

: Conference Report

Brussels Symposium 2017

sef:

A different angle. “Global South” perspectives on the European crises

Larissa Neubauer

In recent years, the European Union has undergone a number of serious crises. Challenges arose during the global financial crisis in 2007, followed by national debt crises, growing poverty and unemployment in many European countries. In 2015/2016, the influx of refugees and migrants seeking a safe haven in Europe demonstrated an overall disagreement among EU member states on refugee and migration policy. While searching for solutions, a growing identity crisis became noticeable, reaching a first peak with Great Britain's vote to leave the EU. Nationalism is a phenomenon also seen in other European member countries. As a result, one could gain the impression that Europe is mainly dealing with itself. But how are current European challenges perceived in other world regions? What do experts from Ethiopia, India or Indonesia expect from the EU today? Answers to these questions were provided at the sef: Brussels Symposium, held at the North Rhine-Westphalia Representative Office to the European Union.

Keep calm – and restore confidence again?

While celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2017, the European Union is occupied with a number of challenges questioning the nature and future of the Union. Dr Dr hc Klaus Haensch, former President of the European Parliament, reminded the audience that the founding promise back then was “no more war between European people, not no more crises”. Experts from Europe and abroad suggested to keep calm and use some of the recent crises as a chance

for progress. As State Secretary Dr Marc Jan Eu-mann from the Ministry for Federal Affairs, Europe and the Media of North Rhine-Westphalia emphasized in his welcome address, it was important to restore confidence in Europe again. It was his hope that the drifting apart will have passed by the end of the year.



Dr Dr hc Klaus Haensch

Will Europe be the beacon of the liberal world order?

According to Professor Ummu Salma Bava, Professor of European Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, looking at Europe from the “giant” India, the European integration was still

unprecedented and accounted for a success story. But apparently, being too close to the subject may contribute to forgetting past achievements. Despite the continued struggle over giving up or keeping sovereignty throughout its history, Europe had not forgotten its international duties. As an example, Bava mentioned the development of the EU’s global



Elmar Brok MEP, Dr Evi Fitriani, Shada Islam, Ziad Abdel Samad and Moderator Patrick Leusch (l.t.r.)

strategy, demonstrating that Europe is still capable of formulating policies. However, with a changing world between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, it remains a question whether the EU will continue to stand for a liberal world order. And then, there is a shift of power from the West to Asia. Europe 27 has to speak with one voice to maintain some influence on the world stage. To Shada Islam, the existence of Trump and Putin could turn out to be a gift for the EU forcing it to develop its own positions, policies and identity.

The need for more coherence in European policies

The question of Europe’s role in the world was also debated during the first panel discussion. A number of panelists underlined the mixed messages Europe sends out occasionally, lacking coherence in its policies. Europe wants to be seen as a soft power without using political power. One example brought up by Dr Evi Fitriani, Senior Lecturer at the University of Indonesia, pointed towards Europe’s own view as being an exporter of peace and conflict resolution, while at the same time selling a lot of arms to conflict driven countries. In addition, Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development in Beirut, evaluated Europe’s neighborhood policy as too eurocentric, not taking into account its neighbor’s interests. Especially during the migration crisis, Europe should have acknowledged that it was a worldwide crisis and

not just Europe’s. From an internal point of view, Shada Islam, Director Europe and Geopolitics from Friends of Europe, admitted that Europe is often times engaged with questionable governments, not listening to NGOs or young people on the ground on the support they need.

Several panelists questioned the recent trend of putting security related issues before development issues. It was criticized that core elements of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) are now also defined by security elements. Elmar Brok, Member of the European Parliament, defended the security aspect in development policies. In his opinion, Europe could provide as much development as one wants without making a difference if there aren’t security and good governance structures established at the same time.

Brexit – unexpected chances for a more pro-development trade policy?

But Europe will be preoccupied in the next few years with entangling British-European relations. The international agenda might move out of focus. However, a number of panelists emphasized the chances the new European order might offer. David Luke, Coordinator of the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in Addis Ababa, highlighted the opportunity for Britain and Europe to rethink their trade policies towards Africa. Especially the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) were deeply unpopular in Africa, and there might be a chance now to develop a more coherent and pro-development trade policy.

Seamus Jeffreson, Director of the European NGO network CONCORD, underlined the worrying sentiment of the Brexiteers’ campaigning on nostalgic ideas about the ancient Commonwealth, an asym-



H.E. Dr Patrick Ignatius Gomes (left) and Seamus Jeffreson

metrical system of the past based on colonialism. He emphasized that we all signed up for the global world and have to find a fair and proper way to live together. Since not only EPAs, but also trade agreements with the United States and Canada are under scrutiny by the people, Europe should concentrate on new coalitions for trade agreements working for the people and not for profit.

Britain's role in European development policy

Patrick Gomes, Secretary General of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), also added the importance of addressing the negative effects of globalization. The world community has agreed on the global Sustainable Development Goals, and all states have the obligation to implement them. In his view, a coherent policy development can help the EU to play an important role in fulfilling these commitments.

In light of the European development policy, Great Britain has played an important role in the past as a major funding source but also in formulating European development policies. Seamus Jeffreson underlined the importance of solidarity with the UK-based NGOs and that a close cooperation between UK and European actors will still be important to reach the development goals that were agreed upon. One major uncertainty that was mentioned by participants also, was the question of future European funding for development work and academic research in this field.

Closing borders – for more security?

Europe's migration policies are also critically reviewed outside of Europe. Looking at the numbers globally, most refugees flee to neighboring countries. Lebanon is one of the countries hosting the highest number of refugees compared to their own citizens. The communities and refugees are struggling with a lack of infrastructure and job opportunities. Despite the efforts to close borders and limit the number of migrants and refugees coming to Europe, for many, Europe is still seen as a place offering peace, stabil-

ity and functioning institutions. Gaining a Schengen visa remains attractive.



Dr Ramy Lakkis, Ralph Genetzke and Ablam Benjamin Akoutou (l.t.r.)

As Ramy Lakkis, Director of the Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training (LOST), criticized, it wasn't the sheer number of refugees and migrants seeking safety in Europe that created a perceived threat, but rather linking migration with the fear of Islamism and possible security issues. Political Scientist Ablam Benjamin Akoutou raised the concern that closing a door in front of other people's face will always trigger a bigger motivation to find out what's behind that door. All panelists agreed that a walling off strategy would only produce more illegal migration, and that Europe has to work on legal migration strategies instead.

Europe needs to "walk the talk"

The discussions around the EU refugee and migration policy, as well as its role as an international player concluded with similar findings: Europe should try to be less Eurocentric and take better care of how its policies influence other world regions. Europe is not a giant on the world stage, and other actors are emerging. But in order to play a role, many participants asked for an EU translating its common goals and values into more coherent policies. This was seen as one major important prerequisite for the EU being accepted internationally as a reliable actor "walking the talk".

Imprint

The Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. As a cross-party and non-profit-making organisation, the sef: provides an international high-level forum for shared thinking on urgent peace and development issues.

The reports to the conferences and events of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) provide information about the discussions and results in a compact form.

Published by
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:)/
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (sef:)
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Editor
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Design Basic Concept
Pitch Black Graphic Design
Berlin/Rotterdam

Layout
Gerhard Süß-Jung

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