

# LSE News & Views

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## Creating a successful federation

In giving the 5th Ernest Gellner Memorial Lecture, *An Iron Law of Nationalism and Federation?*, on 24 May, Professor Brendan O'Leary began by recounting the generosity, professional standards and astounding scholarship of Ernest Gellner:



He summarised Gellner's theory of nationalism: stating that while respecting his work, it was imperative that, 'where evidence and logic demand it', his work should be modified and improved upon. While Gellner believed that nationalism is the primary principle of political legitimacy of modernity, he would have preferred it not to be so. He hoped that industrialisation would diminish national conflicts

and that emerging globalisation might prompt a supra national government which would manage technological, ecological and terrorist threats alongside the cantonisation of local and regional functions.

He was not against federalism: or other forms of polycultural and multinational or indeed post-national government if anything he was strongly in favour of them. He was just sceptical about their prospects, and their robustness in reviewing Gellner's ideas about the limited prospects for the reconciliation of nationalism with federalism, Professor O'Leary took the view that these were 'more powerful, and more consistent with the evidence than they seemed.'

He then went on to explain and discuss in detail the definition of federalism – a political philosophy recommending the use of federal principles; federal political systems – political systems that combine 'shared rule and self-rule'; federation – a codified and written constitution and a supreme court; and nationalism – a philosophy whereby the nation is 'collectively and freely insti-

tutionally expressed and ruled by its nationals.

Professor O'Leary stressed that, by using these definitions, there was nothing to prevent compatibility between federalism and nationalism. He then developed a theory that successful majoritarian federations require a Staatsvoik, a dominant people, and provided empirical evidence for it. Federations without a Staatsvoik required power-sharing or consociational devices if they were to be stabilised.

In conclusion, Professor O'Leary stated that, if the arguments he had put forward were broadly correct, they had powerful implications for the designers of federations. The UK could function as a federation, majoritarian or otherwise. But calls to have a tully-fledged European federation when it lacks a Staatsvoik 'may be a recipe for institutional disaster unless such calls are accompanied by strong commitments to consociational governance devices.'

## Future hopes



US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on her way to the Old Theatre (26 May) where she spoke on the relationship between the US and Russia

Her lecture was given as a precursor to President Clinton's visit to Russia this month and who would, she said, 'reiterate America's desire to see a Russia that is defining its greatness in 21st century terms: democratic in governance, market-oriented in its economic development, ruled by law, at peace with itself, and working with others for a more secure and prosperous world.'



## LSE Nobels: researching our winners



Research into the history of LSE for forthcoming

series in social science from Harvard in 1934.

finance, but after his appointment to the Chicago

at, comedy, discussion and social comment