

EPFMA

Bulletin



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European Parliament Former Members Association

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From 20 November to 22 November 2024, **FMA Board Member Michael Hindley** participated in the Annual Implementation Meeting of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, which was organized by OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Gdańsk, Poland. More info: <https://dop2024.org/>

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editorial Board would like to thank all those members who took the time to contribute to this issue of the FMA Bulletin. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the decision to include an article lies with the FMA Editorial Board and, in principle, contributions from members who are not up-to-date with the payment of the membership fee will not be included. Due to the long time lag between the call for contribution and the publication, some articles may be outdated.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

As 2024 draws to a close, I am delighted to announce the success of our recent FMA recruitment campaign. We have welcomed nearly 130 new members to our community, a number that continues to grow. We look forward to harnessing this energy and commitment as we work together over the coming years. Thank you for your contribution to this important campaign and for your continuing and active participation over the coming weeks and months.

Our association remained active throughout the year and engaged in many different activities. The workshop 'The European Parliament: Past, Present and Future' took place on 17 and 18 October 2024 at the beautiful Villa Salviati in Florence. It was co-organised by the FMA, the Historical Archives of the European Union and the Alcide De Gasperi Research Centre. This hybrid event provided an engaging exploration of the current EU political landscape and institutional framework through the lens of historical trends. In attendance were Former EP and FMA President Enrique Barón Crespo, FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi, and FMA members Fabio Castaldo, Richard Corbett and Eva Lichtenberger. We would like to thank the Historical Archives of the European Union for their cooperation. We look forward to continuing this cooperation again next year.

One of the aims of our association is to promote political dialogue and keep our members informed about EU current affairs. Therefore, every year, the FMA organises a visit to the country hosting the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Given the importance and urgency of the dossiers currently being discussed at European level, this issue includes a lengthy report on the visit to Hungary. I led a delegation of 26 former members on a visit to Budapest from 23 to 25 October. The meeting offered opportunities for a pluralistic debate with the representatives of the Hungarian Parliament and Government. We discussed the priorities of the EU agenda, such as competitiveness, and security and defence, to name but a few. The goal was to listen to and understand the point of view of political actors in Hungary: 'Looking ahead and the role of Hungary' and 'Keeping the unity of the EU while safeguarding shared values and cohesion'. We also visited the European Institute of Innovation and Technology to discuss the horizontal impact of artificial intelligence on society, from education to working conditions and health matters and from disinformation to human rights underscoring the importance of being more competitive on the world stage in the sphere of innovation and technology. You will find some very interesting articles highlighting the various insights of the FMA members who visited Budapest.

Our annual December event 'End of Year Greetings', which took place on 3 and 4 December, was a great opportunity to talk about the EU's priorities for the five-year institutional cycle, including EU defence and security, artificial intelligence and its impact on democracy. The event was intense and inspiring, with lively debates among former and current Members. In particular, I thank the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Esteban González

Pons, the former President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, the members of our association and all our

distinguished speakers and guests for being part of this outstanding event. This month's 'Focus' section promises to deliver a range of insightful perspectives on the EU's geopolitical landscape, with contributions from members of our association. I believe it is particularly important to get a multifaceted vision of the European Union, considering its geographical, cultural and historical diversity.

I invite you to save the dates of our future events scheduled for 20 and 21 May 2025 in your diary. The Annual General Assembly will take place on 21 May and we look forward to your active participation. You will receive an email with further details about these important meetings, unless you have explicitly requested to receive these communications by post.

Thank you to everyone for contributing to this edition of the Bulletin as well as for participating in this year's activities and programmes and to the members of our FMA Staff led by the Secretary-General Elisabetta Fonck for their precious and irreplaceable contribution to all our activities.

With my very best regards I wish you all a happy festive season and a healthy and successful 2025.

Dr. Klaus Hänsch
FMA President

Key facts

Parliament confirms the composition of its interparliamentary delegations

(September session - P10_TA(2024)0005)

The political groups and non-attached Members announced which MEPs have been appointed to each Parliament delegation for the 10th term. The European Parliament will have 48 interparliamentary delegations in this legislative term - four more than in the 2019-2024 legislature. The composition of the delegations must ensure that member states, political views, and gender are fairly represented, while no delegation may have more than one third of its MEPs from the same country.

Pesticides: No residues of EU-banned products in imported food

(September session - P10_TA(2024)0007)

Parliament rejected two Commission decisions allowing residue levels of banned pesticides in imported products. The resolutions stress that agricultural products imported from non-EU countries must follow the same standards as EU-produced products to ensure a level playing field. 522 MEPs voted in favor of the objection regarding cyproconazole and spirodiclofen, and 516 for benomyl, carbendazim, and thiophanate-methyl. The Commission must now withdraw its proposals and submit a new draft lowering all maximum residue levels to the limit of detection or the default value of 0.01 mg/kg.

MEPs: Ukraine must be able to strike legitimate military targets in Russia

(September session - P10_TA(2024)0012)

Parliament emphasizes that Ukraine must have the possibility to fully defend itself and calls for lifting restrictions that hinder its use of Western weapons against legitimate military targets in Russia. The resolution calls for maintaining and expanding EU sanctions against Russia, Belarus, and entities providing military support to Russia, while condemning the transfer of ballistic missiles from Iran to Russia.

EUSF mobilisation for 2023 flooding in Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Greece and France

(October session - P10_TA(2024)0015)

The Council agreed to mobilize the European Union Solidarity Fund to provide assistance to Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Greece, and France for six natural disasters that occurred in 2023, with funding sourced from the EU's 2024 budget. The total amount mobilized from the Solidarity Fund is €1,028.54 million. Once the decision is effective, the EU will transfer funds from the solidarity and emergency aid reserve to the Solidarity Fund's operational budget to assist the affected countries.

Parliament says Georgia's democracy is at risk

(October session - P10_TA(2024)0017)

In a resolution adopted, MEPs say current democratic backsliding in Georgia effectively puts the country's integration with the EU on hold. The ruling Georgian Dream party has pushed an increasingly authoritarian agenda, including on media freedom and LGBTQ+ rights. MEPs believe that Georgian government officials are fuelling a climate of hatred. Georgia's integration into the EU is effectively put on hold and the EU will sanction those who threaten Georgia's democracy.

Single sky reform: Council adopts first reading position to improve efficiency of air space management in the EU

(October session - P10_TA(2024)0022)

With a view to improving the overall efficiency of the way in which European airspace is organised and managed, today the Council adopted its position at first reading on the reform of the Single European Sky. The aim of the reform is to improve the performance, organisation, and management of airspaces in the EU and the provision of the air navigation services to increase capacity, lower costs, and increase the system's adaptability, while also trying to reduce aviation's impact on environment and climate.

Deforestation law: agreement with Council gives companies extra year to comply

(November session - P10_TA(2024)0031)

Negotiators from the Parliament and Council reached a provisional political agreement to postpone the application of the new rules. Large operators and traders will now have to respect the obligations of this regulation as of 30 December 2025, and micro- and small enterprises from 30 June 2026. This additional time is intended to help companies around the world implement the rules more smoothly from the beginning, without undermining the objectives of the law.

COP29: MEPs want all countries to contribute financially to climate action

(November session - P10_TA(2024)0035)

Parliament adopted its demands for the UN Climate Change Conference COP29, which aims to define a new collective goal for financing climate action. collective goal on climate finance that is socially fair, aligned with the polluter-pays principle, and based on a variety of public, private and innovative sources of finance. MEPs want all major and emerging economies with high emissions and high GDP to contribute financially to global climate action.

Parliament calls for an EU crackdown on Russia's 'shadow fleet'

(November session - P10_TA(2024)0036)

MEPs demand more targeted EU sanctions against Russia's so-called 'shadow fleet', which provides a key financial lifeline for Moscow's war in Ukraine. The resolution further calls on G7 countries to better enforce the price cap imposed on Russian seaborne oil, to substantially decrease the oil price cap and to crack down on the loopholes used by Russia to repackage and sell its oil and oil products at market prices.

Other main dossiers discussed in the plenary sessions were:

19.09.24

The European Parliament adopted **three resolutions on human rights issues in Afghanistan, Belarus, and Cuba**. Parliament condemns the Taliban's recent decree enforcing Sharia law and denounces the erasure of women and girls from public life in **Afghanistan**.

MEPs express concern about the situation of political prisoners in **Belarus**, urging the authorities to provide information and access to lawyers and family members.

The resolution urges the immediate and unconditional release of José Daniel Ferrer and all politically detained individuals in **Cuba**.

19.09.24

The **European Parliament rejects** the **electoral fraud** orchestrated by the **Venezuelan regime**. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) condemn the ongoing persecution of the democratic opposition in Venezuela.

They also warn about the looming threat of a new migratory exodus from the country.

09.10.24

MEPs adopted a resolution issuing a strong warning against continued **Russian attempts** to derail **Moldova's pro-European trajectory**.

MEPs highlight the role played by a plethora of malicious actors, including pro-Russian Moldovan oligarchs and Russia's state-funded RT network, in carrying out **voter fraud schemes** as well as **cyber operations** and **information warfare**.

10.10.24

MEPs call on **Turkish authorities** to **drop charges** against Bülent Mumay and **all arbitrarily detained media workers**.

Parliament demands the immediate and unconditional release of Ilham Tohti and Gulshan Abbas, as well as **all arbitrarily detained Uyghurs** in **China**.

MEPs urge **Iraq's Parliament** to **reject amendments** to the **Personal Status Law**, which violate international obligations on women's rights.

23.10.24

Parliament demands an **EU budget for 2025** that focuses on improving people's lives, boosting competitiveness, and addressing current challenges.

MEPs set the overall level of commitment appropriations for the 2025 draft budget at **almost €201 billion**, €1.24 billion more than the Commission's proposal from last June. Parliament wants to boost programmes vital in addressing health challenges, supporting young people, agriculture and rural areas, helping people suffering from natural disasters, boosting climate action, managing migration and security needs, and strengthening EU support for neighbouring regions experiencing geopolitical and humanitarian crises.

24.10.24

Parliament condemns **China's continued military provocations against Taiwan** and firmly rejects any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

Parliament opposes China's efforts to block Taiwan's participation in multilateral organizations and calls on the EU to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international bodies.

24.10.24

Parliament denounced **Azerbaijan's poor human rights record** and called on the EU to end its gas dependency on Baku.

Reaffirming their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Azerbaijan and Armenia, MEPs advocate for the normalisation of relations between the two countries and the signing of a long-awaited peace agreement with a withdrawal of troops from Armenia's sovereign territory.

24.10.24

María Corina Machado and **Edmundo González Urrutia** awarded **2024 Sakharov Prize**.

Parliament's President Roberta Metsola announced the winners of the 2024 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in the chamber on Thursday, following the meeting of the Conference of Presidents, which took the decision.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/plenary>



OVERVIEW EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2024-2029 AS FROM 1 DECEMBER 2024



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DRAGHI REPORT IS AN EYE-OPENER

Mario Draghi's report will have been an eye-opener for anyone who hasn't been keeping up with what's going on in Europe. What Draghi tells us is that if the trends we have seen in the last two decades continue, Europe will be less prosperous, more unequal, less safe and, as a result, it will have much less scope for deciding its own fate.

Mario Draghi goes further, noting that if the inertia persists, the EU's political project itself will come under threat. Europe may reach a point where it can no longer apply the project's most essential values: peace, democracy, freedom, equity and prosperity.

Draghi justifies his position with incontrovertible data that shows the growing gap between Europe and the United States and China in areas like wealth creation, reliance on other countries, energy prices, new technologies, innovation and defence.

Faced with this state of affairs, Mario Draghi proposes action by European authorities along three lines: closing the innovation gap separating Europe from the United States and China with regard to innovative technologies; bringing down energy prices; and increasing security and reducing dependencies.



Draghi presents a range of policies for each of those lines to help turn around recent developments. One of the most important proposals is to invest EUR 800 billion every year to ensure Europe can keep up with growth in the USA and China. That amount would hike Europe's investment from 22 % to 27 % of GDP and would turn around several decades of decline in most of the EU's major economies. The amount in question is double what the Marshall Plan contributed to Europe's recovery in the wake of the Second World War.

Draghi proposes that the financial resources be obtained by issuing common debt, following the example of the NextGenerationEU, which was developed in response to the COVID19 pandemic.

This is where the problems begin. While swathes of the electorate, particularly those who support more extremist forces, are against any increase in countries' contributions, some Member States – Austria, Germany, the Netherlands – will not agree to issuing common debt. The situation in Germany is particularly complex: its constitutional court only allowed common debt to be issued as a one-off exception for the COVID19 package.

Mobilising financial resources is not the only problem, however. Policies relating to public assets – such as international connections and networks, energy, equipment, research, innovation and investment in cutting-edge technologies, artificial intelligence and common defence procurement – need to be designed together. Otherwise the most cannot be made of any other efforts. Energy is an example of this.

Europe's energy prices are much higher than its competitors' because it has never been able to reach an agreement to set up a single energy market. Some Member States, notably France, cannot forgo their own markets and accept greater integration of the energy market.

Another example relates to the clear lack of coordination between centralised monetary policy and the budgetary policies drawn up by each of the 20 Member States in the euro area. Europe has been unable to give the euro area a central budgetary instrument for macroeconomic stabilisation that would work as a response not only to economic recessions but also to asymmetric shocks that cannot be tackled by monetary policy. Such an instrument would make the euro area stronger and would strengthen the euro at global level, which is particularly important at a time of geopolitical and geoeconomic uncertainty.

Europe's great weakness comes down to its decision-making processes and institutional organisation. Europe is unable to coordinate more decisive policies to reverse the trend of recent years. Policies that are decisive for Europe's development must have a common foundation or little progress can be made with Draghi's proposals.

The feeling I have after reading Mario Draghi's report is that the proposals make perfect sense, but I am left with serious doubts about the EU's political capacity to adopt the necessary reforms to decision-making processes.

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THE COST OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

We can't talk about the EU's political goals without mentioning how policies are financed or the budget. But we must ask ourselves whether the EU budget measures up to these political goals. The answer is 'No'. But that doesn't mean we should scale down or downgrade our political goals. The future of the EU lies in greater ambition, both within the EU and globally. That is why the European Parliament has been fighting for a more robust budget that is better aligned with our political goals.

A reductionist debate is par for the course in the run-up to any debate on the Commission proposal for the EU's multiannual budget – the multiannual financial framework (MFF) – with a group of Member States refusing to contribute more than 0.9/1.0 % of their gross national income. This then derails the debate configuring the MFF: the EU's political agenda for a particular budgetary period, which to date has spanned 7 years (current MFF = 2021-2027).



The COVID crisis called for a different response: the EU's budget fell short of the demands that COVID placed on governments, companies, households and citizens. It took a huge political effort (driven, I would say, more by necessity than unanimous political will) to come up with a new type of financing: the debt-based NextGenerationEU fund. Was this financing entered into the EU budget? No; but it was set up and anchored in the EU budget via the creation, for the first time, of debt guaranteed by the EU budget, with the aim of covering the costs of that debt. The relationship between the fund and the EU budget is no trifling matter, but rather carries enormous political significance. The European Parliament is a budgetary authority; it has the power of democratic accountability for the EU budget. Sources of financing outside the EU budget lessen Parliament's democratic power.

The challenges we face (from a strictly budgetary perspective) – such as the pressing and heightened defence challenges brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, or the climate transition – place new demands on the costs of financing the EU. Clearly, the current EU

budget is not sufficient to fully meet these challenges. Are we to cut the Erasmus programme or Horizon Europe?

Should we give InvestEU or cohesion policy the chop? No. These are all key policies of the EU. Alternatively, the European Parliament is calling for a permanent crisis response mechanism to be set up within the EU budget.

“The challenges we face (from a strictly budgetary perspective) – such as the pressing and heightened defence challenges brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, or the climate transition – place new demands on the costs of financing the EU.”

There's only one way to go about it: enlarge the EU budget. How? By requesting a higher direct contribution from the Member States? Although fair, I don't think that's likely to work, or at least it wouldn't go far enough.



According to a number of studies, it would mean national contributions going from 1 % to 5 % of gross national income.

The quest for the right solution points to the need to make progress with the adoption of new own resources. New own resources that instantly repay the debt created by NGEU but can also feed into the EU budget. New own resources aligned with the EU's priorities. The already adopted carbon border adjustment mechanism, the ETS, the plastic tax – all of these tools are key to the climate transition. A tax on large digital companies (or a substitute, such as a percentage of the overall rate, anchored within the OECD, but this has not yet been ratified by member countries, including some EU Member States) or a tax on financial transactions, both linked to the drive for greater fiscal justice in the EU.

“The quest for the right solution points to the need to make progress with the adoption of new own resources. New own resources that instantly repay the debt created by NGEU but can also feed into the EU budget.”

The NGEU is novel within the budgetary context of the EU and the Treaties; we know it was set up as a one-off, with specific aims and for a limited term. It taught us lessons that must not go to waste. Lessons that we need to bear in mind as we set about the essential task of endowing the EU with permanent fiscal capacity and creating a fund to finance the EU's priorities and projects with a European dimension.

The recent Draghi report, ‘The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe’, lends weight to this idea, demonstrating the need to establish a fund with these characteristics to act as an instrument to boost strategic autonomy and the competitiveness of European economies.

The time is now; it is urgent that we shift from thinking about these topics to taking political decisions. The European Commission is due to present its MFF proposal for the next budgetary period (2028-2034?) in June next year (2025). In 2028, Member States will have to start repaying their borrowing under the NGEU. We know how long political decisions take.

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BRIDGING DIVIDES: WOMEN, MEDIA AND THE PURSUIT OF PEACE

I have recently discussed with fellow-women writers from around the globe how exciting and stimulating it is for them to take the floor during meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations every March. Three of them, from the San Miguel, English, and Egyptian literary clubs say that to “fight for a better world for women we must address the ongoing topics of: war, displacement, abuse, poverty, health, access to education, ownership of property, climate crisis and the social reality of women’s lives.” In the US, for example, they say, the investment in arms for war has diminished the budgets available for social needs, be they funds for daycare, healthcare, etc.

As the world is experiencing more war and displacement, the UN has included women in the role of global peacekeepers. This has improved some situations in crisis. The Colombian mission, for example, has reported on the project “Mi historia” which gives funds to local radio stations for demobilised youth to talk about their experiences in war. It is they who highlight the need to focus on “peace” journalism, i.e. the balanced reporting of conflict. Why? Because a news story may influence our feelings or behaviour. The media, too, contribute to that.

The August 2024 riots in the UK are a recent example. On July 29th 2024, three young girls were killed, and eight others injured, by a 17-year-old boy. False information that the boy was Muslim and a migrant quickly spread. That led to days of protests and riots. People have not only chanted against migrants, Muslims, and non-white Britons.



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People attacked them. Some blamed social-media influencers with extreme views that they fuelled the disorder by spreading false and racist information. Others said the media had already influenced people to have a distrust of Muslims and migrants.

Building knowledge and news literacy about sensitive and complex topics is related, among other things, to consider different perspectives. We need to compare those. To think about where differences come from. To identify potential bias in them. To read a variety of trustworthy sources to have a broader understanding of the issue. To evaluate the perspectives: misleading information is spread either without the knowledge that it is not accurate or with the purpose of deceiving people. In the first case, it is misinformation; in the second - disinformation or fake news. We should not demonise the Internet, but in an age when information can be easily spread, efforts are needed to present facts in a fair, informed, and unbiased way.

In conflicts around the world (Ukraine, Gaza), the manipulative narratives contribute to the dynamics of conflict interactions. When the controversial rhetoric is entrenched as a state interest, it even more pushes the tension to the next level. Extremist elements benefit. An escalation quickly becomes a reason for aggressive language, actions, and information (hybrid) wars. The ability to listen to the arguments of the opponent sharply falls. Free expression is described as a hostile narrative; it is weaponised. Antagonism (although some consider it beneficial as a gambit strategy) exacerbates as new myths are constructed.

It is so easy to unleash antagonism, and so difficult to bring it to an end. The simple truth is, it is avoidable. It takes courage to confront it, but this is the way to move forward.

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PEACE AND THE EXERCISE OF POWER



© UN Photo/Mark Garten Secretary-General António Guterres rings the Peace Bell during the ceremony held at UN headquarters in observance of the International Day of Peace 2024 (21 September).

We heard the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, talk about a Culture of Peace and participatory support, warning of the widening geo-political divisions that are fracturing the foundations of a peaceful world and stating, 'we must cultivate a culture of peace'. Furthermore, 'peace not only is the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation'.

In addition, we heard world leaders at the recent Summit on the Future regard peace and security (one of the Pact for the Future's five key themes) as one of the three pillars of the new multilateral era. We also heard them pledge to redouble efforts to build and sustain peaceful, inclusive and just societies and address the root causes of conflicts; to protect all civilians in armed conflict; and to accelerate the implementation of the commitments on women, peace and security.

However, as gratifyingly relieved as we might be to hear these plans and improvements, how can we not notice that it falls short?

How can we ignore that we are out of touch in our approach to peace policy?

Why are we limiting war to what is military in nature?

How can we persist in admiring how it puffs itself up with supposed heroics? Why are we continuing to breach UN Resolution 1325? Why have we barely taken any operational decisions in this area? How can we possibly have gone along with the ridiculous misnomer of 'Peace Fund' when the reality is that it is a regulation of the supply of arms?

It is also worth mentioning that the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, cautioned that if crimes against humanity are not punished, they risk becoming normalised.

Calling for a reform of the UN Security Council, he said, 'a permanent seat on this Security Council is not a privilege, it is a responsibility – a grave responsibility bestowed on only five nations: to be the guardians of world peace'.

So keep a close watch on the approach taken with regard to this delicate matter!

Peace is the cornerstone of the EU and shapes its identity commitment. It would be absurd and outlandish to allow Putin and Netanyahu – these two delusional little beings, these deranged and despotic heads of state – to lay waste to our distinguished European construction, which we have built so laboriously and with so much effort!

"Peace is the cornerstone of the EU and shapes its identity commitment."

Let us actively listen to the young people and their indignation, to the injured nations and their protests and to the heroic victims of so many atrocities. Let us work effectively to stop the violence and redesign the roadmaps needed to reach a ceasefire.

Peace is a matter of power, and power, if we do not exercise it, slips from our grasp.

Today, millions of EU citizens feel the great disappointment of our shortcomings, oversights and silences. We are facing the collapse of our much-admired multilateral institutions, of international law, of the laws and doctrines of human rights... all due to their ineffectiveness. We can only be ashamed! Ashamed of our comfortable day-to-day lives, opportunely punctuated with well-intentioned soothing platitudes – between mountains of civilian corpses.

Wars: we must prevent them, and if we cannot do so, then we must end them as soon as possible.

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'STRONGER TOGETHER' YOUTH EXHIBITION

I was pleased to attend the opening of a moving exhibition at the 12 Star Gallery in Europe House, London, last May, entitled 'Interconnected Realms: Exploring Togetherness'. This multi-media art show was the result of a joint project between the British Council, the European Movement and the European Parliament Liaison Office in the UK whereby young people aged 18-30 were invited to respond to a competition call-out for artworks and essays which explored the added value of collaboration on the topics of peace, democracy, equality, solidarity and sustainable development between youth in the UK and the EU. The entries were assessed against the criteria of the core messages expressed, the innovative thinking behind the idea, as well as the promotion of the value of co-operation between the EU and the UK.

The project engaged the skills of two young curators, Michalina Franasik from Poland and Niina Ulfsak from Estonia, who are both studying and working in London. The winning entries presented a compelling and coherent narrative, and it was surprising to learn that the creators had not met in person during the process. Images of hands reaching out, arms embracing and bodies protecting were plentiful in photographic and drawn/painted/printed works.



© Srija Shrestha, UK, Illustration (60)

Frequent use of blue and yellow echoed both the colours of the EU and the Ukrainian flag with nurturing figures redolent of mythic Mother Earth icons appearing more than once. A collage of European values made with found objects and friendship bracelets, overlaid onto a map, invited close attention, so too several poetic responses to the theme. Meanwhile, a selection of essays tackled subjects such as mental health and well-being, identity, navigating borders, and the highs and lows of language learning and European travel.

The exhibition was part of a wider two-year EU/UK 'Youth Stronger Together for a Better World' project implemented by the British Council in co-operation with the European Movement International and co-funded by the EU which offers young people aged 15-30 from the EU and the UK opportunities to connect and co-operate, influence and implement change together on issues of common interest, paving the way for a more connected future.

The British Council works to support young leaders to enhance their skills and collaborate with their peers to address multiple 21st century crises – from climate change to employment and employability, to alienation and inclusion, to conflict and stability. These topics came to the fore in autumn 2023 when the project worked with young people on the island of Ireland, bringing together communities from both sides of the border to share their experiences of navigating the post-Brexit, post-Covid world. Media industry professionals mentored participants who were then able to develop high quality film and media content showcasing the diverse views of young people living across the island of Ireland today.

Lasha Svanishvili, a young Lithuanian participant in the 'Youth Stronger Together for a Better World' project writes:



"In a world that frequently stresses differences, initiatives like this highlight the common aspirations and struggles that unite youth. As the project progresses, it conveys a strong message: collaboration is not only desirable, but also necessary for a brighter, more interconnected future for young people in the United Kingdom and the European Union. We can actually bridge the gap."

As the UK government begins a new phase in EU-UK relations many of us hope the voices of these young people will be heard in the corridors of power.

Julie Ward

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FMA ACTIVITIES



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VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES – HUNGARY’S 20 YEARS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Hungary has been a member of the EU for 20 years. A lot has changed since then, but not all for the better. EU funds renewed much of Hungary’s infrastructure. However, Hungary’s economy has had serious growth problems in the past two years, as the government lost a large part of the EU funds because of rampant corruption.

But back to the beginning. In Hungary, there was a consensus of joining NATO and later the EU, which was shown in the 2003 referendum, when 84 percent voted for joining. Since then, Orbán has often badmouthed “Brussels.”

Hungary joined the EU in 2004 but saw fewer funds for years as new members entered half time of the seven-year budget. Even with a reasonable absorption rate, most of the funds for the next seven-year budget came after 2010, the year Orbán started his rule. Therefore, he had the opportunity to do big things with this unprecedented amount of money. In my view, he often did not make good priorities.

The EU funds helped a lot with infrastructure, but there were problems with priorities. There is a very telling case in recent months. Even though the government spent many EU funds on railway projects, the Hungarian trains have never been delayed so much.



FMA Honorary Secretary Teresa Riera Madurell, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Dr Koloman Brenner, FMA President Klaus Hänsch, FMA Member Zita Gurmai, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Dr Attila Tilki and FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi

You need to buy a more expensive ticket to join the InterCity service, where two-thirds of the trains are delayed more than five minutes. Systemic corruption is one reason behind these failures. In the case of railways, Orbán’s university roommate’s company was winning a lot of public procurement until he turned on Orbán. Since then, Orbán’s schoolmate has been most successful. He was a gas fitter whose small business was close to bankruptcy, but he became the richest man in Hungary. The European Parliament played a big role in making corruption issues around EU funds an important topic that the Commission could not avoid. Now, in Hungary’s rule of law procedures, safeguards against corruption are quite important—and the government often only wants cosmetic changes.

This autumn, Orbán publicly accepted that a large part of EU funds would be lost, even though it played a significant role in the low economic growth in the past two years. Unfortunately, Orbán could even make his anti-EU propaganda worse. In the past two years, he blamed the EU-record Hungarian inflation in the EU on “sanction inflation,” as “Brussels sanctions” somehow made the inflation highest in Hungary.

Just recently, he accused the EU of wanting a puppet government instead of his, which is quite a statement when Hungary currently holds the EU presidency. These propaganda accusations could bring him some further political success, but they would further poison his relationship with the EU and, sadly, harm Hungary. So, I can only wish that in the next twenty years, Hungary’s EU membership will be used much more to benefit the Hungarian people and the EU. This is a historic chance for Hungary to converge in terms of economy and salaries, too. I firmly believe the EU is also a community of values and Hungary’s historic place is in this European community.

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FMA Secretary-General Elisabetta Fonck, FMA President and Delegation Leader Klaus Hänsch, Dénes Bank from GKI, FMA Member Zita Gurmai and Barna Szabó, Chief Economist at Equilibrium Institute.

HUNGARY ON A DUBIOUS PATH

From the 23rd to the 25th of October an FMA delegation visited the Hungarian presidency in Budapest. During this well-organized visit the delegation could get an extensive overview of the aspirations of the Hungarian second EU presidency but also about the „philosophical“ background and motivation for the special attitude towards the European agenda. Our meetings took place on the days after another „famous“ speech of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the National Day commemorating the start of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and the declaration of the re-established democracy in 1989. In his speech, he again declared Brussels as the new Moscow, which has to be fought because of its interference into the Hungarian domestic interests.

The first meeting with representatives from the majority we had with the European Affairs minister. His presentation stood in contrast to the tone and direction of Orbán's speech. János Bóka explained the priorities of the Hungarian presidency, especially competitiveness, security and defense, enlargement and migration. Concerning the migration issue he underlined, that as presidency Hungary will insist on a quick implementation of the migration and asylum package, but as member country Hungary will press for changes and not only for additional legislation as recently proposed by the EU Commission. One has also to remember, that only a few days before our meeting Viktor Orbán met Robert Fico, the Slovak Prime Minister and Aleksandar Vučić, the Serbian president. All three expressed their satisfaction about their restrictive migration policy and promised to put pressure on the EU to follow their example.

In the following debates with Parliament members from Fidesz, Jobbik and the Social Democrats, the position of the government towards

Ukraine and the Russian aggression against Ukraine was the main issue. For the Fidesz' representative Hungarian interests were the main guiding lines for the Ukraine policy. Hungary wants peace and the end of the war. It cannot play an important role of mediation but it wants to sit at the negotiation table discussing the future of the region, especially as there is an important Hungarian minority in Ukraine. Anyway, Europe should accept the new global multipolarity with a strong role of China and a Russia with its special security interests.

The criticism of the opposition was principally directed against the increased authoritarian rule by the government. They criticized a gradual dismantling of the democratic system towards the „illiberal“ system promoted by Viktor Orbán. The extensive control of the media by the government or by those who are close to the Prime minister is severely limiting the opposition's opportunity to present their ideas to the public. Similarly were the arguments brought forward by the representatives of the civil society we could meet. They are under additional threat after a „Sovereignty Protection Office“ has been established by the government.

This new institution is now under scrutiny of the European Commission, but in the meantime it puts a lot of

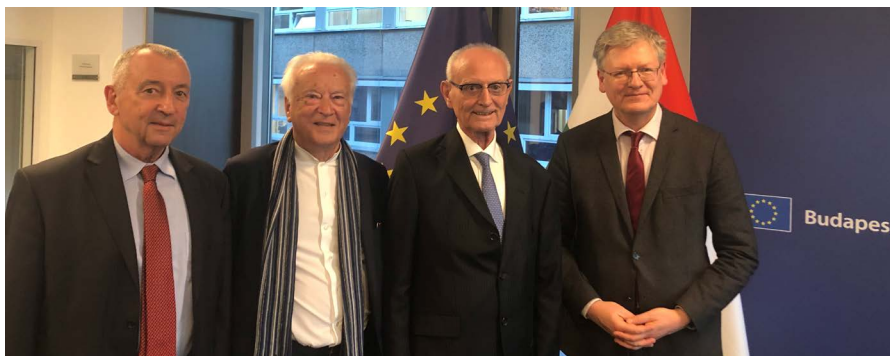
pressure on all those who criticize openly the government as they may endanger Hungary's sovereignty by their criticism. The civil society representatives would like to see a more active EU information policy, which would counter the fake news spread by the government.

Due to the government continuing criticism of the EU, they also fear that the still overwhelming support for the EU membership may weaken. Already now the EU holding money back are called „Brussels sanctions“ in order to blame Brussels and divert the attention from the reason for these „sanctions“: the violation of European laws by the Hungarian government. In addition, of course the withholding of financial contributions have already a visible effect on the necessary investments for a more sustained economic growth of Hungary. Hungary could do better economically if it would receive the money dedicate for them by the EU and if it would not only promote competitiveness in the framework of its presidency but implement a non-discriminatory policy against foreign investors and companies.

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From left to right: FMA Members Georgi Pirinski & Hannes Swoboda and FMA President Klaus Hänsch with Mr László Andor, former Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2010-2014)

VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

WHAT TO DO ABOUT VIKTOR ORBÁN?

'Between Viktor Orbán and the European Union, Hungary has to choose' – this was President Klaus Hänsch's blunt conclusion following speeches by Zsolt Becsey and Zita Gurmai at the end of the dinner debate. Over the course of the evening, our two former colleagues attempted to explain why Hungarian government policy did not undermine European interests or values. The conflict between the two ways of thinking about the EU has never been as clear as it was by the end of our debate.

This article does not seek to take sides but instead aims to summarise what our delegation saw and heard during our short visit to Budapest.

Zsolt Becsey described the Hungarian perspective in the most detail. He reminded us that his country had learnt a fundamental lesson over the past thousand years: located between three much more powerful neighbours – Germany, Russia and Turkey – Hungary could only remain independent, or indeed continue to exist, by developing good relations with all three. It can be difficult to maintain such a balance – in practice, it requires great flexibility.



Michel Pinton during the question and answer session at EIT © EIT



From left to right: FMA Secretary-General Elisabetta Fonck, FMA President and Delegation Leader Klaus Hänsch, András Léderer, Head of Advocacy at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and András Bíró-Nagy, Director at Policy solutions

However, this balance must remain an intangible principle: this is what is behind current Hungarian policy. Becsey explained that Hungary enriches Europe by sharing the best of its historical experience. The main effect of the pressure exerted by the Commission in Brussels and the Parliament in Strasbourg is to bring the Hungarian people closer to their leaders, primarily Orbán, and to fuel voters' mistrust of European integration. Patience, caution and respect for each Member State's unique characteristics are essential to the EU's continued existence.

"Patience, caution and respect for each Member State's unique characteristics are essential to the EU's continued existence."

Ukraine is another source of misunderstandings between Hungary and its European partners. As we know, Viktor Orbán's government is the most lukewarm in its support of the government in Kyiv: it is not providing arms, it is reluctant to give financial support and it opposes the idea of Ukraine joining the EU and NATO.

Attila Tilki, Vice-Chair of the Hungarian Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and elected representative for a constituency bordering Ukraine, helped us understand why.

He stressed the sense of injustice felt by the Hungarian people over the unfortunate fate of their fellow Hungarians living, against their will, in Ukraine, just on the other side of the border: their national minority status offers them little protection from glaring inequalities. It is therefore unsurprising that this mistrust has ended up bleeding into relations between the two countries.

This brief summary would not be complete without mentioning our meeting with András Bíró-Nagy and András Léderer, representatives of two sociopolitical associations. They strongly denounced their country's government for dismantling democracy. The two speakers called on our delegation to urge Brussels to maintain or even increase the sanctions on Hungary. They said 'Orbán only understands power relations', and that force was the only way to make him return to a less biased form of democracy.

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HUNGARY – A COUNTRY WITH TWO SIDES TO IT (FOR NOW)

As we embarked on our trip to Budapest, I could not help but think of the images of Victor Orbán's appearance at the plenary in Strasbourg on 9 October and the related speeches. For quite some time, the question had been hanging in the air: was our trip appropriate and wise given the harmful anti-European behaviour of this Head of State? The answer is a clear YES – we owe it to the citizens of the country who believe in a united Europe with its values and treasures and who take a stand against an illiberal democracy (70 % voted for EU membership and 75 % for NATO membership).

Our visit began on Hungary's National Day – which commemorates Hungary's 1956 fight for freedom, brutally crushed by Soviet tanks, and the new beginning of 1990. This made Victor Orbán's appeal to his supporters to oppose the EU just as they had opposed Moscow in 1956 all the more disturbing. A presidency of the Council of the EU could not act in a way any more harmful to the Community.

Let us be clear: all participants found the short but intensive and busy trip to be highly informative, inspiring and successful. Our sincere thanks goes to the organising team. Already on the first evening, we were given an introduction to the diversity of the political scene by the former Secretary of State for minority issues and Member of Parliament, Vilmos Szabó. As a member of the current opposition to the Fidesz party, he — like our association member Zita Gurmai – strongly criticised the undemocratic policies of the current government. They conveyed a glimmer of hope for change in 2026. By way of contrast, the Minister for European Affairs, János Bóka, spoke about the Hungarian Presidency of the Council's intentions, focusing on stability and continuity. He also underlined, as did the former Speaker of the Parliament,



FMA Delegation at the Hungarian Parliament with former speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly Dr. Katalin Szili and Vice-Chairs of Committee on European Affairs Dr. Attila Tilki and Dr. Koloman Brenner.

Katalin Szili, the Hungarian vision of a Europe of nations and they outlined Victor Orbán's visits to Russia, China and Ukraine – trips he had made without prior agreement. It was not surprising that members of our group raised critical follow-up questions, most of which were left without proper answers.

The round table with the Vice-Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Attila Tilki, highlighted an anti-European stance, as he repeatedly emphasised aspirations to follow a 'Hungary first' policy. We appreciated that opposition politician Koloman Brenner was also present, as he underlined Europe's shared responsibility and at the same time pointed to the under-representation of women in politics. There is not a single woman in the Hungarian Cabinet.

FMA delegation visits aim to get a sense of the diversity of a country's society.

This includes talking to civil organisations and think tanks. Denés Bank, from the Economic Research Company, and Barna Szabó, from the Equilibrium Institute, explained the impact of the current wars on the energy and commodity markets and thus also on the Hungarian economy. What is more, the freezing of EUR 20 billion of European funds presents an obstacle for the EU's investment needs and weakens economic competitiveness.

Nevertheless, both of them and the representatives of the think tank Policy Solution and the Helsinki Committee shared the same message: EU Member States must adopt a joint and clear position when implementing the Article 7 procedure. The Orbán Government is spreading misinformation vociferously through social media, spending inordinate sums of money in the process. Meanwhile, the EU institutions are failing to provide any proper clarifications, which are of particular importance given the precarious situation of NGOs, which are seen as public enemies.

The added value produced for the EU through joint action was underlined in the reports of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, which was set up in 2010 on the proposal of the ITRE Committee. This institute facilitates networking for business, academic and research professionals, connecting them with more than 2 400 partners in the fields of artificial intelligence, health, demography, careers, entrepreneurship, water and more.

Our inspiring trip was rounded off with a visit to the opera and the Parliament building, as well as with some culinary delights.

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VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

A VISIT OF CONTRASTS

Budapest is bisected by the River Danube and has an abundance of beautiful buildings. They bestow an atmosphere of calm – in contrast to the present-day politics taking shape in that same city.

There is a pattern to six-monthly FMA visits to the current Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers. While examining the presidential priorities and programme with Ministers and other politicians is the core purpose, we always meet with civil society, make cultural visits and learn about the work of whichever EU agency is housed there. This visit followed that pattern, but one man's attitude and activities became the prime focus. Viktor Orbán has friends – in Moscow and Beijing – but not in Brussels. Speaking on the day of our arrival, Republic Day, he claimed:

“To Brussels, independent Hungarian policy is unacceptable. Let us face that fact. Therefore Brussels has announced that it will get rid of Hungary's national government. They have also announced that they want to impose a Brusselite puppet government on the country.”

How can such malicious fantasy seem credible to so many voters, we asked ourselves – and we asked several speakers. Opposition voices had few opportunities to present a truthful alternative was the answer.

Control of the media gives credibility, turning fiction into fact in the minds of viewers, listeners and readers.

Civil society might have brought together activists, but we learned about the methods of suppressing almost all such organisations.

In our meeting with EU Affairs Minister János Bóka, he spoke about the programme of the Presidency. It was about Hungary seeking agreement with its EU partners, though with an emphasis on member state powers. As well as probing the detail, we pointed to the contrast with Hungary obstructing agreement on key dossiers and not respecting democratic principles. It was a good-tempered exchange but lacked many points of agreement.

This six-month term is unlike most of its predecessors in other ways. It has a newly elected European Parliament and the Commission's term is ending.

There is a chance of some progress but the six months are likely to end with one step forwards and two Orbánic steps back. There can be no doubt that European culture is embedded in Budapest. Our tours of the magnificent Opera building on the first night and of the beautiful Parliament building the next day reminded us of the grandeur of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Many European capitals have similar styles of architecture, but few can match Budapest in scale.

Almost every member state hosts one EU body or agency. On our final day, we visited the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). It operates without local interference. The presentations were fascinating.

The focus was on achieving big advances through innovation and leveraging private finance, rather than significant public expenditure. The Director, Martin Kern, explained how it is at the heart of Europe's largest 'innovation ecosystem', through its extensive links with high tech companies, leading universities and other European organisations advancing innovation. Its strengths are that network of 2,400 partners and the ratio of eight times private to each one unit of public cost.

Advancing the EU's health priorities was the theme of Ferenc Pongrácz, Deputy MD of EIT Health Innostars. An aging population, with increasing chronic health problems, are dealt with by fragmented systems.

Resource pressures, both financial and human, handicap action. Joining up the systems and making better use of resources are key remedies in this EIT work.

Speakers pointed to the recent Draghi report, which recommended many actions being taken by the EIT. Connections with the EU's Horizon programme also featured. By visiting the EIT, our final day ended with hopes raised – that united action through the EU could achieve progress in both economic and social fields, addressing the needs of Europe's citizens.

Peter Price

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From left to right: Peter Price, Zita Gurmai, Hannes Swoboda, Monica Baldi, H.E. János Bóka, Frances Fitzgerald and Teresa Riera Madurell.

BALANCING SOVEREIGNTY AND EU MEMBERSHIP



FMA President Dr. Klaus Hänsch with H.E. Minister János Bóka

It was an unusual visit to the current holder of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, Hungary, given that the EP and the Commission are very critical of this Member State. Fund payments have been suspended because Hungary is not meeting the conditions. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán constantly speaks out strongly against the EU. He uses his right of veto on the European Council on a regular basis. Our FMA delegation was on edge, wondering how the talks with Hungarian politicians and academics would go.

We received a very hospitable welcome at the national parliament, which looks more like an imperial palace than a venue for meetings. Here, the Minister for European Union Affairs, János Bóka, set out the priorities of the Presidency. These include (1) improvement of the EU's competitiveness in the world; (2) closer European industrial defence cooperation; (3) a consistent enlargement policy focusing on the Balkans; (4) the need to implement the Pact on Migration, especially the 'innovative asylum rules' and the strengthening of the EU's external borders; and (5) the green and digital transitions. The Minister felt that the EU should seriously consider the Chinese proposal for a cooperation

agreement. We asked Mr Bóka how his Prime Minister's anti-EU rhetoric was compatible with the role of the EU Presidency and what purpose it served. To our surprise, he replied that it did not serve any purpose and that the EU Member States should, in fact, treat each other with mutual respect. Fidesz's foreign affairs spokesperson, Attila Tilki, called the EU a bouquet of flowers with different colours, a collection of states with diverse cultures. He said that his party was not nationalistic but patriotic, fighting for Hungary's national interests. Hungary's political and cultural sovereignty is deeply rooted in its history. The frustration felt over the loss of two thirds of Hungarian territory (1920) and the significance of the 1956 uprising are underestimated by foreign critics. Hungary is a conservative illiberal country that does not allow liberal legislation to be imposed by Brussels. Fidesz condemns Russian aggression in Ukraine, but states that the outcome of the war cannot be decided on the battlefield, i.e. not with the supply of weapons but with a truce to enable peace negotiations.

The opposition spokespersons call Hungary an anti-democratic country where Viktor Orbán's party has all the power. Fidesz has changed the constitution in such a way that it is assured of a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The party is totally paternalistic.

There is not a single woman in the government. The media are fully controlled by the government. The voices of the opposition and NGOs are not heard. Fidesz has invested huge sums of money in social media campaigns. Corruption using EU money is rampant. Populism, nationalism and racism are used to ensure broad support among voters.

Our programme of speakers was balanced. This enabled the delegation to form a good impression of what Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party is all about, what the opposition's criticisms are and how think tanks are judging the developments. Hungary has benefited greatly from EU membership, economically and financially. Yet it is still a relatively poor country, ranked 23rd in the EU in terms of GNP. According to Prime Minister Orbán, everything that goes wrong, such as the weak economy, low wages and the disadvantage of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries, is the EU's fault. Nevertheless, he and the majority of the population remain fully in favour of EU membership. Hungary desperately needs the vast subsidies. However, if it wishes to remain a full member, it must meet its obligations under the Treaty.

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The FMA Delegation during the visit at the Hungarian Parliament.

VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

HUNGARY'S CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Invited to speak at the dinner, Zsolt Becsey explained for the first time why the initial 20 years in the EU had disappointed the Hungarian conservative elite and majority population.

He began by explaining that after 1990, we were so happy to take part in Western integration, and in particular gain EU membership, as we hoped that it would be a sort of remedy to the greatest national tragedy we had ever experienced – the Trianon syndrome – which had left the country in pieces. Indeed, the traditional Carpathian basin state that had formed our country had fallen apart. Millions from Hungary's already-emerging bourgeois class (and people who identified themselves as belonging to the Hungarian state) found themselves outside our borders, torn away from family and friends, still on the land on which they were born but now in aggressive nationalist environments, where they were expected to assimilate. We thus hoped that European integration would help dispel the almost centennial perception of a unified nation state, which had never really existed. Having competences that would increasingly be common and community-based instead of sovereign would help put an end to the aggressive policies of our new neighbours and, because of the nature of the EU, the Western bottom-up social model, characterised by autonomy and decentralisation, would prevail in the Member States. Despite the fact that 'respect for minorities' was established as one of the democratic criteria for accession in 1993 and the Maastricht Treaty made mention of the motto 'United in diversity', our national communities – unlike in South Tyrol and the Åland Islands, for example – were not exactly given this respect, although other emerging communities (based on gender, social background, sexual orientation, etc.) were. We still supported the integration of neighbouring Carpathian basin states with that in mind, but there was such



Invited Guest Speaker and former MEP Zsolt Becsey during the Dinner Debate on 24 October at the Akademy Club in Budapest, Hungary.

disappointment about the national matter that it became one of the main stems of anti-Western sentiment. For Becsey, the other conservative lesson is that, with deep roots dating back 300 years, paternalism has grown in Hungarian society, i.e. responsible self-sufficiency, a spirit of competition and market risk management, and the consequent rejection of the possibility of failure. After the political leaders had intervened, especially after 2004, the population hoped that the state and the EU would protect them and guarantee their livelihoods, no matter the quality of results produced, as well as a minimum improvement in living standards and an increase in free benefits. This was already the case prior to 1990, under the regime of János Kádár and before, which is why growing competitiveness issues and slow regional separation, stagnation and new indebtedness also contributed to the anti-Western sentiment and frustration in Hungarian society.

Fortunately, Hungarian society gives more importance to the Western affiliation than to looking for a solution to the East or acting as a bridge between the East and West, but these latter options are becoming increasingly entrenched in the minds of both the political elite and public. On the issue of illiberalism, Becsey said that due to some countries' failures, leaders – and thus the people – believe that the most important

thing when it comes to running our democratic institutions should be the efficiency of decision-making and implementation, in the sense that democratic brainstorming and decision-making are considered excessively slow. As opposed to a liberal democracy based on a system of checks and balances and on local civil and professional society, but which often seems powerless, this political discourse favours the winner-takes-all principle and a nation-state hierarchy underpinned by a powerful leader.

On the Russian advance in the region, Becsey said that the supremacy of the great powers and geopolitical considerations have taken precedence over the self-determination of peoples and the freedom to form alliances, as this implies less confrontation, and that the threat of violence can sometimes rise slowly to the foreground, without bloodshed.

On the situation in Hungary, he added that the Hungarian MEPs are all in political groups, which is always better than being non-attached, but in our country the strongest, ruling party has now moved further away from the EP's political centre. Our liberal and green representation has disappeared, but a new movement, which seems to be strong, is calling for political change and opposition inspired by the West.

Zsolt Becsey
EPP-ED, Hungary (2004-2009)

THE EIT DECENTRALISED INNOVATION MODEL CAPTURES IDEAS AND BRINGS THEM TO THE MARKET

The FMA Delegation had high expectations in advance of the visit, as the new EU agenda is Competitiveness, pushing for more alignment of Research and Innovation in the Economic Agenda. FMA members are aware of the lately published Letta and Draghi reports as well as the report of the Expert Group led by Manuel Heitor. We were all MEPs around the time of the ambitious Lisbon Agenda, and we all believe in knowledge-based economic progress. The host delegation from EIT and Paul Rübzig, member in both FMA and EIT Boards, created a warm and constructive moment and a lively exchange of opinions.

The FMA chair Monica Baldi opened the discussion, EIT Director Martin Kern, EIT Health InnoStars Deputy-Director Ferenc Pongrácz, EIT Digital Regional Director Tuan Trinh and István Kovács the ABCD project coordinator from the EIT HEI Initiative were driving the delegation across the EIT diverse activities and success stories.

In EIT, Research Innovation and Competitiveness are seen as a single Innovation ecosystem from the start. They believe in a triple approach (i) Educate innovators in cooperation with academia, (ii) Break down barriers by connecting innovators across networks, (iii) Turning ideas to businesses.

The original Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) are successful; others have started, and the newest 10th KIC on Water, Marine and Maritime is under formation. After 15 years, EIT KICs should be sustainable. In KICs, every euro generates up to 8 euros.

EIT InnoEnergy became a unicorn in its own right, as among the 200 companies, 4 are already unicorns. Furthermore, they save a huge amount of CO₂, via new products and services.

EIT Digital is another success story. They trained over 3500 professionals in partnership with 60 Universities in the field of ICT which suffers from shortage of skilled workforce across the EU.

EIT Health is similar, with over 4900 trained professionals, most of them on using AI solutions in the Health Sector. Digitalising the Health sector is critical to respond to the challenges of new diseases on ageing population with chronic diseases.

The **ABCD project** from the EIT HEI Initiative (dedicated to improving innovation with Higher Education Institutions) is of special interest, as the project partners included the Enlargement countries from the Western Balkans. Our FMA members had several questions and praised the results.



Question and answer session © EIT

Many of us served in ITRE, ENVI and BUDG/CONT committees. We agreed that Research and Innovation are critical, and should be promoted more in the next Programme. We suggested to promote the EIT more as their visibility is solved somehow in the end-users' successes. We also recalled that the beginning started with the idea to create a European MIT, followed by the regulation with the two Hungarian rapporteur/co-rapporteur in the EP and the Council negotiations to bring it to Budapest in 2011.

Nowadays the discussion is about the top-down structures and focussed on the top-level innovations (the ARPA Model). Maybe it is good to remember that the EIT's secret is the unique decentralised model, with special added value to the Widening countries with lower GDP. It was state of art approach or even a revolution, back then. However, over the last two decades, decentralisation has become a macro trend. All up-stream sectors (Energy, ICT, Computing, Data,) and all downstream services (Health, Education, Financial etc.) are on that path.

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Dr. Paul Rübzig, FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi and EIT Director Martin Kern © EIT

VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

EIT: A STRATEGIC HUB FOR INNOVATION AND GROWTH

The last FMA Study Visit took us to Budapest and to the European Institute of Technology (EIT), where we received a warm welcome by the director, Mr. Martin Kern. Hungary's enthusiasm for hosting the European Institute of Innovation and Technology can be traced back to several key factors that highlight both the country's strategic vision and its inherent advantages. Hungary views the presence of EIT as a significant catalyst for economic growth. By having EIT's headquarters, it positions the country at the forefront of European innovation networks. This can attract further investments, enhance technological collaborations, and boost the domestic research and development sector.

Hosting EIT means access to a wide network of innovation hubs across Europe. This will enable Hungarian universities, research institutions, and startups to collaborate more closely with some of the best minds and cutting-edge projects, accelerating local research efforts.

Hungary's geographical location in Central Europe provides a strategic advantage by bridging Western and Eastern European countries.

This central positioning makes it an ideal hub for connecting diverse markets, facilitating the flow of ideas, people, and technologies.

Partnering closely with EIT provides Hungarian educational institutions the opportunity to participate in joint programs, draw international students, and increase their reputation on a global scale. This also helps in developing a skilled workforce that's aligned with international standards.

Being the host of EIT enhances Hungary's reputation on the international stage, offering it more influence in shaping European innovation policies and priorities. It reinforces Hungary's commitment to playing a significant role in Europe's future economic and technological landscape. EIT emphasizes fostering entrepreneurs and startups. By having the institute within its borders, Hungary opens new avenues for local enterprises to access funding, mentorship, and business opportunities that EIT offers, boosting the startup ecosystem. The presence of EIT can lead to more international professionals living and working in Hungary, promoting

cultural exchange, and contributing to the local economy through their consumption and participation in cultural activities.

Overall, Hungary's willingness to host the EIT reflects a strategic alignment with its economic goals and a commitment to fostering an environment where innovation and technology can thrive on both a local and international scale. Such opportunities are seen as instrumental in advancing Hungary's long-term economic objectives and enhancing its role in the European innovation landscape.

EIT's programs in Hungary focus on bridging education, research, and business to foster innovation across vital sectors, enhancing both local and European competitive advantage in the global market.

The EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities are getting larger, after the existing KICs EIT Climate-KIC, EIT Digital, EIT InnoEnergy, EIT Health, EIT RawMaterials, EIT Food, EIT Manufacturing, EIT Urban Mobility and EIT Culture & Creativity the new EIT Water is now also being founded. The EIT and its KIC is a major milestone and it is good that support is being provided again under the 10th Framework Program.

If you are interested in the work of the EIT you can find further information under <https://eit.europa.eu/>.

The EIT and its KIC is a major milestone and it is good that support is being provided again under the 10th Framework Program.

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The FMA Delegation with EIT Director Martin Kern, Deputy Managing Director, EIT Health Innostars Ferenc Pongrácz, Regional Node Director East Tuan Trinh and project lead, ABCD project, METU István Kovács © EIT

COOPERATION WITH EUI

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Reflecting on “The European Parliament: Past, Present, and Future” at the European University Institute of Fiesole has been much more than an honor, but upon all an occasion to revisit my exciting journey in our Hemicycle, an institution that has not only shaped my professional life but also my vision for the future of Europe.

During my intervention, I took the opportunity to reflect on how far we’ve come as a Union and as a Parliament. I spoke about the remarkable transformation of the European Parliament from a consultative assembly to a co-legislator with significant influence over the EU’s policies, with the aim to bridge the gap between the European institutions and our citizens.

Yet, while celebrating our progress, I also felt compelled to address the pressing challenges we face, especially looking at the turnout of the last European elections, extremely low in many member States from southern and eastern Europe. Rising populism, the erosion of democratic values and fake news in several member states present existential threats to our Union. These challenges remind us that democracy is not a given—it is a constant effort that requires constant vigilance, transparency, and inclusion.

The Parliament must stand as the guardian of these principles, and I urged my audience to recognize that defending democracy is certainly the shared responsibility of institutions and governments, but also of the citizens alike. It must be reconquered by every generation of European citizens.

That’s why I emphasized the crucial need to rethink how we engage with them. The Conference on the Future of Europe was an inspiring example of participatory democracy in action. I firmly believe that such initiatives should not be isolated events but a recurring feature of how the EU operates. Only by creating a genuine dialogue with our citizens can we overcome. But this dialogue should be genuine and effective: falling short in turning into reality their conclusions, doing the mistake of being tactical and short-sighted, paying attention just to national and regional elections and not to a long-term strategic vision based on our strategic autonomy would just foster the disillusionment and skepticism that feed anti-European narratives, instead of overcoming them.

Looking to the future, I shared my vision for a stronger European Parliament: we must move towards a real right of initiative, maybe through

an interinstitutional agreement. But I’m also believe that to create a genuine European demos, and not 27 national electoral campaigns held in parallel, we do need to introduce transnational electoral lists, which could foster a sense of European identity and encourage a pan-European political debate. It is time to transcend national silos and embrace the idea of a truly European public sphere.

I also stressed the Parliament’s role in foreign policy. In a world increasingly defined by geopolitical rivalries and in an era of rising imperialisms, the EU must speak with one voice. The European Parliament, as the institution closest to the people, should be at the forefront of shaping a bold, unified external strategy on an equal foot with the Council. From supporting democratic movements to addressing global challenges like climate change and digital governance, we must lead with courage and conviction. As I concluded my speech, I reflected on Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, that I’ve often described as the beating heart of Europe’s future. Enlargement is not just a policy; it is a promise of solidarity and a commitment to our shared destiny. The European project is incomplete without all these nations fully integrated, and I urged my colleagues and policymakers to reaffirm this vision, without any undue delay.

Participating in this conference reminded me why I entered politics in the first place: to contribute to building a more democratic, inclusive, and united Europe. The road ahead will not be easy, but I remain optimistic. If we are bold in our reforms, steadfast in our values, and open in our dialogue with citizens, the European Parliament will not just endure: it will lead the way to a stronger Union.

Fabio Massimo Castaldo
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Speakers at the high-level workshop in Florence, 17-18 October 2024 © EUI

COOPERATION WITH THE EP

25 YEARS AGO, NICOLE FONTAINE MADE HER DEBUT AS PRESIDENT

Twenty-five years ago, two decades after Simone Veil, Nicole Fontaine became the second-ever female President of the European Parliament. Taking place at the turn of the century (1999–2002), her mandate was marked by profound changes and major progress towards further integration. Here, we look back at some key moments of this committed President's term in office that still resonate today.

Putting co-decision on a firm footing

Co-decision, known today as the ordinary legislative procedure, was introduced with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Nicole Fontaine, who had previously been Chair of the Conciliation Committee, advocated for its scope to be extended. She also took a personal interest in certain legislative files, such as the one on the safety of ships after the shipwreck of the oil tanker Erika and environmental damage it caused. Parliament succeeded in getting stricter maritime safety standards enforced, notably making it mandatory for ships to have double hulls.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995, the failure of the Oslo process and the rumblings of an intifada weighed heavy in people's minds. Yet diplomacy and dialogue were the only way forward. Breaking down any resistance, notably by making visits to Tel Aviv and Ramallah, Nicole Fontaine managed to convince Abu Ala, President of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and Avraham Burg, President of the Knesset, to come together to address Parliament in Strasbourg during a plenary session in September 2000. Their speeches provoked great emotion. The moment was immortalised in a photo of her holding up their arms as the House rose to its feet.

Afghanistan, Commander Massoud and Afghan women

In Afghanistan, fighting raged between the Taliban – who controlled most of



Ahmed QUREI, Nicole FONTAINE - EP President and Avraham BURG © European Union

the country in a reign of Islamic terror – and the Northern Alliance resistance led by Ahmad Shah Massoud. In April 2001, defying the rules of protocol, Nicole Fontaine invited and welcomed Commander Massoud in Strasbourg as a Head of State. She was also committed to supporting Afghan women, providing them with a forum in Brussels.

Universal abolition of the death penalty and adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights

The values of the EU, which she defended at home and abroad, were at the core of her work. On a personal level, Nicole Fontaine was invested in the fight to have the death penalty abolished across the world, speaking on many individual cases and hosting a World Congress for the Abolition of the Death Penalty. For the EU, the work focused on drafting the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It would be enshrined in the Treaty of Nice in 2000 but would only acquire legal force with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007.

9/11

The world was in shock after the 11 September attacks on Manhattan's twin towers and the Pentagon. Parliament was convened for a plenary session a few hours after the event. 9/11 marked a turning point in the

West's security policy, the effects of which are still felt today.

Europeans start paying in euros

The euro is well-established today, but it is clear that it did not have an easy start. In 2000/2001, there was a lot of scepticism and lack of faith in it – some even rejected it outright. Relentless efforts thus had to be made to convince people. Among the actions on the ground, Nicole Fontaine travelled to markets to talk to traders, met with cash handlers on the eve of the unprecedented logistical challenge and engaged with the most vulnerable, such as blind people, on ergonomics of coins and banknotes. At midnight on 31 December 2001, she was the first to withdraw cash from a machine in Nice's old town.

Etienne Bassot, a former member of Nicole Fontaine's private office and now a director in the administration of the European Parliament, writes here in a personal capacity.

Nicole Fontaine wrote a book about her experiences entitled 'Mes combats' (Éditions Plon, 2002).

Etienne Bassot

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FORMER MEMBERS' NETWORK

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE: SETTING THE BAR SINCE 1949

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Association of Former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe (FP-AP), of which the FMA is a member, organised a visit to the CoE's headquarters in Strasbourg. The commemoration happened to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the FP-AP.

Between 2 and 4 October, we attended meetings at the Palais d'Europe with Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Theodoros Roussopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, PACE Secretary General, who, it so happens, previously worked with Miguel Angel Martinez, FMA Representative in the FP-AP, when he was President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

We also organised a working session with the Swiss Ambassador to the CoE and other members of the Parliamentary Assembly from different political groups. Our eventful visit was rounded off with a tour of the European Court of Human Rights, where we engaged in an inspiring discussion with the French judge, Mattias Guyomar, who hosted our visit.

The initiative to create the Council of Europe as an international organisation for cooperation – one that would ensure that Europe would remain a secure and peaceful place in which human rights, the rule of law and democracy prevail – came about at the Hague Congress in 1948. On 5 May 1949, 10 states – Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom,

Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Norway and Sweden – signed the Treaty of London, establishing the Council of Europe. This intergovernmental organisation is now made up of 46 European member States. For countries like mine – Spain – which were emerging from a dictatorship, the Council of Europe was the go-to political and legal platform for all democratic men and women for any issue related to the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights, particularly until we joined the EU.

In its 75 years of existence, the CoE has taken pioneering measures to uphold social rights and freedom of speech, to protect vulnerable people, combat racism, discrimination, violence against women, crime and cybercrime, and to defend our values in the face of new challenges, such as the rise of artificial intelligence.

At the Council of Europe, we can discuss issues that have no place in other institutions, and Ukraine's presence in the organisation, which it joined in 1996, gives it a voice among other European countries. We saw this at first hand during our visit, as we witnessed a thought-provoking debate in the Hemicycle of the Parliamentary

Assembly on the report entitled 'Commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor – Ukraine once again faces the threat of genocide', presented by Knut Abraham, rapporteur and Member of the German Bundestag.

To ensure that the Council of Europe's standards are acceptable to all, consensus is the basic rule for decision-making (if a vote is forced, a two-thirds majority is required). There is no right to veto as in the UN Security Council, nor as in the Council of the EU, where a de facto right to veto exists due to the unanimity required on certain issues.

At a time when threats to democracy are increasing and many rights are at risk, let us ensure that the Council of Europe remains the gold standard. A united Europe can only be built on communication and cooperation between countries, and that is precisely what the nature and work of the Council of Europe is all about.

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EP TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

HOW TO BECOME A REAL EUROPEAN AND DEFEND THE VOICE OF PEOPLE IN INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

UKRAINIAN ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSORS AND RESEARCHERS OF EU INTEGRATION, UKRAINE | 17 OCTOBER 2024 | ONLINE

As a former MEP I was recently asked to give a lecture to the Ukrainian Association of Professors and Researchers of European Integration. A roundtable discussion via internet organized in close cooperation with the FMA within the program "European Parliament to campus". 135 Professors, researchers and students of several Ukrainian universities participated in the event on line with Prof. Irina Sikorskaya of the Mariupol University in the lead. From day one it was a pleasant exercise. The preparations and the contacts via WhatsApp about what they expected it to be. I first had some hesitation since I left the EP in 1999. However it is my opinion that once a European one will always be a European. One that regularly follows the news from Brussels. I also decided not to write out my lecture but work from a list and order of keywords and really look at the reactions and faces on the screen. I tried to be with them.

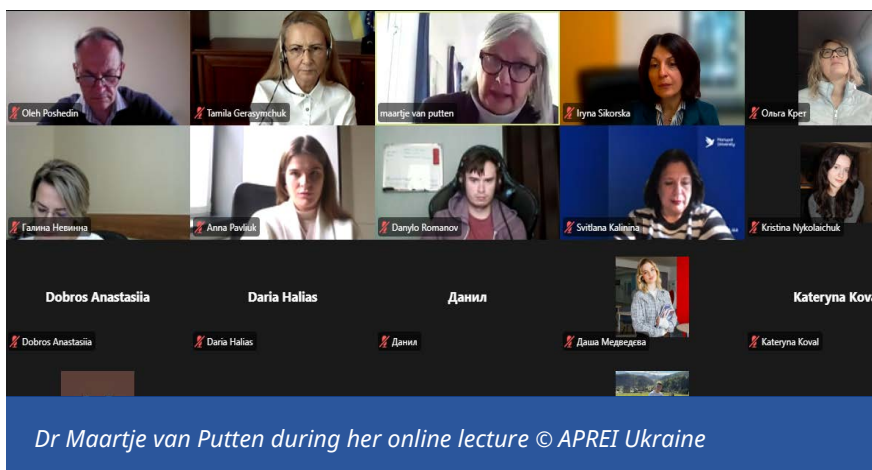
I first focused on my ten years of experience in the Parliament; examples of work and events in the EP committees and how to work with the different nationalities. I told them about an Ikea kitchen table I bought for my office and coffee that was always there. Portuguese or Finnish colleagues or any other nationality

from within the EU were welcome and we worked together on amendments for draft directives. And most important for me was to tell them that despite the differences between the North of Europe or the East or the South we all shared the same spirit concerning Freedom and Democracy, what made us Europeans. And since I have been several times for later work such as for the different Multilateral Financial Institutions in the Ukraine, I have experienced the desire of many who want the Ukraine to enter the EU.

It was easy to give some examples about the interesting and important EU legislation that come from Brussels created for the European Citizens. The later with the notion people also in the EU hear too little that important directives are at the basis of national legislation, such as directives in the field of health, consumer affairs or protection of the environment. I said: "Also in the Netherlands I still have to explain that the right to receive equal payment between men and women for the same work has not been created in The Hague but in Europe. Or take a directive that deals with medicines for children. In most if not all EU countries research for new medicines was mainly tested on (white) men. Not on its impact on women and not at all on children.

The later probably received a small portion of the medicines for men. It was the EU institutions that took this up. There is so much of this". Secondly I focused on how my European background with the Development committee in the EP resulted in becoming the European Member of the so called Inspection Panel of the World Bank. It is an accountability mechanism (3 independent members) for citizens that are harmed or could be harmed by projects financed by the World Bank. We discussed with the participants what the role of such mechanisms is, that it is important to know that these mechanisms exist for citizens, the position of Ukraine in the World Bank or what the European Investment Bank (EIB) means for the country and that the EIB also has such mechanism. It was probably rather new to them.

It took some pushing and pulling before the participants came with questions, such as what would be the impact on the economy of Ukraine while entering the EU. I referred back to the Central Bank of Ukraine and told them that becoming a member of the EU is not an easy thing. The country has to accept the common Acquis, the collection of all common rights and obligations that constitute the body of EU law. "The integration will be a hell of a job but finally you will be a full member of the Club". Lastly I expressed my concern about the present anti EU mood in some EU countries. We still have to fight all kinds of false information mainly circulating in social media. Ukrainians are known for the knowledge on how to use new media and internet. Maybe here lies a task for Ukraine? All together it was a pleasant event.



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FMA ANNUAL EVENTS

FMA END OF YEAR GREETINGS ON AI, EU SECURITY, DEFENCE AND DEMOCRACY



Guest of Honour at the FMA Annual Dinner Herman Van Rompuy

The FMA hosted significant events on recalibrating EU priorities amid pressing geopolitical challenges from 3 to 4 December 2024 at the European Parliament in Brussels. The gathering was chaired by FMA President Klaus Hänsch and featured distinguished speakers and an agenda centred on EU security, defence, artificial intelligence and democracy.

The programme commenced on 3 December with the annual cocktail reception, where Parliament Vice-President Esteban González Pons addressed attendees. His speech highlighted the significance of the FMA. We were honoured by the presence of the former EP and FMA President

Hans-Gert Pöttering as well as the Quaestors responsible for relations with the FMA Marc Angel and Fabienne Keller. This was followed by the annual dinner, headlined by keynote speaker Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council and former Prime Minister of Belgium who delivered an inspiring address entitled 'Europe in a dangerous world'. He outlined his speech around the following words: "unity, democracy, autonomy, long-term vision, more Europe" and provided a rich and insightful reflection on the current "mal du siècle", ending on a message of hope.

On 4 December, the day began with the Librorum event co-hosted with the European Parliament Liaison Office (EPL) in the Netherlands, spotlighting Marietje Schaake's book *The Tech Coup: How to Save Democracy from Silicon Valley*. Ms Schaake, an FMA member and prominent advocate for human rights, discussed the erosion of democracy owing to big tech's influence, saying that 'politics must always remain in the driver's seat'. The event featured FMA President Dr Klaus Hänsch, Danny de Paepe of the Netherlands EPL and FMA board members Manuel Porto and Michael Hindley. The annual seminar entitled 'EU security and defence: emerging threats

and strategies for a resilient future' followed. FMA President Dr Hänsch opened the session, with MEP Riho Terras outlining critical challenges to EU defence.

Notably, he argued that 'people in Europe do not understand that the war is imminent, which is why they do not invest in defence.



From left to right: C. N. Abel Romero Junquera, Jürgen Meindl, François Arbault, Dr. Klaus Hänsch, Elisabetta Fonck and Edit Herczog © European Union - EP 2024

It is the job of politicians on all levels to convince the people that investing in defence is essential'. Captain Abel Romero Junquera highlighted maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic. Austrian NATO Ambassador Jürgen Meindl explored the relationship between the EU and NATO. He argued that 'democracy must not only be defended externally but also internally. Destabilisation – such as a rumour spread on social media – costs nothing compared to weapons, yet it undermines the credibility of those in power'. François Arbault of the Commission outlined future steps for the EU's defence architecture. He frankly stated that 'in the EU, we are spending EUR 300 billion on defence, but it looks like Russia is preparing to overtake us. This is cause for immediate concern, and we need to tackle that. We are still not at the level of the 2 % target'. A question and answer session, moderated by former MEP Edit Herczog, concluded the seminar.

Both events underscored the EU's strategic recalibration in the context of global challenges. These speeches offered insights into how Europe can maintain its resilience to overcome challenges, as Herman Van Rompuy put it, 'in a dangerous world'.

All pictures of the FMA End of Year Greetings can be found on the FMA Flickr Account: <https://bit.ly/FMA-End-Of-Year-Greetings-24>



The recording of the FMA Librorum and Annual Seminar is available here: <https://bit.ly/RecordingFMALibrorumSeminar>



From left to right: FMA Board Member Manuel Porto, author and former MEP Marietje Schaake, FMA President Dr. Klaus Hänsch, FMA Board Member Michael Hindley, Elisabetta Fonck and Head of EPL Netherlands Danny De Paepe © European Union - EP 2024

FMA PATRONAGE

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND PEACE

On Tuesday, 15 October 2024, an event/conference entitled 'Cultural Diplomacy and Peace' was held in the afternoon in the elegant surroundings of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation's club (the Circolo degli Esteri) in Rome. Patronised by the European Parliament Former Members Association, the Union of Honourary Consults in Italy (UCOI) and the United Nations' University for Peace, the conference was organised by the Ars Pace Association with the support of Il Patto Sociale-Informazione Europa, a media outlet.

The opening addresses were delivered by Ambassador Carlo Marsili (Honourary President of UCOI) and by Enrique Barón Crespo, President of Ars Pace, representative of Leaders for Peace and former President of the European Parliament. We very much appreciated the contributions of a number of experts and renowned speakers, including: Ambassador Maria Assunta Accili, board member of the Italian Society for International Organization (SIOI) and a former Permanent Representative of the Republic of Italy to a number of international organisations based in Vienna; Dr Enzo Moavero Milanesi of Luiss Guido Carli University, former Deputy Secretary-General of the



Speakers at the conference 'Cultural Diplomacy and Peace' on 15 November 2024

Commission, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Minister of European Affairs; Cristiana Muscardini, columnist, policy analyst, analyst, founder of Raggruppamento Europa Sociale and former European Parliament group leader; Ambassador Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, President of the Istituto Affari Internazionali and former European Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship; Roberto Savio, Permanent Representative in Italy of the United Nations University for Peace and President of Inter Press Service; Monica Baldi, Vice-President of Ars Pace and of the European Parliament Former Members Association.

We found that the speeches made by Gianfranco Fini (former Minister for Foreign Affairs) and Lavinia de Nicola (the President of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Spouses Association) were particularly relevant.

Moderated by Rai Radio 1 journalist Tiziana Di Simone (presenter of Caffè Europa), this fascinating debate gave way to the presentation of 'SAFARI: a journey into the Lives of Italians in Africa', a book by Ms Muscardini, a recipient of the European Gold Medal of Merit. In the book, she argues that "Political and cultural leaders are responsible for not establishing criteria – including reciprocity and respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – conducive to co-existence and for failing to draft a Universal Charter of Duties. If we knew more about Africa and just how diverse it is, we would, among other things, be in a better position to understand it."

Young violinist Isabella Mastroeni, a member of the Rome's Fontane Youth Orchestra and of the Santa Cecilia Musical Conservatory's Symphony Orchestra, regaled guests with a performance of Bach's works. Various experts in the field and personalities from the institutional, diplomatic and cultural spheres took part, including Ambassador Daniele Verga, Vitaliana Gemelli MP and Mauro Nobilia MP.

Ars Pace organised this event to explore the key role that cultural diplomacy plays in strengthening political and economic ties and promoting intercultural dialogue, respect for diversity and human rights. Our outstanding contributors only served to reaffirm one of my long-held beliefs, namely that "cultural diplomacy promotes intercultural dialogue with a view to fostering socio-cultural cooperation and strengthening a nation's political and economic interests. It involves learning and respecting different ideologies, as well as conducting dialogue in a way that is respectful of diversity and human rights.

Cultural diplomacy is a form of soft power which plays a strategic role in the development of cooperation programmes and that is crucial for establishing solidarity and forging complex diplomatic relations, especially as regards peace processes."

Monica Baldi
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CONFERENZA
ars pace
15 MARTEDÌ OTTOBRE 2024 ORE 18.00
presenta

DIPLOMAZIA CULTURALE E PACE

La diplomazia culturale si occupa di promuovere il dialogo interculturale per favorire la cooperazione socio-culturale e rafforzare gli interessi politici ed economici di una nazione. Essa implica l'apprendimento e il rispetto delle diverse ideologie, nonché la realizzazione di processi di dialogo che rispettano le diversità e i diritti umani. La diplomazia culturale è quindi fondamentale per la solidarietà e i processi diplomatici complessi. L'Associazione culturale Ars Pace, presieduta da Enrique Barón Crespo, si dedica a promuovere la pace nel mondo attraverso l'arte, la musica, la cultura, la scienza e l'economia, con l'obiettivo di ristabilire equilibrio e armonia.

Programma
ore 18:00 > Apertura
Amb. Carlo Marsili, Presidente Onorario Unione dei Consigli Onorari in Italia (UCOI)
On. Enrique Barón Crespo, Presidente Ars Pace & Leader pour la Paix

ore 18:10 > Inizio conferenza
MODERA
Tiziana Di Simone, Giornalista Rai Radici conduttrice "Caffè Europa"

INTERVENZIONI
Amb. Maria Assunta Accili, Membro Consiglio Direttivo Società Italiana per la Organizzazione Internazionale (SIOI)
Prof. Enzo Moavero Milanesi, Università Luiss "Guido Carli" Roma
On. Cristiana Muscardini, editorialista, analista e fondatrice Raggruppamento Europa Sociale (RES)

Amb. Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, Presidente Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
Roberto Savio, Rappresentante Permanente in Italia di Università per la Pace delle Nazioni Unite (UPEACE)
On. Monica Baldi, Vicepresidente Ars Pace & European Parliament Former Members Association (EP_FMA)

ore 19:15 > Presentazione del libro "SAFARI: viaggio nella vita di italiani in Africa" dell'On. Cristiana Muscardini (medaglia d'oro al merito europeo)

ore 19:45 > Performance ARS PACE Il flauto del Maestro Andrea Coccononi

ore 20:00 > Vin d'Honneur

CON IL PATROCINIO DI
ACDPAE
IL PATTO SOCIALE
Lupetta

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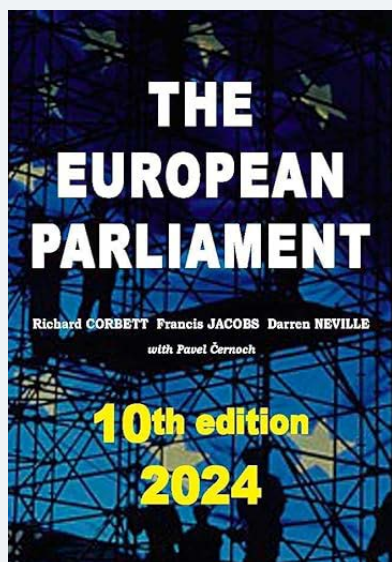
Lungotevere
dell'acqua Acetosa, 42
Roma

Poster of the event



THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – 10TH EDITION

by **Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs, Darren Neville**, with **Pavel Černoč**,
published by John Harper Publishing Ltd (10th edition, 2024)



Many colleagues will be familiar with *The European Parliament* - the book co-authored by our esteemed colleague, Former MEP Richard Corbett, an expert in parliamentary affairs in his own right and a committed pro-European who has made himself several and notable contributions in favour of a more united and democratic Union. A new 10th edition came out earlier this year, the first since 2016. It covers all aspects of how the Parliament works, the evolution of its powers and how it uses them, and about its members.

First published in 1990 (34 years ago!), it has become the standard textbook on the Parliament, used in universities across Europe, as well as by many MEPs, assistants, staff and journalists in Brussels. It is an amazing work in terms of the breadth of the aspects it covers and its analytical approach. The reader will be amazed to find information and analysis of any possible topic of her interest... the book has every detail about the Parliament in one place: you do not need to google a dozen websites to find what you are looking for! From the logistics of the Parliament (meeting places, languages, secretariat) to its actors and working structures (members, political groups, governing bodies, committees, delegations, plenary, intergroups)

to its powers (legislative, budgetary, appointments and dismissals, scrutiny and control, and more), or rules of procedure (a topic among many others in which Richard worked for many years as MEP), and how these have evolved over time. It answers almost every question you might ask.

What is remarkable is that each new edition is not simply an update of names of office holders – the Parliament itself evolves considerably between editions, often more than we think. When the first edition came out, Parliament had only a consultative role on most legislation, had no say on international agreements signed by the EU and no role in the appointment of the Commission. That has all changed, step by step, thanks also to the co-author, who was rapporteur of the Lisbon Treaty, and other committed colleagues. Parliament's approval is now required for (almost) all EU legislation, for the election of a Commission President, the appointment of the Commission as a whole, the ratification of international agreements, the accession of new Member States, and the conferral of delegated powers on the Commission. It is now incontournable in EU affairs, and the most dynamic among the institutions, even if further political fragmentation, particularly with the increasing role of Euroskeptic and far-right forces, and a certain lack of interest in institutional issues, could prevent the deployment of its full potential. The incoming negotiation of the Inter-Institutional Agreement with the Commission would be a key test for Parliament, particularly regarding the long-awaited development of its right of inquiry, blocked by Council for more than a decade. Parliament has also to figure out how to use its leverage vis-à-vis Council on its proposed reform of the electoral law for the introduction of the transnational lists, and on its proposal for amending the Lisbon Treaty, topics so far ignored by the Member States. As the reading of the book shows, Parliament has managed over time to find all sorts of ways, political but also bureaucratic, to increase its powers and influence, even in the most difficult circumstances.

This trend must not stop, particularly in the event of further enlargement, since it is for the benefit of European democracy and its citizens.

As already hinted, Corbett's experience is particularly appropriate for writing such a book. He was an MEP from 1996 to 2020 (with a five-year gap), was Parliament's co-rapporteur on the Constitutional Treaty and on the Lisbon Treaty, several times rapporteur on revising the EP's Rules of Procedure, Parliament's negotiator of the reform of the "comitology" procedures, ten years S&D Group coordinator at AFCO, and Leader of the UK Labour MEPs. Previously, he had worked with Altiero Spinelli on Parliament's 1984 proposal for a Treaty on European Union and became Deputy Secretary General of the S&D Group. While out of the Parliament between 2009-14, he was Principal Advisor to Herman Van Rompuy, the first full-time President of the European Council.

Corbett's co-authors are (since the first edition) Francis Jacobs, former head of the secretariat of the EP committee on environment and consumer protection, previously on economic & monetary affairs, and on constitutional affairs, later head of the EP's Dublin office, well known to many former Members, and (more recently) Darren Neville, of the budget committee secretariat. I may add that Richard is also a dear colleague and friend to many of us, always available to give powerful insights over the coffee table for the benefit of the integration project, to which he remains wholeheartedly committed.

The book is available via Amazon, the European Bookshop, or direct from the publisher at: <https://www.johnharperpublishing.co.uk/the-european-parliament/>

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UPCOMING EVENTS



ACTIVITIES

27
JANUARY 2025

Online Roundtable “Commitment to strengthening democracy”

On Monday 27 January (*date and timing to be confirmed*), the Former Members Association in cooperation with associations of former parliamentarians outside of the EU will organise an online Roundtable. More information will soon be available.

26-28
MARCH 2025

FMA Visit to Poland (*dates to be confirmed*)

From 26 to 28 March 2025, the FMA will visit Poland on the occasion of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Delegation will be led by FMA President Klaus Hänsch. Registrations will open beginning of 2025 via mail.

20-21
MAY 2025

FMA Annual Events

On Tuesday 20 May, the FMA will remember those former MEPs who passed away in 2024-2025 during the Annual Memorial Service in the EP Hemicycle (Brussels), followed by the FMA Cocktail Reception and Annual Dinner. The following day, the Annual General Assembly takes place. The Annual Lunch will close the FMA Annual Events on Wednesday 21 May.

MEMBERS' NEWS

Obtaining your doctorate at 82

In times of Corona, when not so many activities were available, I started writing about gay rights legislation in the Netherlands. It turned out that little research had been carried out in this field, in spite of a lengthy and arduous political battle. Three years later, in January 2024, at the age of 82, I defended my thesis at the University of Amsterdam, titled: *Gay politics in the Netherlands (1966–2023): the symbolic power of legislation*.

This dissertation describes and analyses four legislative changes that mark the history of homosexuality in the Netherlands after World War II: the repeal of Article 248bis of the Penal Code (1971), the creation of the General Equal Treatment Act (AWGB, 1994), marriage equality (2001) and the addition of 'sexual orientation' to Article 1 of the Constitution (2023). The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, it aims to map these legislative processes using the original parliamentary sources. The focus is not on the final legislative texts, but on the legislative processes and related political discussions. Secondly, the symbolic effects of these legislative processes are examined. These symbolic effects of legislation relate to the interpretation of the equality principle and to different views on homosexuality. During the last fifty years, attitudes towards homosexuality have become much more tolerant, not only in the Netherlands but also in other European countries. In the Netherlands, however, these changes began much earlier and went faster than elsewhere. My book explores possible reasons for these differences. Regarding the legislative changes I have studied in this book, however, the Netherlands was not in the forefront across the board: it was in the equalisation of the age of consent, anti-discrimination legislation and marriage equality, but lagged behind in the introduction of registered partnership and the addition of 'sexual orientation' to the non-discrimination clause in the Constitution. The progress of law reform is also influenced by the organisation of policy making. 'All politics is local' seems applicable here.

Joke Swiebel

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FMA AT WORK

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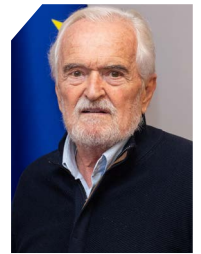
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Ms Baldi (Chair), Mr Audy, Mr McMillan-Scott, Ms Riera Madurell and Mr Rübig.

EP to Campus: Mr Hindley (Chair), Mr Porto and Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl.

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Relations with the House of European History: Mr Martínez Martínez.

Relations with the European University Institute (EUI): Ms Baldi.

IN MEMORIAM



Dieter P.A. SCHINZEL

☞ 24 August 2024
PES, Germany (1979-1994)

He served as a German Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Schinzel represented *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*.



Oldřich VLASÁK

☞ 12 October 2024
EPP-ED (2004-2009), ECR (2009-2014), Czechia

He served as a Czech Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Vlasák represented *Občanská demokratická strana*.



Lyndon H.A. HARRISON

☞ 18 October 2024
PES, United Kingdom (1989-1999)

He served as a British Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Harrison represented the Labour Party.



Paul M.J. STAES

☞ 13 November 2024
RBW (1984-1989), Greens/EFA (1989-1994), Belgium

He served as a Belgian Member of the European Parliament. At the national

Annual Memorial Service booklet

Dear Member,

The Secretariat is preparing a booklet to remember (former) MEPs who passed away in 2024 and 2025 who will be commemorated during the Annual Memorial Service on **Tuesday 20 May 2025** in the Hemicycle of the European Parliament (Brussels).

We would like to ask you if you are available to write a text for one or more of your former colleagues who passed away. A full list is available via the FMA website here: <https://bit.ly/AMS2025>

The text must be written in English or French and can count **150-180 words**. The **deadline** is **24 January 2025**. Please send your text to us via mail: FormerMembers@europarl.europa.eu.



GEOPOLITICS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



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EASTERN EU MEMBERS – BETWEEN FEARS, POPULISM AND RELIANCE ON THE UNION



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The recent US elections very vividly reminded us that this supreme instrument of democracy is more influenced by emotions rather than by rational analysis. Understanding these emotions and the driving forces behind them is essential when promoting political strategies. Public emotions might be provoked by unpredictable factors like natural disasters, wars, human suffering, migration but also by fake or manipulated information. The history shows that negative emotions are a much stronger factor, motivating the electorate than the positive ones.

The rise of the right and the extremes in Europe and the US is very much driven by emotions, short termism and fears. Fears from migrants, fears from a declining economy, fears from shrinking international influence, fears from loss of living standards.

All these challenges are present in one form or another, but the problem is that the traditional politics and the main street parties do not offer or do not properly communicate a reassuring alternative. The voters in the US were concerned by the increasing prices, when the inflation was under control. They were ready to listen to promises that carbon fuels production will be the magic solution, bringing down prices in the supermarkets, when the US is drilling record levels of gas and petrol.

The working-class people voted for billionaires, promising to decrease their own taxes. Recent immigrants voted for closing the borders and mass deportations. Emotions left behind the rationale. We see very similar developments in Europe. For a very long time the EU was built on the foundations of the memories from the wars and the threat from the communist bloc.

“The rise of the right and the extremes in Europe and the US is very much driven by emotions, short termism and fears.”

From the ashes of the war, the founding fathers brilliantly created a union that secured peace, built a strong economy and enshrined the values of freedom and democracy. The unification of the continent was another great victory.

Likewise, it was also a victory for the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe, who benefited enormously from the freedom of movement and the EU solidarity that changed the vision of the regions and the profile of the economies. Two decades fast forward, the war and the divisions mean less and less for the new generations.

The European Union was an inspiration for the societies in Central and Eastern Europe until the euphoria faded away and the challenges became more apparent. The free movement exacerbated the demographic problems of the East. The transformation of the societies left many people that could not adapt behind. Very often the governments failed to lead and motivate.

The old public Stockholm syndrome of reliance on a Big Brother turned for parts of the society into disappointment from

the lack of a magic Brussels intervention to solve the problems in the country.

Much of this is not rational but emotional. And these emotions were skilfully turned into fears, bringing extremists and anti-democrats into the political landscape. They are conservative, play their game with dictators invoking some fake nostalgies and make everything possible to demonstrate national superiority over the EU institutions. They are using false "patriotic" rhetoric in an effort to disguise the unsatisfactory economic performance, the divisions in the society or the compromises with the democratic values.

This propaganda is used by the nationalists as a scape goat to divert the public attention from their own failures to an imaginary external evil and the EU institutions are easily assigned with this role.

However, Europe lives in a context. Putin's aggression against Ukraine, the mass killings in the Middle East, the results of the US election that might lead to deep divisions between traditional allies in defence, economy, quest for democracy and the rule of law. All these developments around us are real and create strong fears. Putin's war is perceived as a direct threat, especially by countries as the Baltics and Poland.

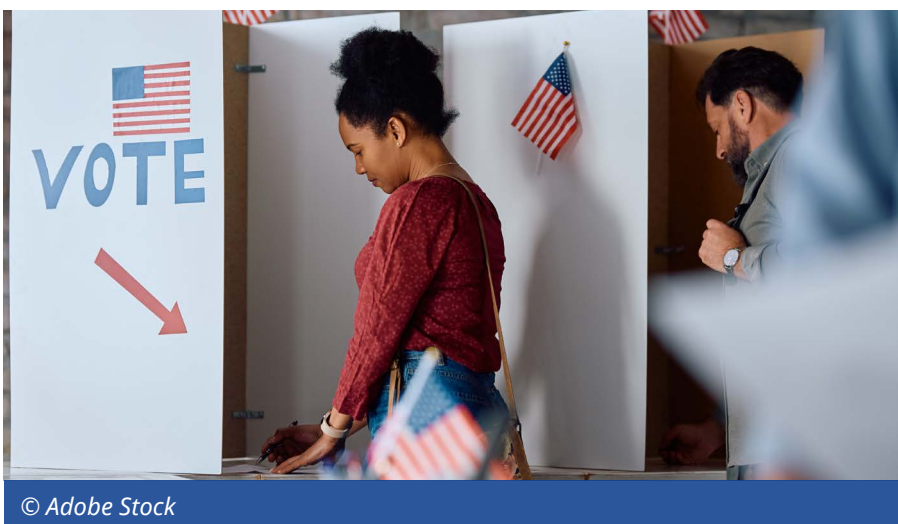
Paradoxically the Russian aggression already led to enlargement of NATO with countries that never thought about that 3 years ago, to loss of the attractive European energy markets and to a consolidation in the EU. The impact of these fears will last. The devastation in Gaza and Lebanon, the risk of a conflict involving Iran and Israel increases the possibility of an even higher migration from the region and Eastern Europe would be the first to meet the wave.

Now the expectations are that the EU will be able to step up, address efficiently the external challenges and protect the quality of life of its citizens.

From migration management to competitive economy and to defence, the common effort can be much more effective than the national ones. At the same time these expectations need to be managed. EU can work well when all member states act together. The latest example was the way COVID-19 was addressed and in particular the efforts to preserve the jobs and recover the economies. Hence the populists and nationalists should be kept responsible to demonstrate their countries' and their own contribution to the common EU efforts. In this case, there is no "they" and "we".

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"Now the expectations are that the EU will be able to step up, address efficiently the external challenges and protect the quality of life of its citizens."



GEOPOLITICS OF THE EU – THE SITUATION FROM 1989 ONWARDS

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the beginning of a new era for Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc ignited a wave of democracy and freedom, leading to the enlargement of the European Union from 12 to 28 Member States. This expansion was driven by their desire to integrate former Eastern Bloc countries into a democratic and economically stable Europe. However, this spirit has been heavily challenged since Putin's 2014 annexation of Crimea, which has reignited tensions and opposition to further EU enlargement from Europe's increasing Right.

I was first elected an MEP in 1984 and, having been a regular visitor to the Eastern Bloc, set about developing an EU programme to promote democracy and human rights, initially focussed on the USSR plus Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights later developed worldwide scope, with today a €1 Billion budget. It is the only EU external programme which can operate without host country consent.

As the EU grapples with new challenges, Donald Trump's re-election as US President introduces a myriad of geopolitical issues. His tariffs on European goods threaten significant economic repercussions from the entire continent.

Germany's internal political crisis, sparked in November 2024 by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's fallout with his finance minister over Ukraine aid, adds another layer of complexity. The resulting instability in the EU's largest economy is concerning, but the EU's overall resilience and unity are equally crucial.

The instability in Germany is mirrored by President Macron's precarious government in France. UK premier Sir Keir Starmer's efforts to reset post-Brexit relations with the EU, especially in defence and security, must navigate this troubling landscape, while UK public opinion polls now show that 70% think Brexit has gone badly (<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2024/10/08/05cab/2>).

Across the EU, member states face structural economic challenges. Once regarded as solid industrial powerhouses, economies like Germany's are now overly reliant on a few sectors like automotive and chemicals. The car industry, for instance, faces declining sales, high costs, and fierce competition from China. These economic issues are compounded by social unrest, with significant portions of the population turning to Rightist parties driven by concerns over immigration and the cost of living.

Beyond economic and political challenges, the EU must also contend with rising autocratic regimes globally. Beijing, Pyongyang, Tehran and the increasingly isolationist and protectionist stance of Trump's Washington pose significant threats to the liberal democratic order the EU champions. Looking ahead, the EU must brace itself for potential economic fallout from a US-EU trade war and address the structural weaknesses in its Member States' economies. Political stability in key countries like Germany and France will be crucial for maintaining a cohesive and effective European response to these challenges. The next few months will be pivotal in shaping the EU's ability to uphold its values of democracy and economic stability. This historical perspective demands a refreshed and renewed defence posture for the EU. The coming months will be crucial in determining how the EU navigates these issues and maintains its role as a bastion of democratic values in an increasingly complex world.

Edward McMillan-Scott
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Happier days: EP Vice-President Edward McMillan-Scott and US Secretary of State John Kerry meet centrist candidate Dr Mustafa Barghouti as they led the largest-ever observer delegations to Palestine's first presidential election in January 2005

THE EU'S GEOSTRATEGIC RESPONSIBILITIES

After several centuries of Europe being a global heavyweight, albeit in the second half of the 20th century, more economically than politically (the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union stands out more here), the world will be very different in the 21st century, as new powers emerge. Economically, the US – Europe – Japan triad will be a thing of the past, given some countries' exponential growth, such as China (and India, for example).

Taking into account the competition from these and other countries, increasingly in the same sectors, the fears of countries such as the United States and European countries, which have higher wages and a particularly costly social model, are understandable; it could be concluded that protectionism should be the way forward (leaving our political and social model out of the equation), preventing competition for goods from the outside world (that was the path President Trump chose and is the option some European politicians support).

It is not a position that the European Union has taken, however: it has continued (with the exception of CAP protectionism) to be open. It applies low to average level of customs taxes and many products are not taxed at all; and it has advocated its policy of openness in documents that have been published, including the Europe2020 strategy and even in documents published in the last couple of years.

Stress has been placed on the idea that the way forward is to focus instead on broadening and deepening the single market, 'a single market for the 21st century'.



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That route is intended to put EU citizens' interests and EU activities first, but it also benefits people and businesses from outside the EU, who are able to move freely within it and follow common technical requirements in an economic area with considerable sway. And a single currency among 20 heavy-hitting countries also makes it much easier for people from outside that space.

If we want to continue moving towards global free trade within the WTO, creating integration areas will be the way forward, establishing and deepening the single market and establishing the euro, which is obviously not possible outside an institutional framework like the one that the European Union provides.

Integration spaces are also necessary for financially burdensome or risky initiatives and to bolster social and territorial cohesion; and in cases of that kind they may offer benefits beyond what we might expect of integration spaces.

The EU's success in that approach, with positive economic results, is an incentive to open up more markets and to create and deepen integration spaces in other areas of the world, to the benefit of its citizens, but in turn it is also a way of expanding opportunities for the EU's economic activities.

The EU is facing a difficult future but it will be able to tackle those challenges with a view to its own interests and the interests of the world as a whole; it has and will continue to have a desirable and very important role to play in current and future global geostrategic challenges.

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