

Where would we be without CESAA?

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Introduction

Few Australians have a clear understanding of the structure and processes of the Australian political system. Even where they are aware of three levels of government, and can describe their geographic boundaries, they struggle to articulate a comprehensive account of the distinctions in competence, scale and operations.

The relatively low level of political literacy about their own system of government helps to explain why most Australians have such limited knowledge or appreciation of the European Union (EU), its structure and processes. The relationships between the 27 Member States and the EU institutions mean little, let alone the complex arrangements and checks and balances in place, on the one hand to promote European integration, and on the other, to protect and promote the rights and interests of the nations which form the membership of the EU.

If Australians have a poor grasp of the multilevel management of most key areas of governance in Australia, how much less knowledge do they have about the relationships and competences in the EU. This is a common picture in most parts of the world beyond Europe itself, and even within Europe, most citizens are much more focused on regional or national political processes and issues than they are on the European level.

Since the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, however, the EU has moved steadily from a primary focus on arrangements within the EU and amongst its institutions, to an increasingly strong agenda related to its engagement in the world. The establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the first articulation of a Global Strategy in 2016, and the declaration by the incoming President of the European Commission in 2019 that hers would be a 'geopolitical' commission together demonstrate a strengthening agenda to act on global issues.

Public diplomacy has been a crucial dimension of this growing engagement with the world beyond the EU and its neighbourhood. Through the Delegations in a growing number of countries, the EU has been very keen to support activities and projects which enhance understanding of the EU, its values and global priorities for peace and an international rules-based order. In this endeavour, the Delegations would seek to work with local business associations and academic organisations such as the European Community Studies Associations (ECSAs), CESAA in Australia. However, limited resources on both sides meant that this cooperation was ad hoc and limited. The British, French, Italian and German public diplomacy efforts have been so much

stronger in Australia, with the British Council, Alliance Française, the Goethe Institute and the Italian Cultural Institute all promoting a range of cultural activities and language classes.

Universities have been of particular interest to the EU, as alternative vehicles for connecting with young people who would themselves hold positions of influence in a range of sectors, and for research that would address various aspects of the bilateral relations between the universities' host country and the EU. Commencing in North America in the late 1990s, the EU set up EU Centres to promote teaching, research and public education through media engagement, seminars and conferences. The program had begun as a European Parliament (EP) initiative in 1998, with an initial commitment as part of the 1995 EU-US 'New Transatlantic Agenda' (NTA) and 'Joint Action Plan' (JAP). Encouraged by the positive response to this initiative, the EU extended the program to other parts of the world, particularly the industrialising countries in Australasia, including Japan, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, New Zealand and Australia.

The introduction of European Union centres

The extension of the European Union's program of funding for 'EU centres' to Australia marked a significant shift in the capacity for universities to engage with activities related to the EU and broadened the framework of European Studies in Australia. Already, the historic focus on language studies and the associated interests in history and culture of European nations had been complemented since the early 1990s by a much stronger priority on the history and politics of European integration. The establishment of CESAA had brought together scholars and researchers with an interest in European integration, and the success of the University of Melbourne in attracting Jean Monnet funding to support a Centre of Excellence had marked an important transition.

However, the EU centres program took this a whole step further. In 2001, the first step had been taken in Australia and New Zealand with the inauguration of National Europe Centres (NEC). One was at Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra and an equivalent for New Zealand at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch.

The engagement in Australia was extended in 2006, through a competitive process in which three universities won funding to host EU Centres. ANU continued to be a centre for European studies, while the other successful universities were Monash University and Latrobe University. Monash had had an explicit connection with Europe since 2001, when it had established the Monash Prato Centre in Tuscany. This was at the initiative of historians and Italy specialists building on Monash's visibility with the Australian European University Institute Fellowships Association (AEUIFA). Monash had coordinated this initiative in which Australian universities contributed to funding scholars to spend time at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence. Monash's personal links with EUI administrators and its strength in Renaissance history enabled it to mobilise professors at the University of Florence to assist with the creation of the Prato Centre. Subsequently, the Europe Steering group, set up at Monash to support the Prato Centre, was involved in the creation of the Monash European and European Union Centre (MEEUC) on Monash's Melbourne campus.

In comparison to the European studies initiatives in the 1990s, the Monash centre in 2006 was funded by the EU and had to be EU-focused. This is why it was called the 'Monash European and EU Centre'. A balance had to be achieved as the languages and cultural studies scholars did not want to be excluded despite the EU focus. This was a challenge as academics in the language department lacked expertise in the EU but did bring expertise in individual countries and their cultural studies (see Mascitelli et al., 2020). The MEEUC, under the directorship of Professor Pascaline Winand, a Belgian professor who had previously taught at the EUI in Florence, created a new EU subject at the undergraduate level, a new postgraduate degree (called Master of European and International Studies) and a PhD program.

The third centre in 2006 was led by Latrobe University which hosted a consortium of 6 universities across Australia, setting up the Innovative Universities European Union Centre (IUEUC). The IUEUC had two central nodes, La Trobe University as lead university in Melbourne and Macquarie University in Sydney, with Murdoch University in Western Australia, Flinders University in South Australia, the University of Newcastle in New South Wales and Griffith University, and from 2008, James Cook University, in Queensland (see Winand et al., 2015).

By then, Australia had been identified clearly by the EU as a target of public diplomacy, with the clear intent of promoting a better understanding of the EU and its relationship with Australia and the wider Asian region. This new relationship, after years of tension related to the Common Agricultural Policy, was enhanced after the change of Australian Government in late 2007. In 2008, Australia ratified the Kyoto Protocol and Prime Minister Rudd visited in order to demonstrate a positive dialogue between the two parties. In 2010, the Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, also visited Brussels, this time to attend a Leaders Summit of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), which Australia had just joined. In Brussels, she called for the commencement of negotiations for a treaty-level agreement between the EU and Australia. That Australia had numerous EU Centres funded by the European Commission, with a priority on promoting scientific and educational links with Europe, seemingly prompted Australian and EU stakeholders to deepen their bilateral relations (see Mascitelli et al., 2020).

Further rounds of the competitive EU Centre program funding occurred in 2009-10, and in 2014. In the 2009 round, the EU promoted a network arrangement, linking the Australian and New Zealand centres. This time, ANU and Monash were successful again, while RMIT University replaced the IUEUC as the third Australian EU Centre. The Australian National University Centre for European Studies (ANUCES) took over the role of the former National Europe Centre, at the initiative of four Australian National University Colleges (Arts and Social Sciences, Law, Business and Economics and Asia and the Pacific).

As part of the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN), with members in all Australian mainland states, the RMIT EU Centre shared a wider commitment to forging partnerships with industry and government to deliver practical results. The new Centre gave priority to fostering industry engagement with the EU, and to a distinctive focus on EU Regional Policy, unlike the other three centres which were focused more specifically on the institutions and processes at the heart of European integration.

Alongside this consolidation of the EU centres program, the role of CESAA had become less clear. The Centres were favoured by the Delegation with respect to information sharing and cooperative initiatives, yet CESAA had continued to be active with the development of the new journal, the Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies, and its regular newsletter. Given its central location in Melbourne, the RMIT EU Centre and CESAA began to cooperate closely in sharing resources and activities, such as jointly sponsored seminars.

This contributed to a major European and EU studies conference being held in 2014. CESAA was the Australian representative association in the regional European Studies Association of Asia Pacific (EUSAAP) which brought together the ECSAs from various Asian countries including not only those with EU centres but also Thailand and Indonesia. Their principal activities were an annual conference and the publication of a journal. For the first time, in 2014, Australia hosted a EUSAAP conference in Melbourne, with CESAA providing the academic leadership for the conference program, and the RMIT EU Centre providing logistical and administrative support. This level of cooperation has continued since, with CESAA conferences being hosted regularly by the RMIT centre, alongside contributions to the journal and co-hosting of seminars.

In 2014, a new round of the EU Centres program in Australia and New Zealand saw five centres supported in Australia and a sixth continue in New Zealand. RMIT and ANU were successful again, while three new centres were supported at the University of South Australia, the University of Adelaide and the University of Melbourne, each of the latter three offering specific foci for their work. Interestingly, there had been some interest in this round from Sydney institutions, but in the end, there was no proposal for a Sydney EU centre to the dismay of the Delegation and many others in the EU community. The sixth centre in the network was the New Zealand EU Centre Network (EUCN) which was led by the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE) based at the University of Canterbury.

At the University of South Australia, the Hawke Research Institute, which emphasises research impact and public political debate, hosted the Hawke EU Centre for Mobilities, Migrations and Cultural Transformations led by Professor Anthony Elliot. This new Centre was launched by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke (after whom the Research institute was named) with an agenda to examine ‘the global challenges caused by the increasing displacement of people and communities in the 21st century’ (EU Delegation to Australia Newsletter, 2014).

Also in South Australia, the EU Centre for Global Affairs at the University of Adelaide focused on enhancing ‘international trade and regional cooperation in the Asia and Pacific regions ... and the bi-lateral trade and investment relationship between the EU, Australia and Asia’ (Winand et al., 2015, p.75). In Victoria, the University of Melbourne co-funded the EU Centre on Shared Complex Challenges under the auspices of the ‘Carlton Connect Initiative’ (CCI). This Centre aimed to bring together people who shared a desire to tackle some of the biggest sustainability and social resilience challenges by designing new ideas and technologies to assist in securing Australia’s prosperity (Winand et al., p.76). This Centre sought to enhance EU and Australia collaboration on challenges such as climate action, international order and business innovation through engagement across political, scientific and economic dimensions.

The EU Centres undertook a broad range of activities, both in parallel and together. They sought to influence awareness of the EU partly through teaching and research but also through extensive public education activities, including media work (Mascitelli et al., 2020). Morgan (2017) suggested that the EU Centres created an interface between the Community and the experts. The Centres' contribution to generating new knowledge, and their role as venues for some quite important discussions involving not only academia but also government and business, and in some instances, even the scientific sector has also been noted (see Mascitelli et al., 2020). Other Australian academics have suggested that while EU Centres in Australia have significantly contributed towards deepening diverse stakeholders' awareness of the importance and relevance of European and EU focused studies, they have nonetheless, experienced and continue to face, numerous obstacles. According to Martin Holland, the Director of the EUCN and NCRE, these obstacles '... have been [the] universities' existing structures and the [motives of] stakeholders who have on a number of occasions expressed their own priorities and interests' (see Mascitelli et al., 2020).

This level of energy had both positive and negative implications for CESAA. While Centres cooperated with CESAA, sometimes co-sponsoring seminars, participating in conferences, and contributing to the ANZJES, their activities also obscured the role of CESAA. Even where they contributed to activities, Centre-based colleagues only rarely became members of CESAA, and then contributed to the social infrastructure necessary to sustain an academic organisation.

Given the various ways in which EU Centres were seen to be able to contribute to EU-Australia relations especially in the areas of teaching, research and innovation, the 2008 EU-Australia Partnership Framework had mentioned extending their role as one of its objectives. Davison (2019) described the expanded number of Centres between 2014-17 as 'smart diplomacy' by the EU because it created a growing number of Australian academics, scholars and students who were interested in issues related to Europe and the EU.

Through this period, various Australian scholars (not only in the EU Centres) had been winning Jean Monnet awards, awards intended to support Chairs, Associations grants, and Modules. The Jean Monnet programme was initially launched in 1989 and has been accessible to Australian universities since 2001. It is funded through the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Education and Culture (EAC), and managed by the European Commission's Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Since its inception, approximately 50 projects have been won by successful Australian submissions (see Mascitelli et al., 2020).

The Jean Monnet program suddenly became even more important in 2017, when the EU program for EU Centres ended in Australia. Support from various Jean Monnet Actions became the alternative source of resources for continuing the EU Centres. This was an appropriate program, partly because of its purpose on studies of European integration, and partly because it was possible to spend the awards in third countries, unlike with other EU programs such as Horizon 2020. In 2017 and 2018 Australian universities were awarded 24 awards. This success enabled some of the EU centres to continue both an identity as key sites of EU expertise in Australia, as well as the very practical benefit of ongoing funding.

In November 2017, the EU Centre at RMIT organised a conference to mark the conclusion of the EU Centres program in Australia. It brought together colleagues from all Centres and demonstrated the scale and continued enthusiasm of Australian scholars for continuing European Studies in Australia. CESAA members beyond the EU Centres also participated prominently in the conference.

Subsequently, the Jean Monnet Actions became even more important when Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) in the European Commission provided an increased pool of funding for Australian scholars applying for Jean Monnet awards. Other Erasmus Actions, such as Erasmus Mundus which offered scholarships for young Australian scholars to study postgraduate programs in European universities. The offer of Erasmus Mundus scholarships to students in third countries (such as Australia) is another form of public diplomacy, intended to deepen awareness about the relevance of EU engagement with Australia, especially in the area of education, research and innovation (see Mascitelli et al., 2020).

Context, of course, is everything

Scholars of European languages and cultural studies can often connect with personal experience in promoting interest in their fields. However, interest in the EU and in EU studies has been shaped very much by context, and by prevailing political agendas and processes in both Europe and in Australia.

This has been apparent particularly in the period from 2010-22, which was book-ended by two Australian Labor Governments, with nine years of conservative Coalition Governments between. After Prime Minister Rudd's visit in 2008, Prime Minister Julia Gillard visited Brussels in 2010 in order to attend an ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting) Leaders' Summit. This was an important step in itself, as it signalled Australia's enthusiasm to join the more structured environment for multilateral engagement with Europe that ASEM represents. However, it also provided an opportunity for Prime Minister Gillard to call for an upgrading of diplomatic relationships between Australia and the EU, in the form of a Treaty-level agreement. Negotiations commenced shortly afterwards, leading to a signing of a Framework Agreement in August 2017. EU Centres and CESAA both played a part in contributing to public awareness of the prospect of upgraded diplomatic arrangements and their possible implications.

Changing political leadership clearly shaped the context of relations between the EU and Australia, but so also did diplomatic appointments. During this time, there have been four different EU Ambassadors to Australia, each bringing slightly different priorities and styles of negotiation to the diplomatic agenda. The election of the conservative Coalition Government in Australia in 2013 coincided with the strong campaign by the EU and key EU Member States to achieve a significant breakthrough in global climate negotiations. One key milestone towards this was the decision at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2015, to adopt the commitment to 'Transforming Our World', the Agenda to 2030 encompassing 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 13 on Climate Action was advanced considerably by the Paris Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21). The Convention was signed by 186 countries and ratified by 195. The Conservative Australian Government was reluctant to sign but this was a key priority for the then EU Ambassador to Australia, His Excellency Sem Fabrizi. Quiet but intense lobbying from the EU Delegation together with the prominent support from the Obama

Administration led to Australian consent to the Agreement, notwithstanding its strong commitment to the fossil fuels industry.

In the latter part of the decade, other significant European events attracted considerable public interest in Australia, leading to greater interest in the EU itself. The European immigration crisis and its tragic implications in 2015 was one key issue while the circumstances of Greece and the tensions which developed between the Greek Government and the EU institutions in the wake of the 2009 bank collapse, culminating in a dramatic stand-off in 2016-17, was another. However, the most significant issue to drive interest in the EU in Australia was the British referendum in July 2016, in which a majority voted for the United Kingdom to leave the EU. Australian governments and the public followed closely the subsequent cycle of negotiations, initially over the Withdrawal Act, and then eventually, a new trade agreement. The circumstances of Northern Ireland were, and continue to be, a particular source of interest. Both the EU Centres and CESAA have contributed significantly to assisting Australians to understand, firstly, the EU itself, its institutions and processes, as well as the specific details at each step of the negotiation process.

More generally, Europe was also gaining attention as the centre of rising populist actors and events. The election of Trump as President in the United States prompted great tensions also in Europe as Trump publicly reneged on longstanding conventions and policies seen to be at the heart of the Transatlantic economic and security relationship. Different Australian scholars of European Studies followed these changed political developments and responded to the greater levels of Australian interest.

In a different way, the intensification of debate over the future of fossil fuels in Australia has led to increased interest in sustainability transitions. The closure of the Hazelwood mine and power generator in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria in 2017, led to a search for a different approach to regional development. Drawing on the EU's commitment to Smart Specialisation, the newly established Latrobe Valley Authority drew for support on a team from the EU Centre at RMIT and in the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute at the University of Melbourne. Five years later, the EU Centre at RMIT continued to provide advice on the EU's experience with Smart Specialisation not only in relation to transition from coal but also the cessation of old forest logging. A close relationship with the EU's Joint Research Centre means that an ongoing dialogue has developed sharing the learning about Smart Specialisation between Australia and the EU.

In more recent years, the impact and spread of Covid, the enormous consequences for people, and the increasing prominence of science led by European, US and Chinese researchers in the search for vaccines, have all kept Europe and EU-Australian relations in view. This has continued, perhaps even intensified, notwithstanding the border closures.

Conclusion

When the EU centres program was established in Australia, the significance and role of CESAA was less apparent. After all, they were well funded and connected with EU institutions in a way which gave them considerable prominence in promoting awareness of the EU and its relationship with Australia.

However, CESAA continued to be the only association focused on Europe more generally, including the particular circumstances of EU Member States and other European countries not part of the EU. It provided an interdisciplinary and pan-European forum for examination of all things European, not just the EU. This became more clearly visible with CESAA's and the New Zealand association's introduction of ANZJES in 2009. Since then, it has become a very prominent voice for European scholars not only in Australia and New Zealand, but for scholars in Asia and even more widely.

In the last decade, CESAA and the EU Centres, particularly that at RMIT, came to work together more closely, offering seminars and conferences that provided a very public opportunity for promoting research on EU-Australia relationships. This has mirrored greater weight in the EU-Australia relationship diplomatically, as has been demonstrated by the Framework Agreement, a Trade Agreement and the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy.

As some EU Centres have closed, CESAA, now ESAANZ, has even more importance as the trans-national body for bringing European and EU scholars together, and providing a foundation for offering both support and a critical lens on the EU-Australia relationship. In the era of the 'geopolitical' EU, this role can be central itself in developing the EU-Australia partnership in Asia Pacific.

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