

UPF: Is there a Future for the European Union and the Rules-Based Global Order?

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A Peace Talks Webinar was held on June 26th 2020 on the theme "Is there a Future for the European Union and the Rules-Based Global Order?". The Webinar was hosted by the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP), a project of the Universal Peace Federation.

Both the rules-based world order established after WWII and the EU system of close intergovernmental cooperation and integration are under such severe strain as to cast doubt on their future viability. In both cases increasing preoccupation with national self-interest, as against willingness to cooperate together for the common good, would appear to be the key destabilizing factor.

What are the key issues threatening to tear the EU apart or at least to greatly reduce its effectiveness and how can they be resolved, if at all? Even more importantly, can the global, rules-based system survive and how can the E.U. best adapt itself so as not only to ensure its own survival but also to bolster the global rules-based system in its fight for survival?

Few people can be better qualified to provide answers to these vital questions than our 3 panelists. Each has played a key role in the development of the E.U.'s policies in the last 20 years.

Panelists:

Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of Italy (1996 - 1998 and 2006-2008) and EU Commission President (1999-2004).

Jose Manuel Barroso, Prime Minister of Portugal (2002-2004) and EU Commission President (2004-2014).

Herman Van Rompuy, Prime Minister of Belgium (2008-2009) and E.U. Council President (2009 - 2014). Chairman of the Board of the College of Europe (since 2019).

Moderator:

Rita Payne, Former BBC Asia Bureau Chief. President emeritus, Commonwealth Journalists Association.

A recording of the webinar can be found on the UPF Europe and Middle East Vimeo Channel at: vimeo.com/433294969 or on the UPF Europe and Middle East YouTube Channel at: youtu.be/CGehSoxXhtI or on the Peace Media Channel at: youtu.be/NjRYqKm0080



Dr. Thomas Walsh, Chair, UPF International

Dr. Thomas Walsh is the Chair of UPF International and Secretary General of the Sunhak Peace Prize Foundation. He has been a teacher, author, and editor specializing in the areas of interfaith, religious studies, peace studies, philosophy, and social theory. Dr. Walsh serves on the International Council of the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Coalition for Religious Freedom. He has contributed to and edited more than 30 books related to interfaith, peacebuilding and renewal of the United Nations.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, Chair, UPF International, gave the opening remarks. Both the rules-based world order established after WWII and the EU system of close intergovernmental cooperation and integration are under such severe strain as to cast doubt on their future viability. In both cases increasing preoccupation with national self-interest, as against willingness to cooperate together for the common good, would appear to be the key destabilizing factor. What are the key issues threatening to tear the EU apart or at least to greatly reduce its effectiveness and how can they be resolved, if at all? Even more importantly, can the global, rules-based system survive and how can the E.U. best adapt itself so as not only to ensure its own survival but also to bolster the global rules-based system in its fight for survival?



Rita Payne, Former Asia Editor, BBC World News (TV), President emeritus, Commonwealth Journalists Association

Rita Payne worked for nearly 30 years at the BBC until 2008 ending up as Asia Editor, BBC World News (TV) with responsibility for 3 news programmes a day. Before moving to TV, she was a news editor/producer/presenter at BBC World Service radio. Latterly, she served as President of the Commonwealth Journalists Association and is currently its President Emeritus.

Ms. Rita Payne (Former Asia Editor, BBC World News (TV), President emeritus, Commonwealth Journalists Association) served as the moderator for the panel and introduced the panelists.

Panelists:



Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of Italy (1996 - 1998 and 2006-2008), President of the European Commission (1999-2004).

Romano Prodi is an Italian politician who served as 10th President of the European Commission (1999 - 2004). He served twice as Prime Minister of Italy (1996 -1998 and 2006 - 2008) and is a former economics professor, often known in Italy as "Il Professore".

In October 2007, Prodi became the first President of the Democratic Party at the party's founding.

He has always felt deeply about helping Africa and, in 2008, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed him as President of the African Union-United peacekeeping panel. He currently serves as U.N. Special Envoy for the Sahel, the band of territory that stretches across Sub-Saharan Africa.

H.E. Romano Prodi (Prime Minister of Italy (1996 - 1998 and 2006-2008), President of the European Commission (1999-2004)) spoke first. Support for authoritarianism is on the rise globally. The consensus around liberal democracy is slipping, but Europe remains the world's example of this doctrine. Although this moment is delicate, the European Union has weathered many crises, and has, in general, gained power and stability over the last few decades. H.E. Prodi spoke highly of Europe's social and economic cooperation, but was less bullish on defense and foreign policy cooperation. Increased influence in the tech sector by authoritarian countries, especially China, calls for a European response. He called for clearer rules regarding joint European efforts on foreign policy issues.



Jose Manuel Barroso, Prime Minister of Portugal (2002-2004), President of the European Commission (2004-2014)

Jose Manuel Barroso enjoyed a successful and varied academic career embracing law, European Studies, Political and Social Sciences and became Assistant Professor of Law at Lisbon University and later Director of the Department for International Relations at Lisbon's Lusitana University.

In the 1980s he rose through the Portuguese Foreign Ministry to become (in 1992) Minister of Foreign Affairs for 3 years before entering Parliament and in 1999 becoming the leader of his political party and de facto Leader of the Opposition. In 2002, Barroso became Prime Minister.

2 years later he was appointed as President of the European Commission, in which post he served for 10 years, until 2014. He is currently Chairman of Goldman Sachs International and teaches at various American and European universities on issues related to the EU, international business and international affairs.

H.E. Jose Manuel Barroso (Prime Minister of Portugal (2002-2004), President of the European Commission (2004-2014)) spoke next. H.E. Barroso spoke of the Sovereign Debt crisis, when most commentators agreed that the European Union could not come through the crisis intact. The European

Union, he contends, is much more resilient than most think. Progress for the E.U. is incremental, involves significant compromise, and, therefore, can be very frustrating even while successful. The multilateral world order has suffered from waning commitment on the part of the United States. The European Union can take up the role of torchbearer for the multilateral world order if the United States continues to falter. Cooperation and competition are not mutually exclusive: it is possible for different political systems to compete for ascendancy while also taking a common approach to international peacekeeping, pandemics and climate change. In conclusion, H.E. Barroso called for wiser leadership on all sides.



Herman Van Rompuy, Prime Minister of Belgium (2008-2009), President of the European Council (2009 -2014), Chairman of the Board of the College of Europe (since 2019)

Herman Van Rompuy is a Belgian politician, who served as Prime Minister of Belgium from 2008 to 2009 and then as the first permanent President of the European Council (the role of which is to achieve consensus among EU member nations on EU policy) from 2009 to 2014.

His early career before politics had been as a student of economics, then from 1972-75 working for the Belgian Central Bank and in the 1980s as a Lecturer in Economics at leading Belgian universities, before entering the Senate in 1988. From 1993 - 1998 he served as Budget Minister and Deputy Prime Minister before becoming Prime Minister in December 1998.

He currently serves as President Emeritus of the European Council, Chairman of the Board of the College of Europe, one of Europe's top graduate schools specializing in European Affairs, and President of the European Policy Centre, the EU's principal think tank.

H.E. Herman Van Rompuy (Prime Minister of Belgium (2008-2009), President of the European Council (2009 - 2014), Chairman of the Board of the College of Europe (since 2019)) spoke next. The pandemic highlights the high level of global interdependence and the fragility of the global system. Trade protectionism is on the rise, especially in the United States, as a result to internal disillusionment with the effects of globalization. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed that the European Union is highly dependent on American and Chinese companies for key technological resources, which makes a collapse of international trade particularly threatening. "Geopolitics starts at home," H.E. Rompuy says; the E.U. needs to develop economic autonomy, but not autarky. There is need to correct the fragilities imposed by globalization, but this is not incompatible with a continued commitment to free international trade. International cooperation is more necessary than ever, with extreme poverty on the rise and the looming threat of climate change.

QandA and closing statements followed:

In response to a question on the prospects for southeast European nations, like Albania, for membership in the E.U., H.E. Prodi called for greater prioritization for those nations while insisting on clear criteria for membership. On the "Infodemic" – the global rise in misinformation – H.E. Barroso reiterated the need for media freedom, as well as the need to promote media literacy, with cooperation between the E.U., national governments, and civil society. On the question of tension between European centralization and the desire for autonomy, H.E. Van Rompuy pointed out that the perception of the E.U.'s power often outpaces its actual power; the E.U. is not a super-state. On the prospect of a European initiative analogous to China's "Belt and Road," H.E. Prodi was optimistic about such efforts, should Europe choose to undertake them.