundraising and use of humour in political communication.

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