

Event Report



No Guts, No Glory
A foreign policy for the
European Union

EIAS Book Talk
29 September 2020

On 29 September 2020, EIAS hosted the book talk "*No Guts, No Glory - A Foreign Policy for the European Union*", by Mr Brian McDonald, former Head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Korea (2006-2010) and former Head of the European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan (2003-2006). The event was chaired by Mr Alberto Turkstra, EIAS Senior Associate and Mr Erik Famaey, EIAS Senior Associate commented on the book as a discussant. Presentations by the speakers were followed by a Q&A session with the audience. EIAS was delighted to host its first live event since the beginning of the pandemic, respecting anti-Covid-19 measures and social distancing. The following report is a brief summary of the discussions.

"*No Guts, No Glory, A Foreign Policy for the European Union*" addresses copious challenges of the last decades, with a fallacious EU foreign policy as a common denominator. An EU foreign policy that should be institutionally reformed, according to Mr McDonald, through the implementation of a majority or qualified majority voting. Brian McDonald started his intervention presenting one of the main arguments of his book: the EU is at a turning point and its internal weakness could crush it if it does not confront them in an adequate way, rising above it. The EU needs a much more integrated and powerful system of its own, to formulate clear policies as the EU faces individual challenges. The Union needs to construct a viable European Foreign Policy that can stand in the middle ground between making decisions based on the EU's own interests and adhering to multilateral principles.

Accordingly, McDonald underlined that soft power will no longer be sufficient. The EU's capability to project or maintain its principles will depend on its ability to project hard power. The EU will have to take a harder look at its responsibilities and decide on a more autonomous basis whether to get involved or not in matters of hard power. Some geopolitical scenarios were presented in which the EU should increase its capacity to react on its own, such as nationalism, the rise of China and US isolationism. However, according to Mr McDonald, the solution does not lie in tearing up the liberal order and revert to protectionism, but rather in improving the existing system whether in the form of new policies or improved institutions.

Indeed, despite liberal economies having benefited from the global market, economic incertitude and unsuccessful economic policies have led to growing scepticism and nationalism. To address these issues, companies should invest more in productivity and decent wages should be maintained, even if this involves reshaping trade policies and moving towards more protectionist ones. The recent events and debate regarding 5G and Huawei can serve as a case for this being a clear demonstration of increasingly failing EU in the high-tech sector, as in many other sectors. This is likely attributable to foreign companies' investments in the EU, regardless of their sector of activity and worryingly assuming that they would obey the rules and behave themselves according to EU standards.

Mr McDonald concluded recalling that despite existing criticisms and scepticisms, member states do not have other future outside the EU. Our commitment to values is what keeps the EU member states together and if geopolitical interests will be kept at the centre of preoccupations, the EU will be able to produce a common, and more effective, foreign policy.

In response, Mr Erik Famaey discussed the main message highlighted in the book, while raising some questions and criticism. Firstly, Mr Famaey encapsulated Mr McDonald's proposal for a restructured EU foreign policy through Josep Borrell's hearing at the European Parliament. Borrell stated that the EU's foreign policy is facing three main problems: a question of identity, difficulties in finding a common position and a problem of method. Accordingly, the solutions proposed by Mr McDonald would be balancing soft and hard power, empowering EU institutions by adopting majority voting. Regarding the "policy light and process heavy" issue, Mr Famaey criticised the extreme degree of

decision power given to the EU member states and questioned whether the establishment of a separate External Action Service had led to a more assertive EU foreign policy. He suggested that if the Commission and the Council could leverage the vigour displayed rather unanimously by the EU Parliamentarians, in particular on defending values, foreign policy would definitely be galvanised.

Mr Famaey understands the frustration, expressed in the book, of EU diplomats whose attempts of tackling EU foreign policy are made difficult by an intricate institutional framework and wrong policies. However, he feels that Brian McDonald heaps too much criticism on bankers and economists who have “dominated our economies” and “believe too much in free and self-correcting markets”. He finds that politicians should not be exonerated of responsibility for the austerity policies that keep the economy down. Furthermore, the traditional focus on trade and commerce has left domains such as cyberspace, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and biogenetics underexposed. These are the areas where Borrell said EU foreign policy should also get involved more actively. This leads to the question whether foreign policy can remain the work of generalists or would also require specialist envoys.

Addressing Mr McDonald’s opinion that the EU should take the place of the US in being the foremost promoter of Western liberal values, Mr Famaey agreed on the fundamental role that democracy and human rights assume in the European architecture. Yet in foreign policy there are too many cases, such as Taiwan and India, where the EU is looking away. This makes the EU an accomplice in sustaining unfairness in a world where the defence of liberal values is supposed to underpin the foreign policy of a European Commission with geo-political ambitions.

Mr Famaey concluded with three statements on democracy. Democracy is the best guarantee of EU security; it does not necessarily subscribe to liberal values, and it always gets in the way, even in a union of sovereign nation-states.

During the Q&A session questions of democracy, EU foreign policy in Asia and China-CEE cooperation were raised. A first question, regarded the Japanese involvement in FTAs and the difficulties of negotiating the EU-Japan FTA. To this, it was underlined that the EU-Japan agreement was a decisive occasion to discuss common standards and shared values. Another comment related to the hesitant EU foreign policy on the Philippines in 2016. In response to this comment, the Philippines were acknowledged as an example of a deficient EU foreign policy. The EU was indeed unable to speak up on the South China Sea contention. Finally, another comment concerned the China-CEE initiative and the recent dissatisfaction of European countries, mostly Central and Eastern European nations toward its economic achievements given that the volume of expected investments remains underwhelming. In response to this comment, the underlying political and strategic importance of the China-CEE initiative was highlighted.

The book talk was a compelling occasion to reflect on the last decade’s main challenges and how the European Union should encounter those. According to Mr McDonald, the EU urges an institutional reconstructing and correspondingly, Mr Erik Famaey claims for a more persistent EU foreign policy. Therefore, to survive on the global stage, the European Union needs, as Mr McDonald writes in his book “...to fly on a better pair of wings or the current ones will not suffice.

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