



Society for  
International Development

Netherlands Chapter

SID-NL Lecture Series 2011-2012

“The State in a Globalizing World.  
Problematic, yet indispensable”



Lecture: **Regional Cooperation - The Case of Europe**

On Monday 13 February 2012, **Ummu Salma Bava**, Professor of European Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, held her lecture “Regional cooperation: the case of Europe” in the 2011-2012 SID-NL Lecture Series, ‘The State in a Globalizing World’.

### Summary

Professor Ummu Salma Bava began her lecture by asking what Europe actually is. Europe can be an idea, a geographic space, a geo-political and economic entity, a set of countries, a new post-modern construct, and an emerging security actor. In short, it can encompass different conceptual ideas. Interestingly, the word ‘Europe’ has become coterminous with the European Union (EU). Despite the divisions within the EU, there is an inherent assumption in official documents that the EU is synonymous with Europe. Indeed, from 1945 on, the EU has emerged as a composite actor imbued with all the attributes of an actor in international politics. The WTO Director-General has said that Europe teaches that strong leadership, legitimacy and coherence are needed for political effectiveness. These last three issues are extremely critical in how the EU responds as an actor in dealing with the current crisis.

Looking at Europe from the outside, from a region where conflict is not over, Europe offers a tremendous success story. It showcases cooperation and integration. It stands for the quest for a new kind of politics. However, over an extended period of time one can come to take certain developments as given; the benefits become part of everyday life. From the inside, it is easy to forget the effort which has gone into the construction of the European project. Looking at Europe from India, it may not be considered a superpower. She cited Piening (1997: 196): “But it is certainly a global power in the sense that its actions - and indeed its very existence - have come to have a significant effect far beyond its borders. Both by default and by intention”. Europe upholds certain norms and ideas when it engages with the rest of the world. It portrays ideas of how to politically organise democracy, rule of law, market economy and respect for human rights. Ideas seem to be the new armies of Europe.

### The People’s Project

In the context of crisis it is important to revisit former treaties and have a look at the vision that was created and the words that were used. The Treaty of Rome (1957) called for the pooling of resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty. It called upon the peoples of Europe who share this ideal to join in their efforts. What has happened to the people’s project?

There are three points taken from post-war Europe which are extremely significant in terms of the crisis today. First, The Treaty of Rome talks about ‘the people’ and not about the borders. Second, there was a shift from state security to human security; a shift from sovereignty to welfare. Third, one used to be able to focus on the dividends of cooperation: stability, mobility, visibility, economic growth and an enhanced role in international politics. Today, there is a return to certain elements of renationalisation, that is, a repositioning of

the national interest before the collective interest. What has happened to the social contract dating back to 1957? Does it need re-visioning or revising? According to Bava, there is no reference point in history for the European project. Therefore, there is no way of knowing how well Europe is performing. One can only measure its success in terms of its ability to respond to crisis.



### Hard landing for Europe

The idea of regional cooperation is not new and pre-dated the Second World War. Nevertheless, it was the Second World War that led Europe to reorganise its political vision. The idea was that there could be a new way of organising politics. A new way that could take national interests beyond

the realm of confrontation. This resulted in the growth of the community; a growth that has been both widening and deepening. Europe has transcended itself time and time again to create new ideas of reorganising and reimagining the political space. However, one cannot see these developments as simply linear and automatic. If one loses faith in this project, then the EU can also be undone.

This brings us to two important questions. Firstly, does the mix of history, politics, economics and culture create the perfect recipe for regional cooperation? Bava stressed that every attempt at regional cooperation is unique. Successful cooperation cannot simply be replicated in other regions. But we can certainly draw lessons. And secondly, what does it mean to be both the object of envy and the spotlight of despair? What is seen today is the post-crisis despair and a chill in political relations. The rest of the world is looking at the EU with suspended hope. Bava argued that the way forward is new coalition building and finding consensus. This is happening at the moment, even when it comes to Greece. But one has to ask: how will it be sustained? Are the owners of this process solely those countries which have performing economies? Has the social contract run out?

Bava posed these issues more generally as integration versus nationalisation. If one looks at the EU as an organic entity, there is a retreat to a foetal position. When a person is injured he/she tends to shrink and go back inside rather than reaching out. We have witnessed the crisis and the resurgence of the state (the state as part of the rescue package). But the danger here is that some elements of nationalisation, on national identity and interest, creep back into the equation. Europe's challenge is to hold these different views of the collective and the national together. Then, how to create an effective system which also addresses sustainability at multiple levels - political, economic and social? On one level the EU has collectively created a norm convergence which is critical to its identity. However, when the values are stripped away, what is left are different sets of interests. Brussels is perceived as extremely far away. If we look at leadership, legitimacy and coherence one feels far more comfortable looking at national leaders which can be answerable and delivered at this level. The biggest challenge for Europe will be to maintain shared value preferences in the quest for new cooperation in multi-level governance.

### Europe at a Crossroads

The above puts Europe at a crossroads. There is no doubt that the scope and intensity of cooperation has increased tremendously. However, the process of globalisation is impacting

both the individual member states and collectively the EU. In this sense, there is an extreme balancing of interest going on. And we should not forget that each state has a different capability and capacity to respond to the multiple processes that are happening simultaneously. In the current crisis, the state is both positively and negatively viewed. Has the structure, as what was envisioned in Maastricht, become weak? Has consensus based politics reached its end, or is it another stopping point in the road, as the EU has faced numerous crises already and it has always been able to bounce back. In the end, we should not ignore the following question: how far is too far?



## Discussion

Ben Crum, lecturer of political theory at VU University, opened the discussion, by acknowledging that every process of regional cooperation is unique. However, if Europe fails then that is indeed of general relevance. If regional cooperation does not work in Europe, it is probably even less likely to work in other regions.

Former Dutch ambassador to India, Eric Niehe, addressed the similarities between the EU and India. Both are diverse and encompass similar amounts of states and languages. Also, in the 90s India found itself on the brink of bankruptcy. René Grotenhuis, President of SID NL and Executive Director at Cordaid, noted that a major difference lies in Europe's history. He argued that Europe's roots stem from the collective experience of the Second World War. Without these roots, perhaps, Europe's regional cooperation would not have been possible. Over the last ten years, critics on Europe, along with new generations that have not experienced the Second World War, have argued that Europe has moved from a people's project towards a technocratic project. Then, what is the role of historic context for other regions that are trying to cooperate? Bava responded that for the generations coming after the war, history has become increasingly impersonal. The personal narratives from those who had experienced war at first hand, have now entered into the realm of textbooks. For the generations of today, peace has become a given. The challenge is to spark this 'we' feeling when these generations have not been confronted by the spectre of war. The socio-political challenges of today are of a different nature. Until this point in time the challenges have not been seen as existential. Now for the first time, in the context of the cuts in wages and jobs and following the news from Greece; it has become an existential kind of crisis. Importantly, new generations will create their own collective experiences.

When asked by several members of the audience about India's perspective on the EU, Professor Bava answered that first and foremost, the EU is India's largest trading partner. India looks at Europe in terms of the business that is done. The EU, as a political and security actor, punches far below its weight. It should be noted that after the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) the EU has become involved in civil and military missions in the world. However, Europe as a 'brand' is not very visible. The EU is viewed as an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military midget.