

## The New Zealand experience: Thank you, Jean Monnet

Martin Holland  
University of Canterbury, New Zealand  
martin.holland@canterbury.ac.nz

### Abstract

*The trajectory of EU Studies in New Zealand has taken multiple paths over the last quarter century, seen a proliferation of organisations and acronyms but a constant and secure funding base maintained by successive tranches of Jean Monnet and other EU funding mechanisms. The longevity of such a benign environment is now, however, uncertain. It is counter-intuitive, perhaps paradoxical, to witness a change in EU support for academic experts at a time when EU public diplomacy has never been more important.*

**Keywords:** Jean Monnet; EU Studies; EUCN; NCRE; EUSANZ; ESAANZ

### Introduction

Documenting the trajectory of European Union and European Studies in New Zealand is something of a poisoned chalice subject to changing contexts – and probably with no consensus on whether the glass is half empty or half full. The early battles of the 1990s were preoccupied with defining even the appropriate name of the field – should it reflect a narrower dedicated European Union focus or be a broader more inclusive approach suggested by the designation European Studies? History shows that a progressive blurring of this dichotomy prevailed (albeit the “core” of EU Studies remained loyal to the multidisciplinary alignment of Law, Economics, Politics and History) and the terms are used in a more relaxed interchangeable way in contemporary settings. Obviously, the emergence of CESAA suggested that the more inclusive option was favoured from the start in Australia, whereas in New Zealand, and more generally in the Asia Pacific, a clear designation of EU Studies or European Integration became the preferred perspective.

This choice of labelling of the discipline as EU Studies taken more than a quarter of a century ago in New Zealand has cast a significant shadow. While the intellectual commitment of individual academics to engage in this field of study was an essential prerequisite and a personal choice, in a practical sense an important element underpinning this academic interest in both New Zealand and the wider Asia-Pacific has been access to the significant funding provided through a number of complementary EU frameworks: the Jean Monnet programme, the EEAS/ Foreign Policy Instrument and its forerunner Commission DG RELEX (External Relations). All of these required an explicit EU rather than just a broadly European focus. Indeed, without this support (stretching over more than two decades) it is unlikely that EU Studies would have become embedded in universities across the region. The importance of this funding was recognised in a 2008 pioneering analysis entitled *The Future of European Studies in Asia* which concluded “[T]he financial support from the

EU is still essential for the sustainability and further proliferation of European Studies in Asia” (Holland, Jora & Ryan, 2008, 13). Subsequent developments were to prove that is assessment was correct but also naively optimistic; consequently, it should come as no surprise that recent substantial changes in the scope and priorities within these EU initiatives have had a profound – and negative – impact. The peak of academic research and teaching in EU Studies has long passed; 2023 may come to symbolise a watershed heralding a period of decline and perhaps growing disinterest. How and why has this come about?

The alphabet soup of EU Studies acronyms that was brewed in the 1990s persisted and proliferated into the new millennium with a needed rationalisation only occurring as late as 2020. Networking and coordination were in vogue, as witnessed by the now defunct ESIA (European Studies in Asia led by the Asia Europe Foundation in Singapore) and NESCA (the Network of European Studies Centres in Asia led by Macau). These two were examples of research rather than teaching based collaborations. The growth in academic studies associations predated these, the most ambitious being the creation of the ECSA-World grouping (European Community Studies Association) in the mid-1990s. Both CESAA and the New Zealand EU Studies Association (EUSANZ) were involved from the start and ECSA-World brought together all of the national member state EU Studies associations and those in third countries – the USA, Canada, China, Russia, Australia and New Zealand amongst others. The President of EUSANZ served for several years as the EUSA-World Vice-President. ECSA-World’s biennial conference and administration was funded by the EU and this support lasted a little over two decades before Commission interest and funding ceased – and with it the organisation has faded into obscurity.

The first EUSANZ conference was held in Christchurch from 27-30 September 1998, although in partnership with the Australasian Political Science Association and not CESAA. Undoubtedly, however, CESAA was influential in guiding the development and eventual launch of the New Zealand equivalent and the hallmark of the early years was complementarity as well as collegial cooperation. At this time the EU’s representation to New Zealand was in the form of cross-accreditation from Canberra and the EU Delegation was instrumental in promoting cross-Tasman synergies. This was normally via individual member collaborations such as participation in each other’s conferences and joint research projects rather than in a formalised CESAA/EUSANZ format. Perhaps the most enduring example of this was the 2005 “EU in the Eyes of Asia” Jean Monnet funded project that examined media reporting and elite perceptions towards the EU in both countries (NCRE, 2005). While not directly diverging and with no ill-intent, the EU Studies path taken in New Zealand became quite distinct from that of Australia. Building on the EUSANZ experience, in 2000 the University of Canterbury established what was to become the NCRE – the National Centre for Research on Europe, an initially modest initiative that subsequently led to the creation in 2006 of the EU Centres Network of New Zealand (EUCN) and, in 2003, the European Union Studies Association of the Asia-Pacific (EUSAAP). The EUCN brought together EU experts across all eight NZ universities while EUSAAP acted as an umbrella organisation which, at its height, brought together EU Studies associations in 11 Asia-Pacific locations stretching from India to Japan. Crucially, all these different initiatives – EUSANZ, NCRE, EUCN, and EUSAAP – were generously supported through contestable EU grants. EU Studies in New Zealand were fortunate to have this strong NCRE institutional base as the activities of EUSANZ could be supplemented and subsidised by the activities of these other separate but linked

structures. In contrast, CESAA had much more limited institutional support from Australia's tertiary sector. This difference was no more clearly evident than with the promotion and funding of EU Centres in both countries in the early part of the twenty-first century. As noted already, the triple-hatting of the NCRE with EUSANZ, EUCN and EUSAAP meant that with the selection of the NCRE focus of the New Zealand structure, the work of EUSANZ was streamlined and enhanced. In contrast, none of the multiple EU Centres selected in Australia had a formalised working relationship with CESAA and thereby inevitably compromising its impact.

The European Union Studies Association Asia Pacific (EUSAAP) provides a unique forum for EU experts within the Asia-Pacific region. It constitutes an academic international network of now ten national European Union Studies Associations in the Asia Pacific region with the objective to collaboratively increase the impact, visibility and excellence of EU Studies. EUSAAP promotes EU Studies in the Asia Pacific by organising activities to address issues of mutual importance. The breadth and depth of EU relations varies between countries in the Asia Pacific region, however, activities organised by EUSAAP aim to discuss and analyse the EU's objective to promote political and social dialogue through policy input. Thus, EUSAAP seeks to raise awareness, increase the visibility and sustainability of EU Studies by engaging academics, students and practitioners in relevant and current issues, especially in countries where these are underdeveloped. These activities promote closer connections in research and policy, strengthening and broadening networks. Interaction with experts from across the region also helps to promote greater regional understanding and a sense of identity as a group of scholars with an EU focus. EUSAAP places a high importance on inclusiveness with young scholars participating alongside established academics, practitioners and experts. Postgraduate workshops are designed to equip students with valuable, transferable skills, facilitate networking and stimulate research ideas, enhancing the international network of participants. Additionally, EUSAAP works in association with two affiliated journals: the *Asia Pacific Journal of EU Studies* (which is edited by EUSA Korea) and the *Australia and New Zealand Journal of European Studies* (edited by ESAANZ).

The EUSAAP member associations as of 2023 are:

- Australia & New Zealand – European Studies Association Australia and New Zealand (ESAAANZ)
- China – Centre for European Studies (CFES)
- Hong Kong SAR – The Hong Kong Association for European Studies
- India – Indian Association for European Union Studies (IAEUS)
- Indonesia – European Studies Indonesia
- Japan – European Union Studies Association in Japan (EUSA-Japan)
- Korea – European Union Studies Association of Korea (EUSA-Korea)
- Macau SAR – Institute of European Studies of Macau (IEEM)
- Taiwan – European Union Centre in Taiwan
- Thailand – Interdisciplinary Department of European Studies

The decision to merge CESAA and EUSANZ came about through the mutual agreement of three senior EU academics – two Australian and one New Zealand. The reasons were clear-cut. First, a generational transition was needed. Second, the membership base of both CESAA and EUSANZ was stagnant. And third, a change in EU funding support for such academic associations was under review globally – and subsequently halted.

The pre-existing benign context had dissipated, and the merger was a logical, efficient and probably inevitable outcome. Certainly, the first two years of the European Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand's (ESAANZ) existence have shown the wisdom of this decision. And thankfully, the old debates on names were not revisited!

The 2021 Jean Monnet decision to cease supporting EU Studies associations globally presents a formidable challenge to both ESAANZ and the EUSAAP. Prior to the merger, both CESAA and the EUSANZ had a strong track record of winning Jean Monnet grants (known by the acronym SUPPA) to support the organisational functioning and hosting of conferences of the associations. These awards typically provided €50,000 over a 3-year period. As of 2023, only EUSAAP continues to hold such a grant: while this has another two years to run, quite what follows this stay of execution is unknown. The longevity of both the two-decade old EUSAAP and the more youthful ESAANZ seems in jeopardy. From the perspective of Brussels, EUSA-World had not really delivered the policy-advice that the new Commission sought, and support for academics beyond teaching modules was effectively cut. The Jean Monnet programme has refocused funding towards youth, covering school pupils as well as university students, with academic research support largely ignored. After approaching thirty years of funding, it is not so unreasonable to have expected such associations to have become self-sustaining. Few outside of Europe and North America have developed such a business model including the equivalent ESAANZ associations across the Asia-Pacific.

Clearly, a new more self-sufficient funding model for ESAANZ and EUSAAP is needed. The past practice of EUSAAP was to hold an annual conference with hosting rotated between the member associations. In pre-Covid times, the 2019 conference was convened in Shanghai; in 2021 Melbourne hosted a blended meeting as did Seoul in 2022; the 2023 version is scheduled for Bangkok. At this point, the Jean Monnet funding will have ended. The hosting of these conferences was a significant undertaking as EUSAAP provided 3-nights' accommodation and hospitality for all presenters, a number which often approached 100. ESAANZ and EUSAAP will need to adopt a more familiar social science academic conference structure whereby participants are expected to cover their own costs as well as pay a sizeable fee. This transition, however, may be unpalatable for some EU experts in the region given past expectations.

From a New Zealand perspective, the EUSANZ, NCRE, EUCN and EUSAAP were the most relevant organisations and individual membership frequently overlapped. While each framework made a distinctive contribution, their collective impact was more important in establishing EU Studies as a recognised field of academic study. EUSANZ served as the necessary launch pad in the 1990s for these subsequent initiatives. From this momentum, an important ancillary consequence has been the establishment of EU programmes at the tertiary level in New Zealand and within the Asia Pacific. The NCRE has proven to be the most successful in this: in 2006 they introduced the first EU Studies major at any Australasian university, developed a doctoral program and in 2016 introduced a Taught MA in EU Studies, one of only three offered at the time in the wider Asia Pacific. To date the NCRE has supervised more than 40 PhDs on a variety of topics addressing the European integration process and currently has twelve graduates enrolled. Thanks to the various Jean Monnet grant awards this next generation of EU scholars have the possibility of participating at ESAANZ and international conferences as well as benefitting from scholarships. No comparable

comprehensive approach was developed by any other New Zealand university; at best, just one or two courses were offered (mainly at Victoria, Otago and Auckland), although there was greater interest at the graduate level. The weaker direct institutional relationship between CESAA and any Australian university meant that studying the EU was reliant on individual academic staff commitment which, naturally, has fluctuated during the last quarter century. The University of Melbourne was the pioneer (as witnessed by the roots of CESAA) and latterly Monash, RMIT, UNISA and the ANU have taken on this task.

Beyond Australasia the pattern was different. The two oldest taught Masters program in the Asia Pacific were established in the late 1990s in Malaysia and Thailand; unlike their New Zealand counterpart, neither of these relied primarily on EU funding. The program at Chulalongkorn University focused explicitly on EU Integration and was widely regarded as the region's leading program. It usually attracted upwards of 20 students annually during its first 15 years of operation, only to see this trend reversed to low single figures foreshadowing the program's demise in 2023. The programme offered by the Asia Europe Institute at the University of Malaya followed a hybrid EU/ASEAN Studies format and while numbers remained high there has been a hiatus under Covid19. Surprisingly, there has never been a Malaysian EU Studies association (nor one in Singapore for that matter).

The situation in other places where EUSAs have been established is mixed. EUSA Japan has the highest number of members (circa 500) and Japanese scholars have regularly received Jean Monnet funding and several EU Centres were established together with EU Chairs. However, many if not all of these have closed recently. More positively, Indonesia has bucked this trend by setting up an EU Studies association in 2019. The picture in Taiwan is perhaps the most encouraging: there is an active and effective association and the EU Studies university consortium has been frequently successful in winning Jean Monnet grants, second only to New Zealand in the region. Turning to China, while separate EU Studies associations remain active in the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau, and university-based EU centres have been established, the growth in this century's first decade appears to have slowed somewhat. Respected EU centres still operate at Fudan, Sichuan, Wuhan, Macau, Hong Kong and elsewhere, but new initiatives seem limited. Perhaps reflecting the EU's own decade of crises, rebuilding academic interest in studying the EU remains a work in progress.

Keeping EU Studies programs dynamic enough to reflect emerging trends and priorities is essential if the recycling of old debates such as those on enlargement, the Eurozone and treaty reforms, for example, is to be avoided. The various EU Studies configurations (CESAA, EUSANZ and now ESAANZ) have played an important role in generating new research themes that have local as well as global relevance and in providing a platform for their exchange. Examples of this included a focus on the EU's contribution to Climate Action, sustainability and Artificial Intelligence (led by Australian academics), the changing role of the EU in the Indo-Pacific and "EU Perceptions" (an academic fad now well past its sell-by-date thankfully), both led by New Zealand researchers. As already noted, the removal of Jean Monnet funding for academic associations jeopardises how such new research themes can be nurtured.

An enduring and at times fractious debate relates to the interface between the academic study of the EU and the practice of EU public diplomacy. A traditional approach emphasises academic autonomy with the established freedom to comment

as critically as desired in fulfilling the role of academics as the conscience of society. The matching of this accepted role with the requirements of EU Delegations' public diplomacy has not always been without tension. A growing expectation has emerged that the activities of EU Studies associations as well as other Jean Monnet activities be at least consistent with a broader EU "outreach" philosophy – to raise awareness and a better understanding of the European Integration process. While academic autonomy remains sacrosanct and unblemished – CESAA/ EUSANZ/ ESAANZ have never been instructed how to engage or what to say – for some this relationship has been at times uncomfortable. After all, many research projects and teaching modules rely on EU funding. In contrast, the NCRE in New Zealand explicitly embraces an Outreach role as part of its academic vision by performing:

A wider societal role and serves as one element in the EU's outreach within New Zealand and the Pacific. Raising a critical awareness of the EU, informing government, the media and public opinion all play an important part in the NCRE's core function (NCRE, nd).

To conclude, much has been achieved in establishing EU Studies in Australia and New Zealand over the last three decades. The hallmarks of this success have been Trans-Tasman collaboration, imitation where appropriate and innovation where needed. Undoubtedly the growth of EU Studies in New Zealand was initially inspired by the example of CESAA and the recognition that at the tertiary level a European Studies academic void was evident in both countries. The recent merging of these separate interests under the ESAANZ banner suggests that closer collaboration on EU Studies is set to continue, prosper and deepen in the coming years.

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