

Press release

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Marcel Benoist Swiss Science Prize is awarded to Lars-Erik Cederman

Bern, 3 September 2018 - Lars-Erik Cederman has been awarded this year's Marcel Benoist Swiss Science Prize. Mr Cederman, Professor of International Conflict Research at the ETH Zurich, will receive the CHF 250,000 prize for his work on political peace-building and the inclusion of ethnic minorities. Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Ammann, Chairman of the Foundation, personally informed Mr Cederman about the award. The award ceremony will take place in Bern on 15 November.

Today, conflicts between ethnic minorities and central governments are not uncommon – even in Europe. Mr Lars-Erik Cederman, a conflict researcher, has been able to demonstrate that regional autonomy for ethnic minorities and their involvement in political decisions are central to achieving lasting peace. Equally important is a balanced distribution of wealth and basic services. Mr Cederman is being awarded the 2018 Marcel Benoist Swiss Science Prize for his theoretical and empirical work.

New theories on inequality and conflict

In recent years, Mr Cederman has explored the relationship between inequality and conflict; he and his research group have compiled a global data set on ethnic groups. The data collection covers their opportunities to share in government power in the period from 1946 to 2017. Inequalities between ethnic groups were measured using surveys of experts and satellite images, before being plotted on a digital map. The data collection is available to politicians, academics and members of the public (see: <https://icr.ethz.ch/data/>).

Mr Cederman's work combines theoretical innovation with empirical sophistication. In his early research, he used computer models to develop new theories of world politics. This allowed him to show how states and nations develop and dissolve. Mr Cederman's findings contribute to a better understanding of the root causes of conflict and assist in finding solutions.

On learning of the award, Mr Cederman commented: "I am greatly honoured to receive the Marcel Benoist prize. I see the prize as recognition for my group's research and for the entire field of conflict and peace research."

Mr Cederman was born in Sweden in 1963, and has Swedish-Swiss dual nationality. He studied technical physics at Uppsala University and international relations at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva. He received his doctorate in political science from the University of Michigan in 1994. He then researched and taught at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, the University of Oxford, the University of California in Los Angeles and Harvard University. He has been Professor of International Conflict Research at the ETH Zurich since 2003.

Major contribution to the solution of societal problems

This year is the first time the Marcel Benoist Foundation has awarded the prize to someone working in the humanities and social sciences. Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Amman, explains: “Mr Cederman’s work on ethnic conflict acknowledges the important contribution of the humanities and social sciences to the resolution of societal problems.”

The Marcel Benoist Swiss Science Prize is the most prestigious science prize awarded in Switzerland. Since 1920, the Foundation has awarded the prize in recognition of outstanding research which is of importance to human life. In the course of its nearly one-hundred-year history, ten prize winners have subsequently been awarded the Nobel Prize.

First time selection of the prize-winner by the Swiss National Science Foundation

This year, for the first time, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) was responsible for selecting the prize-winner. Mr Cederman was selected from 26 nominees. The SNSF’s evaluation panel consisted of two elected representatives, six international experts, members of the SNSF National Research Council and a representative of the Marcel Benoist Foundation.

The selection process was largely digital and anonymous. The candidates’ gender, publication list and university were only disclosed to the evaluation panel in the second evaluation round. “The scientific community is complex and places high demands on research funding and on the selection of the best researchers. The SNSF uses innovative methods to make the selection process as fair as possible,” says Matthias Egger, President of the National Research Council of the SNSF.

Further information

For more information on the Marcel Benoist Swiss Science Prize and the selection process go to: www.marcel-benoist.ch The SNSF has supported several research projects by Mr Cederman since 2007: <http://p3.snf.ch/person-520986-Cederman-Lars-Erik>

Pictures of Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Amman with Lars-Erik Cederman will be available online from 2pm at: <http://bit.ly/prixbenoist>

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