

Too little, but not too late – Some Reflections on EU Studies in New Zealand

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7 April 2001

1. Towards a “Rediscovery of Europe”?

In the past decade European Studies became a growth industry in the Asia-Pacific.¹ European Studies programs and research facilities have been set up in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, China and South Korea, some of them with considerable support provided by the European Commission. More recently, similar centres and programs have been established in Australia and New Zealand. In consonance with these developments, several national Associations for European Studies and a network linking the Western Pacific were formed. This “rediscovery of Europe” (Holland 1999) constitutes a departure from previous priorities in the fields of research and education which in the process of nation-building and the search for an indigenous national identity accorded attention to Europe only as the colonial villain and the culprit for many of the political, economic and social anomalies which marked the post-independence era in the Asia-Pacific region.

¹ See, for instance, Suthipand Chirathivat/Poul Henrik Larsen (eds.): *European Studies in Asia... New Challenges and Contributions to the Understanding Between Asia and Europe. Workshop Proceedings*, Bangkok: Centre for European Studies, Chulalongkorn University 1999.

A number of reasons account for the “European Renaissance”² in the Asia-Pacific. They can be found in the region itself as well as in changes of Europe’s foreign policy agenda. To begin with the European side, the upgrading of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) to a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) through the Treaty of Maastricht has undoubtedly helped to sharpen the contours of an European foreign policy identity and, with it, a tendency to become a more assertive and more outward looking international player than hitherto.

Yet, it is safe to assume that the main impetus for Europe’s renewed presence in the Asia-Pacific came from the twin experience of Asia’s economic boom and Europe’s doom in the 1990s. While East and Southeast Asia – and by OECD standards – Australia and New Zealand, too, enjoyed unprecedented economic growth, Europe went through a protracted recession with high rates of structural unemployment. While Europe was preoccupied with its own problems such as the transformation of Eastern Europe, enlargement, completion of the Single Market and paving the way for the Economic and Monetary Union, its complacent attitude toward the Asia-Pacific and, by coincidence, other world regions, abruptly changed with APEC’s first summit held in Seattle in 1993. The summit sent shock waves through Europe, the more so as it

² In reference to the concept of an “*Asian Renaissance*” coined by former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

was preceded by the ratification of NAFTA through the US Congress. Both events conveyed to Europeans the message of a seeming American policy shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific and a gravitational shift in the world economy.

These geopolitical and geoeconomic changes were paralleled by stiffening Asian resistance against Western and, in particular, European conditionalities³ which became part and parcel of the EU's relationship with the non-Western world after the end of the East-West conflict. Rejecting Western universalism, which many saw as an attempt to erect a new Western value hegemony and as thinly veiled protectionism designed to block the rise of Asia's high performing economies, the Asian side responded with collective identity-building based on cultural relativism. The Asian value hypotheses became a frontal challenge of Western concepts of political, economic and social order and set the tone for an "Asianization of Asia" (Funabashi). Politicians, academics and the media ritually designated the 21st century the "Pacific Century" and predicted "Asia's rise to the sun" (Mahbubani 1993). A causal relationship was established between the Asian economic miracle and Asian values which were seen as more in tune with the demands of

³ These include democratic forms of government, observation of human rights, disarmament, market-oriented reforms and development-orientation.

globalization than the sclerotic, overly legalistic and bureaucratized, laggard and decadent Europe (Rüland 1996).

While the persistent treatment as a pathological case, which found ample expression in frequent references to the “European disease”, helped to pave the way for neoliberal inroads into the European societal discourse, mounting fears of losing out in the world’s economically most dynamic region and an urgently felt need to counter what was perceived as grossly misleading clichés of the Asian value hypotheses, Europeans launched a new cultural offensive in the Asia-Pacific region. While the EU policy document “*Towards a New Asia Strategy*” (European Union 1994) displayed a strong economic bias, educational, scientific and cultural activities were regarded as an important complementary device to improve Europe’s image in the Asia-Pacific. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), inaugurated by the Bangkok Summit in March 1996, provided the institutional framework for these policies, which received a further boost with the establishment of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in 1997. The European Asia strategy went hand in hand with a similar foray into American universities as a result of the *New Transatlantic Agenda*, with the Commission earmarking US \$ 10 million for the establishment of EU Studies in the States (Holland 1999:28). By the mid-1990s it had finally dawned to Europeans that mastering globalization requires a

multi-faceted and sophisticated presence in the Triad's core regions. In fact, educational, cultural and scholarly activities have become important prerequisites for building up "soft power" (Nye 1990), which nowadays must be considered a crucial resource in the Triadic struggle over the agenda and the definition of the rules in global multilateral fora.

Yet, promoting European Studies also held some attraction for decision-makers in the Asia-Pacific. The profound changes in Europe's political landscape after the collapse of socialism, persistent fears over a Fortress Europe and diversion of European investment and aid from developing countries to Eastern Europe, seemed to suggest to Asian governments that domestic expertise on Europe may be a valuable asset in their interactions with the EU. Thus, despite the contentious value debate and a similar set of grievances in the area of trade, it is interesting to note that Asians were more responsive to the European overtures than New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, Australia. Even long after the devastating consequences of Asian crisis had become evident, New Zealand, for instance, was still preoccupied with her efforts of building a Pacific identity. In institutional terms this policy has found its expression in the remarkable contribution Australia and New Zealand made to the creation and development of APEC and – as far as scholarly research is concerned -- the establishment of think tanks and study programs related to the Asia-Pacific. In New

Zealand the APEC Study Centre in Auckland, the Asia Studies Institute and the Asia 2000 Foundation must be named in this context.

Geography has not changed after the Asian crisis. What, however, has changed in the Asia-Pacific, is the general environment for small countries like New Zealand to find partners for the pooling of bargaining power in major global fora. With APEC in disarray, limited prospects for new regional groupings such as the P 5 and the Western Pacific Forum, the slow progress of negotiations for an ASEAN-CER free trade agreement and bilateral free trade agreements, such as the one recently concluded with Singapore, and new Asian cooperative arrangements under the auspices of ASEAN+3, which is an EAEC⁴ in disguise and, in effect, excludes Australia and New Zealand, as an external observer one would have expected a stronger readjustment towards an omnilateral foreign policy.⁵

2. Studying the EU – How and What?

The *Joint Declaration on Relations between the EU and New Zealand* of May 1999 is one sign of cautious reorientation. The establishment of the

⁴ The proposal for an East Asian Economic Grouping (EAEG), later renamed into East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), was first launched by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Muhamad in late 1990. It was designed as an East Asian regional bloc able to represent Asian interests in transregional fora such as APEC and in global multilateral fora. It explicitly excluded all Anglo-Pacific countries, including Australia and New Zealand.

⁵ Which so far mainly concentrated on relations with Latin American countries. Ibid., p.4.

Centre for Research on Europe at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch is another. Yet, for the Center, given finite personal and material resources, the question invariably arises what should be studied, how, for whom and to what end. Before addressing this question in greater detail, a few preliminary remarks must be made.

Although a sharp thematic profile might be desirable for an institution like the CRE, under the above-mentioned circumstances, it makes probably more sense to opt for a wider approach that integrates many disciplines and thus encourages interdisciplinary work. At the same time the Centre's research program should strike a reasonable balance between basic and applied research.

While this always entails the danger of ending up with a laundry-list of projects, a small country such as New Zealand can hardly afford a degree of specialization as larger countries. However, a certain degree of prioritization of research topics may contain this danger.

This said, the following priorities may be considered:

One priority area should be the EU. This, of course, is a deliberate choice for contemporary themes. The EU is undoubtedly the engine of political, economic and social change in Europe. It increasingly represents European interests in the world and the growing weight of its policies has

a major impact on the interests of non-members. The fact that New Zealand's interests are tangibly affected by the EU not only, but particularly, economically, and that academic expertise on the EU is rather scarce and scattered, qualifies EU Studies as major focus for the Centre's research activities.

Research on the EU should be built around the four core disciplines of Political Science, Economics, Law and History. This concept basically follows the European Study Centres set up in various parts of Asia during the 1990s with the assistance of a Consortium of European Universities.

While without EU Studies the Centre would probably sooner or later face a legitimacy problem, this priority must not become a procrustean bed. As a catalyst for European research topics, the Centre should tap and promote whatever scholarly talent and interest is devoted to Europe – in the University of Canterbury, but if suitable also through cooperation with other institutions in New Zealand. This opens up a broad range of topics far beyond the EU.

As far as the above-mentioned core disciplines are concerned, other European cooperative arrangements such as CEFTA, the Council of Baltic Sea States, EFTA, the Black Sea Cooperation or the various forms of transborder cooperation, as exemplified by the Euroregions, may be studied. Other topics could include the violent conflicts on Europe's

periphery, foreign policies and domestic societal developments in individual European countries.

The latter would provide ample opportunities to bring in additional disciplines such as sociology, geography, anthropology, literatures and languages. These disciplines could perhaps be summarized under the heading of cultural studies. While cultural studies may be at variance with utilitarian concepts of research, they open up valuable insights into Europe's major societal discourses in such fields as fine arts, fiction and the mass media. To claim that such reflections of the "*Zeitgeist*" do not have a marked impact on policy formulation and policy outcomes is tantamount to subscribing to a rather narrow concept of politics.

As a political scientist I am not in a position to comment on the whole gamut of very legitimate research concerns in the field of European Studies. I believe that there is much time left for in-depth group discussions tomorrow in which the various disciplines could formulate their own research priorities in the context of their resources and capacities. I will therefore limit myself in the next few minutes to a further elaboration of what could be topics in EU research. While, again, there exists a plethora of very legitimate and interesting topics, none of which should be excluded beforehand, a major criterion for my

assessment is the potential benefit for New Zealand in its interactions with the EU.

2.1. External Relations and CSFP

As the EU develops international actor qualities in an increasing number of policy fields with an intensifying presence in a growing number of international fora and issues, in-depth expertise on the Union's external relations and the CFSP must constitute a key interest for a non-member such as New Zealand. This includes the analysis of institutional changes such as recently the creation of the Office of a High Representative for the CFSP, the impact of these changes on policy- and decision-making, and their effects on the dynamics of interaction between member governments, transnational groups and European institutions.

Studies of this kind would basically address the internal dimensions of Europe's foreign policy formation, as they have to assess to what extent the foreign policymaking process sheds its intergovernmental character and moves forward toward the supranational end of the integration process. For non-members this transformation may have profound consequences. The more this is the case, the more the EU ceases to provide scope for two-level political games. As the Europeanization of the CFSP and external relations proceeds, one may expect increasing

difficulties for non-members to exploit divergent national member interests through the instrumentalization of bilateral state-to-state relations.

More specifically, the CRE could focus on case studies of the EU as an international actor. As globalization proceeds and with it the border-crossing nature of an increasing number of policy matters, there is a tendency for the continued multilateralization of international relations. From the perspective of New Zealand one very obvious arena of interest in this respect is the WTO. Since 25 percent of the country's wealth hinges on agriculture and agricultural exports, it is persistently at loggerheads with the EU and the latter's reluctant liberalization of its agricultural policies. This provides ample rationale for studying the EU as an actor in the WTO, her strategies, negotiation techniques, communication patterns, coalition-building and policy results.

Closely related to this topic is the relationship between the EU and the Cairns Group. The lack of bargaining power of a small country vis-à-vis powerful economic blocs such as the EU prompted New Zealand to join the Cairns Group of agricultural exporters. Yet, very little is known over how and with what effects the Cairns Groups represents its interests in and vis-à-vis the EU.

It is now conventional wisdom that globalization and regionalization complement each other. In fact, globalization has been a major force behind the so-called *New Regionalism* which saw a proliferation of regional organizations from the mid-1980s onward. Driven by Brussels, which seeks to rationalize its external relations by increasingly moving towards bloc-to-bloc dialogues, gave rise to the emergence of inter- and transregional relations. Though adversely affected by the Asian crisis, these inter- and transregional dialogues may assume important intermediary functions in an emerging system of global governance by serving as agenda-setters and clearing houses for global multilateral fora. While the major powers of the Triad are involved in at least two such relationships, New Zealand is only a member of APEC. Due to a membership moratorium, neither New Zealand nor Australia can hope in the near future to be admitted to ASEM. Yet, although ASEM, like APEC, is struggling to rise on top of its talk shop image, the Asian-European relationship has a definite impact on New Zealand's immediate perimeter of interests as it increases policy options of her Asian neighbors in the same way as it limits the scope of her own choices. After all, ASEM has strengthened Europe as a competitor of New Zealand in Asian markets.

Another topic to be placed in this context is the EU's policy of negotiating bilateral free trade agreements with major countries such as South Africa and Mexico as well as regional organizations such as the MERCOSUR. While from a European perspective these are results of the intensifying global economic competition with the United States over market shares and rules, such bilateral agreements may jeopardize New Zealand's trade interests in many ways. Their consequences may even be exacerbated as New Zealand's own may negotiations to establish free trade arrangements with Pacific Rim countries proceed sluggishly.

While these are areas where European and New Zealand interests may diverge and therefore, from New Zealand's perspective, deserve intensive research, there are others where interests converge. One such area is development aid. Through its long-established link to the ACP states, the EU and New Zealand share a common interest in the development of the South Pacific islands. Yet, they also share an interest in the eradication of poverty in Asia as well as an avid concern for halting the disruptive social consequences of the Asian crisis such as separatism, religious strife and uncontrolled migration. This common interest rests on a strong foundation of shared values such as popular participation, democracy, the observation of human rights and sustainable development. They are perceived as prerequisites for conflict prevention and stability. As donor

countries have considerably scaled down aid in recent years and, contrary to their overarching common interests, tend to involve themselves in turf fights over political influence in recipient countries, studies on the EU's development policies, especially if focussing on Asia and the Pacific, could help pave the way to a more coordinated development policy between the EU, New Zealand and possibly also Australia for the benefit of the target groups.

Shared interests also exist in the area of security. Although the EU may not and perhaps should not play a major security role in the Asia-Pacific, it is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and therefore an actor with potential influence on New Zealand's security perimeter. Although the ARF has yet to evolve into a full-fledged security regime for the Asia-Pacific, there is definitely a rationale to study the European role in the ARF. One is to secure European acceptance for New Zealand's nuclear free policy, the other is the growing potential for cooperation in peace-keeping efforts. European efforts to form a rapid deployment force coincide with New Zealand's, albeit controversial, moves to restructure its army into a peace-keeping force. Yet, the peace-keeping capacities of both could be brought to good use in conflicts on the doorsteps of both sides. A third rationale for studying security issues is the evolving nature of the European defence identity itself. To understand European security

policies requires a good grasp of the institutions, the apparatus and the decision-making procedures in this policy field.

2.2 Internal developments of the EU

The previous discussion should have indicated clearly that understanding the EU's policies presupposes sufficient knowledge about the Union's internal dynamics. The evolution of the EU's system of governance should thus be an essential part of any research program on the EU. Institutional changes will have a direct bearing on the power equation within the EU, the EU's policy output, access to EU decision-making bodies and the channels to influence them and must therefore be carefully studied.

Of particular interest in this respect may be the ongoing debate over the EU's democracy gap. Recent reforms strengthening the European Parliament, the introduction of the subsidiarity principle and the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* approved in Nice have partially addressed this criticism. In fact, the EU can by now be considered the most democratized international organization and thus set a precedent for others to follow. With the influence of the legislative powers in the EU on the rise, the study of European elections, decision-making in the European Parliament, the embryonic Europeanization of the political

party system and the incremental emergence of a European public space may be important topics to study.

For several reasons, the enlargement process should likewise be of particular interest: First, it changes the institutional set up, second, it may directly affect New Zealand's economic interests, and, third, relatively little is known in the country about the Eastern European applicants for membership.

Given the economic stakes involved, from New Zealand's perspective the study of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy must be a priority field of research. However, it is very obvious that this kind of research must rest on a strong interdisciplinary base and involve strong economic and legal expertise. Apart from this, it is self-evident that topics such as the EU's trade relations, trade relations between New Zealand and the EU and the Monetary Union are a domain of economists.

As the EU pursues a cooperation concept that is characterized by a high level of legalization and contractualism, with the rapid growth of the *acquis communautaire* European law becomes an increasingly diversified and demanding field. Knowledge of the European law, the legal procedures and the thrust of decisions made by the European Court of Justice thus increasingly determine success and failure of transactions in Europe and with Europe.

Finally, the CRE should not neglect the theoretical dimension of EU studies. The EU has throughout its existence strongly inspired theoretical discourses on international relations. Functionalism, neofunctionalism and new institutionalism have been developed with the EU as empirical frame of reference. Studies about the impact of international norms, rules and institutions on the behavior of states, the degree regional organizations develop actor qualities, and the way the EU contributes to the evolution of structures of global governance could be theoretical issues of interest.

3. Conclusion

All these research topics must be grounded on a solid historical foundation and proficiency in European languages. Beyond the interdisciplinary approach, the Centre must develop capacities for the diffusion of its know how and networking with other institutions.

Diffusion of know how involves several activities which need not be spelled out here in detail as there can be drawn from the experiences of the Centres established earlier in the Asia-Pacific region. Diffusion of know how includes a leading role of the Centre as an initiator and coordinator of teaching courses on Europe at various levels of university education (undergraduate and graduate). European Studies should

produce a broad basis of Europeanists who are able to competently staff key positions shaping New Zealand's relations with Europe in fields such as diplomacy and government, business and cultural relations. Moreover, the Centre should act, as organizer of special lectures, seminars and conferences on Europe, be involved in the training of multipliers such as teachers and journalists on Europe and stimulate the activities of the local European Studies Association. A high-profile publication program, briefings for political decision-makers, diplomats and other public officials with a hand in European affairs, a regular media exposure as well as the establishment of a documentation unit, which ideally should also be accessible through the web, are additional activities that may be expected from the Centre.

Taking into account the limited resources and the geographical location, a successful networking policy is crucial for the Centre's sustainability. Networking has at least three major dimensions:

At a first stage, networking needs to be facilitated through university partnerships, exchange programs for scholars and students, joint postgraduate programs and research agendas and conferences. This is probably an area which can be moved forward with relative ease as the ongoing activities of the Centre indicate.

Second, in the area of teaching, networking can be facilitated through long-distance learning programs on Europe, either in cooperation with other universities in the Asia-Pacific or, more preferably, with European and American partners. E-seminars would constitute a cost-effective approach to a considerable broadening of available teaching expertise and allow for the introduction of topics into the teaching program that may not be covered locally.

A third stage is network building at a higher plain. While New Zealand's national Association for European Studies is already linked to the Asia-Pacific network, it must be borne in mind that the Asia-Pacific network is still relatively weak in terms of organization as well as resource endowment. A closer cooperation or perhaps even a tutelary relationship with North American associations may be considered.

Fourth, very essential is the close relationship to representatives of the European diplomatic community, the EU Delegation in Canberra and, probably more difficult, to representatives of European institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg. Their cooperation is not only crucial for the sustainability of the program, but they may also serve as resource persons for research projects that necessarily must rest on solid field work.

Finally, the sustainability of an institution such as the Centre hinges very much on the long-term commitment of the European Commission and, in

particular, the university. In order to carry out systematic research a predictable resource flow is needed. The neoliberal spirit that has permeated universities in many parts of the world may have developed the entrepreneurial skills of faculty members, but also increasingly distracts them from what they are able to do best: competent research and good academic work.

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