

CBE Roundtable Event: ‘Europe’s Place in a Challenged World’

The combination of Brexit, a global pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine is proving to be an awkward constellation of events for the EU to handle. The Centre for Britain and Europe’s (CBE) round table event discussing the future of the EU has therefore proved very timely. On 28 April 2022, the CBE welcomed Rector Federica Mogherini, former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Barbara Serra, award-winning journalist, TV presenter, documentary maker and author, to the University of Surrey. Professor Amelia Hadfield, Head of the Department of Politics at the University of Surrey and Co-Director of the CBE, and Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos, Reader of European Politics at the University of Surrey, completed the esteemed panel. Chairing the panel was Dr Alia Middleton, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Surrey and Co-Director of the CBE. During the event, Dr Alia Middleton facilitated some incredibly thought-provoking discussion regarding the EU’s ability to be an effective foreign and security actor.

Speakers:



Federica Mogherini
Rector, College of Europe, Former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy



Barbara Serra
Award-winning journalist, TV presenter, documentary-maker and author



Prof Amelia Hadfield
Dean International, Head of Department of Politics, Director of the CBE



Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos
Reader in European Politics

Chair:



Dr Alia Middleton
Senior Lecturer in Politics, Co-Director of The CBE

Rector Federica Mogherini commenced the discussion by giving a more optimistic view on the future of the EU. Focusing on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Rector Federica Mogherini explained that in 2014, Putin was betting on the internal collapse of Ukraine, however, owing to the support mechanisms provided by the EU, this never occurred. Putin’s accumulated frustration at the ultimate success of the EU thus resulted in his military aggression. Putin did not expect such a rapid, united and effective response from the EU which Rector Federica Mogherini claimed, has provided the institution with a solid basis of self-confidence to project itself with in the future.

Offering a different perspective on the future of Europe, Barbara Serra outlined the importance of establishing European values. As a believer of European identity, Barbara Serra explained that at a time of significant geopolitical change, it is imperative to define the metaphorical glue between Europeans: the values that link one of us together and thus make the continent an attractive destination. However, Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos highlighted that the revelation of such values relies on the restoration of trust in political institutions. Describing the current landscape as a 'watershed moment', Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos discussed that opportunities can be harvested from the crises we have witnessed over the recent years to bring citizens back to the forefront of democracy.

Building on this, Professor Amelia Hadfield expressed that in a year, Europe will face its biggest challenge: dealing with the outfall of the Ukraine crisis. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine casting a spotlight on the importance of energy security and the unequal distribution of energy within Europe, Professor Amelia Hadfield explained that the crisis would pave the way for a new generation of energy distribution, enabling the EU to reset the current asymmetry. Despite such challenges, Professor Amelia Hadfield voiced her optimism for the future of the EU, aligning with Barbara Serra on the importance of re-integrating European values.

It is clear that the recent spate of crises has brought the EU to a crossroads, a sentiment which was echoed by Rector Federica Mogherini when she quoted Jean Monnet, "decisive moments happen following crises". Russia's invasion of Ukraine is different from previous acts of aggression as it not only involves a member of the Security Council, but also a significant nuclear power. Rector Federica Mogherini explained that many make the mistake of defining the invasion of Ukraine as an attack on the West, however she defined it as an attack on multilateralism. With European citizens not used to wars taking place on their soil, Barbara Serra explained that Putin presents a different level of threat to that felt amongst Europe during the fight against the War on Terror.

Looking further ahead, Rector Federica Mogherini went on to highlight that the question, 'where is Russia going?', has generally been left unanswered which in turn, sparks the question of 'where is Europe going in terms of enlargement?'. Rector Federica Mogherini explained that the future of the EU could rely on the offering of 'partial membership' to certain countries, which would hopefully solve the issue of the Balkans and the Association Trio. Before taking questions from the audience, Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos nicely summarised the panel discussion. He explained

that the EU must reflect and learn lessons from the recent crises to improve reaction mechanisms and create safeguards for the when the next crisis emerges.



After discussing the role of the EU on a grand scale, the floor was opened to questions from the audience. One of the many stimulating questions from the audience included, “how does the EU help the individual citizen?”. Barbara Serra explained that this boils down to an issue with European media. Europe lacks a common media and language, unlike the Middle East, which Barbara Serra felt is detrimental to the portrayal of the EU at the citizenry level. Rector Federica Mogherini, however, expressed that the often negative depiction of the EU comes as a result of domestic politicians using the institution as a scapegoat for its nation’s problems. Of course, this is ironic considering the EU is made up of nation states, however, Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos discussed the need to merge the elite and citizenry level to restore trust in institutions and enable individuals to feel a sense of ownership in their decisions.

Fundamentally, as highlighted by Professor Amelia Hadfield, the EU has a responsibility to contribute to global norms and regulations. The international rules-based order turns to the EU for both the good and the bad. The past few years have spotlighted the EU’s ability to make tough decisions and whilst the road ahead looks difficult, it provides the foundations for optimism.

Written by Evie Horner.