

Speech delivered by H.E. Mr. David Daly
Head of Delegation of the European Commission to Australia
at the Festival of Ideas,
University of Melbourne, 18 June 2009

**Panel Session: “Europe – Farewell to an idea?”
“Bumping into the EU on the world stage”**

Introduction – some ideas about Ideas

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on the topic “Europe: Farewell to an idea?”.

First of all I would like to congratulate the University of Melbourne for having the idea of a festival of Ideas. Ideas matter. As the British journalist and historian Tony Judt has written of today’s world:

“If we are to understand the world whence we have just emerged, we need to remind ourselves of the power of ideas.” Judt “Reappraisals” (P.15)

As this is a Festival of Ideas I would like to offer two quotations about ideas which I find particularly appropriate as regards the EU:

“An idea is salvation by imagination” Frank Lloyd Wright

We must not forget that the EU was born out of war, to prevent war in the future such as Europe had seen every fifty years stretching back through the centuries. After WW II we needed men of new ideas, of imagination and of political courage to come to our salvation; men such as Robert Schuman and others.

“I can’t understand why people are afraid of new ideas. I’m afraid of the old ones!” John Cage

If ever frustrated with one aspect of the EU or another we should remind ourselves that we have tried the alternative and it doesn’t work; centuries of bloody history in Europe have shown that.

Again, thankfully, after WW II there were people in Europe who felt the need for new ideas and who wanted to leave behind the old ones.

A word of caution; the EU is “work in progress” and every generation must make its investment in the European Project. As President Barroso said last week, “this is not the time for complacency”; it never is.

One can debate the issue as to whether there is only one, singular idea of “Europe” or “the European Project”. If the EU is work in progress is there a clear single vision of the final destination of the EU? No; there are at least 27 different ideas and possibly even 500 million!

This is not only an interesting academic issue to ponder; it has important political implications. At every stage of the European integration process there is a natural balancing act which must be achieved between these differing visions of “the single idea of Europe” or the “final destination of Europe”. This natural balancing act explains the compromises which allow all EU Member States to agree whatever can be agreed at that particular point in time.

Notwithstanding this last point, I would nonetheless like to show that the idea of “Europe” is alive and well and that this can be seen through the many ways in which other countries, including Australia, “bump into the EU on the world stage”.

Bumping into the EU...not off the EU... on the world stage

In today’s world countries such as Australia find themselves bumping into the EU in various ways, possibly to the surprise of some people.

I would like to examine why this is so; is it because of some devious political master plan on the part of the EU seeking world domination? No.

I would suggest that the EU’s increasing role in the world stems from a combination of its expansion in terms of policies and membership; over time the EU has developed policies which bring it onto the world stage; over time new members have increased the size and economic importance of the EU and have created new next door neighbours for the EU.

Before going further I would like to clarify something. I use the term “bumping into the EU” with the emphasis on the “into” as in “I bumped into a good friend of mine the other day shopping in Bourke St.”; I do not use the term “bumping off the EU”, as in “hitting off something akin to an obstacle” etc.

EU values and the world stage...

The EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights; these values underpin pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice and solidarity.

In its relations with the wider world, the EU tries to uphold and promote these values.

EU external policies impact on the world....

There are three main external policies of the EU which clearly impact on other countries; trade policy, development policy and “classical” foreign policy.

Trade policy: Since the achievement of the Customs Union in 1968 we have had an external trade policy, common to all MS. Because trade is dealt with at the EU level, it means that other trading partners have to negotiate with the EU directly, in fact, with the European Commission representing the MS for this purpose.

This is keenly felt at the international trade talks at the World Trade Organisation in Geneva where the EU is a big player. Today the hot topic is the conclusion of the Doha Round of trade talks. It is felt that 80% of the hard work has already been done and the Round needs just another injection of political will to be achieved. The prize is big; more than US\$150bn injection into the world economy at a time when it is most needed; a

halving of all customs duties currently collected worldwide; an insurance against resurgent protectionism.

This is an area where Australia, like others, bumps into the EU. However, the key thing to note is that the EU and Australia are now basically on the same side of this debate, despite our differences; we both want a Doha deal; neither of us will be found wanting whenever we enter the critical last ten minutes of these negotiations.

Development aid policy grew out of concern by MS for their former colonies. Today there are 77 countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) covered by the latest agreement – the Cotonou Partnership Agreement. This agreement combines political dialogue with aid for a host of activities ranging from strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law to economic capacity building and poverty reduction.

Today the EU, together with its MS, is the world's biggest donor of development aid amounting to some euros 46bn, representing around 60% of all development aid given globally.

The world is a big place and developmental needs are huge; so how come Australia bumps into the EU in this context?

In two respects; firstly we bump into each other in the OECD which has a coordinating role for developed countries in respect of their development aid and where there is a constant push for using our aid money more effectively.

Secondly, we bump into each other in the Pacific where Australia is the biggest donor to that region and the EU is the second biggest with euros 450m over the next period (2008-13). We are actively engaged in coordinating our assistance to these countries; in seeing if we could deliver the aid more efficiently together; in opening up our aid schemes to each other – something we are starting with a number of programmes in certain Asian countries.

Classical Foreign policy is another area where we bump into each other. It may be that this comes as a surprise to some of you because you may well ask “does the EU have a foreign policy?”

The better question to ask is “What type of foreign policy does the EU have?”

Here the short answer is “an evolving one”. This is not surprising given the importance of foreign policy to all countries everywhere.

On the other hand, there is the realisation that the EU is strong when it speaks with one voice; today that means unanimity on these foreign policy issues.

There is also the realisation that the EU has a certain responsibility as an important actor globally which it should shoulder.

Already back in the 1970s there were attempts at better coordination of positions between the MS on foreign policy issues - European Political Cooperation.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of Yugoslavia led to a much stronger degree of cooperation with the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy in

1992. The experience of the Balkan Wars led to a renewed political push at giving the EU a stronger instrument for the conduct of foreign policy, namely, the European Security and Defence Policy adopted in 1999.

The EU gave itself its first European Security Strategy in 2003 and reviewed it last December. This plotted the new security threats facing Europe; the nature of the security threat was changing away from that of territorial defence against external aggression; instead security threats are being posed from non-state actors, from increasing radicalism and terrorism, from social and political disruption stemming from climate change etc. The instruments to tackle these new security threats need to combine both hard and soft tools with emphasis on strengthening weak states and helping them to develop.

Where did all this lead?

Today, the EU has shown itself much more of a player than before – in contrast to the way it had handled the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

The EU speaks more clearly through Dr. Solana, the High Representative for CFSP issues, in coordination with the European Commissioner for External Affairs Mme. Ferraro-Waldner. The EU played an important role in stopping conflict in the Balkans (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia); the EU has become much more of a player than before in the Middle-East; Dr. Solana has played a certain role in talks with Iran on nuclear issues.

Last year the EU played a crucial role in negotiating the ceasefire in Georgia; this was backed up by a quick deployment of monitors who were important in getting Russian troops to withdraw. A Special Representative of Dr. Solana is co-chairing talks between the parties in Geneva.

Also last year the EU launched its first naval mission to address the issue of piracy of the coast of Somalia.

Again last year the EU deployed a military force to Chad to help protect refugees from Darfur; this was a holding exercise, bringing protection to those refugees long before the UN force could replace the EUFOR.

So, the EU can be pleased with the progress which it has made in terms of foreign policy.

However, we should remain balanced in our appraisal. We should reject either extreme pessimism – that the EU will never have a real foreign policy and it should stop trying to have one – or extreme optimism – that we have today a foreign policy capability the same as any country.

The EU has made important progress but there is still much to be done and the Lisbon Treaty would bring further improvements in terms of streamlined instruments.

What does any of this have to do with Australia?

The EU and Australia cooperate on a number of issues in this context;

- we work together on counter-terrorism issues through the Joint Centre for Law Enforcement in Jakarta;

- we follow the situation in Fiji with equal concern;
- we are likeminded on many issues at the UN;
- we share the same basic outlook on the situation in Afghanistan where Australia has troops and where 22 EU MS have between them 27,000 troops and the EU has a significant aid programme – total EU + MS contribution of euros 8bn.

You can also bump into Internal EU policies at the global level

Some internal policies have always had important external elements affecting countries outside the EU. I do not have time at this stage to go into details but it is clear that internal policies such as Economic and Monetary Union (the Euro), environmental Policy, Agricultural Policy, even Higher Education Policy, each has its implications for countries outside the EU.

EU Enlargement - a pole of attraction

The EU has attracted new Member States since the beginning; successive enlargements have increased the size from 6 to 9, 10, 12, 15, 25 and now to 27. These accessions have been driven by political reasons, with countries wanting to benefit from this democratic club; also there are economic reasons related to the single European market which today boasts 500 million consumers.

The recent enlargement was the biggest and most complicated, especially taking in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc – nonetheless, it was an historic opportunity which Europe was not going to miss.

The attraction of joining the EU continues, as demonstrated by the current candidate countries. There is no sense that the idea of Europe is waning among the CCs/PCCs.

EU Enlargement – size matters

EU enlargement has increased the size of the Single Market to 500 million consumers. The EU's internal regulations and standards matter hugely to all who wish to export to this market. EU standards influence global standards more today than ever before.

This is also an issue with Australia. The EU is still the most economic partner for Australia in terms of trade and investment. EU investment here represents over a third of all foreign investment. European companies here account for around 1.2 million jobs in Australia.

One operational conclusion I would draw would be that Australian exporters should pay more attention to discussions in Brussels before regulations are adopted when there are more opportunities to shape them.

EU Enlargement – new Member States, new next door neighbours

Another obvious implication of enlargement is that the EU gets, literally, new next door neighbours. At the same time the EU acquires new colleagues around the Council table in Brussels who have themselves their own particular experience of dealing with those new

next door neighbours. Examples would be Russia (Finland 1995) or Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary 2004).

Conclusion:

You will be delighted to hear that I will very soon take the advice of my compatriot, Oscar Wilde, who said that:

“Some people cause happiness wherever they go, others whenever they go”

I am drawing to a close.

In today’s world we all face major challenges: the Global financial Crisis, securing further international trade liberalisation, climate change, international security and counter-terrorism issues.....

One aspect of these global challenges is that they cannot satisfactorily be addressed by single countries acting purely on their own. We all need each other.

Because of our high degree of likemindedness Australia and the EU are natural partners for each other. We are already working closely together on these issues.

As we have seen, much work over many years has gone into making the EU what it is today. This work is not finished.

We have looked at certain EU policies of particular interest to our international partners; we did not stumble upon these policies ready made; they have been laboured over; negotiations continued until compromises were agreed.

Why? Because 6-9-10-12-15-25-27 countries in Europe wanted these policies.

Why? Because these policies represent parts of the idea of Europe which everyone could agree on at particular moments in time.

I would like to close with reference to two further quotations:

“An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come.” Victor Hugo

and

“Man’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894)

The idea of Europe, whatever that is, is certainly an idea whose time has come.

The mind of Europe, now having taken on board this idea for over 50 years, will not easily regain its original dimensions.

Thank you for your attention.