

EAMF 2018

Panel Session 2

Evolution of the European Union

Moderator **Gavin Hewitt**, British broadcaster, invited the panel to consider the state of the European Union (EU) in the sense of 'current challenges and future prospects'.

Deborah Bergamini, Italian journalist and member of parliament, said the construction of the European Union had been a great success, despite some errors. Now it was going through a phase of introspection, after the challenges of recent years: the financial crisis, the Greek debt problem, terrorism, migration and independence movements.

The EU's enlargement process had been an amazingly successful tool of foreign policy, but the community was seen to be failing in other respects. She did not expect to see more integration in Europe, but she remained an optimist about European solidarity in general.

Renaud Girard, French journalist of Le Figaro newspaper, said the good news about the European Union was two-fold: it had achieved its objective of maintaining peace and the Eurozone was working. On the bad news side, it was an institutional failure because its citizens did not feel part of it and because it lacked political will.

"The fact is that the European Union is the most brilliant diplomatic achievement since World War Two," he said. "But we seem to be forgetting the golden rule: the more enlargement, the less integration."

Sam Wilkin, Senior Adviser to Oxford Economics and Oxford Analytica, praised the remarkable growth rate of the Eurozone but expressed misgivings about the rise of populism. This was partly due to the appalling record of the community's officials and technocrats, particularly on handling the debt crisis.

Asked by moderator Hewitt about the impact of 'Brexit', Wilkin described the British referendum vote as a "much needed wakeup call, but too late". The EU had what he described as a democratic deficit. "People feel that the European institutions have more and more power, that they don't have a say. This has given a boost to the populists."

Eli Hadzhieva, consultant on EU affairs, said she liked the fact that, despite difficulties, the European Union was working together on the basis of shared values in the field of the economy and security. "This is the strength of Europe," she said.

She said she remained optimistic for the future of the EU, despite the problem of extremism. "Europe has always progressed after every crisis," she said.

Jerzy Wenderlich, former speaker of the Polish parliament, said the fundamental reason for the rise of populism in Europe and elsewhere was that certain sections of the population felt excluded.

“We need to show these people that the European Union is also for them,” he said. “This is the only way to get these helpless people out of the grip of the populists. And we need finally to say to the populists, Go to Hell!”

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