

European Union: where next?

"What's Europe's place in a changing world? Where does it fit in?" These are questions Professor Richard Whitman is hoping to answer as he is researching European Union (EU)'s future role. This research is funded by the Madison trust.

"The EU doesn't want to be a global super power," says Professor Whitman. "It already is one economically. The 1990s saw it as a powerful trading organisation in Europe. Now it is looking at a wider global perspective."

Part of Professor Whitman's work was given as evidence to the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry on foreign policy aspects of the EU's Lisbon Treaty. According to the EU, this treaty "provides modern institutions and optimised working methods to tackle efficiently and effectively, challenges in today's world."

Currently, the EU is setting up a diplomatic service. It globally applies aggressive diplomacy on human rights. It is already engaged in military operations outside Europe to protect these. In countries where human rights are violated, the EU suspends its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), designed to give better trade access to European markets.

"A European union in some form is inevitable," adds Professor Whitman. "It is founded on the principle of collective security. The United States is still EU's most important trading partner, but their political relationship needs working on. Also, China and India, with their rapidly developing economies, are increasingly interested in the standardised way they will be able to trade with a united Europe in the future."

Research aims

To determine European Union's future role in a changing world.

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