

Democracy: Bridging Facts and Norms
REPORT: EVENT 2 / February 19, 2016 / Public lecture
"Justice, Democracy, and the Unconditional Basic Income"

Democracy: Bridging Facts and Norms

18.02.2016
18:30
UZH Zentrum

FACTS

- 1 Public lecture and discussion
- 2 _____
- 3 Justice, democracy, and the
- 4 unconditional basic income
- 5 _____
- 6 Speaker
- 7 Philippe Van Parijs
- 8 Université Catholique de Louvain
- 9 _____
- 10 Discussant
- 11 Reiner Eichenberger (UniFR)
- 12 _____
- 13 Moderator
- 14 Philipp Löpfe
- 15 _____
- 16 Followed by an apéro
- 17 _____
- 18 Rämistrasse 71, KOH-B-10
- 19 [http://democracynet.eu/activities/](http://democracynet.eu/activities/events15-16/)
- 20 [events15-16/](http://democracynet.eu/activities/events15-16/)
- 21 _____
- 22 Organised by DemocracyNet.eu
- 23 and Institut Zukunft
- 24 _____
- 25 With the support of UZH
- 26 Graduate Campus



Universität
Zürich ^{UZH}



Report // March 2016**Facts**

Thursday, February 18, 2016, 18:30-20:00

Location: University of Zurich Main Building, room KOH-B-10

Lecturer: Philippe Van Parijs

Discussant: Reiner Eichenberger (UniFr)

Moderator: Philipp Löpfe

Audience: Around 370-400 persons

Video-podcast: <https://cast.switch.ch/vod/clips/nwmuadfvp/streaming.html>

Event organized in collaboration with Institut Zukunft. This institute is engaged in promoting dialogue between the civil society and the economic sphere for future oriented solutions. It was involved in the launching of the *Grundeinkommen* initiative.

Summary of the lecture and discussion

In the first 40 minutes of the event, Philippe Van Parijs presented a lecture on the theme “Justice, Democracy, and the Unconditional Basic Income.” The first part of his talk was devoted to the question of Justice – which requires, in his view, the introduction of an unconditional basic income. Every legal resident in a country (except, for instance, tourists, prisoners and diplomats) should be able to rely on this minimal income for real freedom for all to be truly promoted. To those who question whether it is fair to give money to people who don’t work, Van Parijs answers that the way income is distributed today cannot be considered just. Some receive high salaries for jobs that are pleasant, while others get paid little for painful work. Moreover, there are no wages paid for some forms of work essential for the good functioning of society (e.g. care work, associative work, and so on).

The second part of his talk was centered on democracy – namely on how to translate the ideal of the unconditional basic income into a law that could be accepted by the Swiss citizens at the popular vote of June 5, 2016. He argued that the amount of the basic income should be closer to the current social aid (about CHF 1’000) than to the CHF 2’500 announced by the people who launched the *Grundeinkommen* initiative. The introduction of such an unconditional basic income would be the beginning of a ‘third model of social insurance’; as the two previous ones, it should start low but with confidence of the long-term impact. In Van Parijs’ view, the introduction of an unconditional basic income should be supported by all sides of civil society and parties: All those who want freedom, real freedom for all, should favor it. What is needed to make its adoption possible is an open debate, where all the good arguments should be listened to, and discussed properly.

A discussion between Van Parijs and the Swiss economist Reiner Eichenberger followed this lecture. Moderated by Philipp Löpfe, this discussion revolved around a number of questions: Is Switzerland the appropriate place to introduce an unconditional basic income? Does it really serve freedom? Is it a serious proposition from the economic perspective? How to finance such a universal income? Additional questions were raised by the audience: Does the unconditional basic income also enables individuals to live more fulfilling lives? Wouldn’t the positive impact of this income be lessened if the amount distributed was too low? And how to make it a tool towards reducing existing inequalities?

These challenging questions gave our speakers the chance to further present their views. The discussion between Van Parijs, Eichenberger and the broader public was lively, insightful and humorous. The informal feedback we received from the participants and the audience was very positive.

External outcomes

The presence of Philippe Van Parijs in Switzerland was noticed by the media. The French-speaking newspaper *Le Temps* published an extensive interview of the Belgian philosopher on the day of the lecture, and the German-speaking TV channel SRF3 interviewed him and recorded the conference for a television program that will be broadcasted on *3sat Kulturzeit*.