

Panel: Back to Modernity in the EU
Date/Time: Tuesday, April 22, 2014 / 13:00-14:15
Speakers: Patrick Messerlin, Sciences Po (Moderator)
 Kim Nam-Kook, Korea University
 Kai-Olaf Lang, GIGA
 Stefan Niederhafner, Seoul National University

Rapporteur: Stefan Soesanto

Professor Messerlin framed it to the point by stating that this session would have been very different if it were not for the crisis in the Ukraine. Indeed, the panel discussion primarily gravitated around the question of whether the EU should seek further integration as a reaction to Russian aggression or abandon its quest, given the already growing discrepancies between the EU and its citizenry.

Professor Kim Nam-Kook started off the discussion by highlighting that increased EU integration is not a feasible strategy as it will reinforce the EU’s internal struggles. Kim also noted that further integration would seriously undermine the EU’s soft power image. Particularly in the security sphere, the Europeans would be hard pressed to find a common outlook in terms of humanitarian values and defining their enemies abroad. For Kim, therefore, the Ukrainian crisis and the future of the EU are two very different tasks.

Dr. Kai-Olaf Lang raised the idea that EU is starting to diversify its identity by including the communist experience of its Eastern members. Issues such as missile defense and boots on the ground have strengthened US influence within the EU and are continuing to do so with the emergence of the Crimean crisis. The EU according to Lang is arriving at its moment of truth by discovering its road to geopolitics. So while the bilateral relations of EU member states are playing a bigger role in EU foreign policy than in the past, this trend will not facilitate a return to the Westphalian model, but instead contribute to the emergence of reinforced EU integration. In terms of Europe’s energy infrastructure, Lang is predicting that the events in the Ukraine are creating a momentum for a more efficient EU energy market.

According to Professor Stefan Niederhafner the EU will always produce a sub-optimal outcome when dealing with Russia due to the vastly different national interests among its member states. Yet Putin’s actions in Crimea have delivered a powerful argument for the further integration of the EU’s common foreign and defense policy. So while nation states have regularly insisted on their sovereignty in defense matters, the crisis clearly revealed that the EU countries on their own are in no position to effectively deter Moscow from aggression. On the future trajectory of the EU’s energy policies, Niederhafner was rather pessimistic given that the dependency on Russian oil and gas is primarily a concern on the national rather than the EU level.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.