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WHERE DO WE GO FROM “GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM”?

Amina Lone

“We need to vote leave so we can get rid of the throb (rubbish).
These Romanians are rubbish and if we leave we can stop the immigrants coming in.”

A Pakistani woman shared this conversation with me during the EU referendum campaign. She responded to the Pakistani man with, “Weren’t we together when we came over? Why do you want to stop people coming in when we did exactly the same sixty years ago?”

Stronger In’s campaign was one based on economic security, for people, for businesses, for the country. It was widely acknowledged that Remain could not win the immigration argument, yet it kept cropping up. Vote Leave’s repetitive mantra, whether whispered or explicitly stated, cut through.

As the national communities lead for Britain Stronger in Europe, I heard plenty of anti-immigration sentiment throughout the campaign, but I still balked at such blatant hostility from people who were direct beneficiaries of migration. How could it not be personal when so many of our forefathers had risked all to come to the soil of the motherland? Hearing anti-immigration platitudes from some politicians was unpleasant but expected in the current climate. All political parties have failed to respond to concerns about immigration, perceived or real, in a mature, robust and positive way, leaving a vacuum. But large numbers of descendants of immigrants, maybe in a bid to ‘fit in and truly belong’ vocalised fears about immigration too.

Stronger In recognised that the Remain campaign needed to engage with all communities and pro-actively set out to do so. We knew that, in order to reach BME individuals and communities, the BME media would play a key role. Significant numbers of black and minority ethnic individuals get their news from channels like the British Muslim TV, Sikh Channel, BEN TV, and publications like The Voice, Eastern Eye, and Asian Image. They are left to be more representative and relevant.

Good campaigners know the air and ground war both need to be successful. From early January, the field team went out into high streets, held community meetings and street stalls, up and down the country. They worked weekends, evenings, and afternoons speaking to ordinary people, engaging, feeling the pulse of the nation. They didn’t balk when asked to engage with Gurdwaras, mosques and temples or set up stalls at fairs like the Bangla Mela, the Vaisakhi celebrations and the Afro Hair and Beauty Show. While we got some chuckles for having a stall at a beauty show, it was one of our most successful days with numerous black people, many young, coming up and asking to be convinced in a positive and open manner.

We held events with diverse communities supported by politicians, civil leaders and community activists. A big community lifter was organised with MPs, activities and supporters to break bread together. Nechau, a leading online Chinese lifestyle magazine described our Chinese community event as “the first of its kind for the Chinese in Britain regarding the EU referendum.”

But the challenges were great. Many had concerns about a “white-led” campaign not only too male, but too pale. Old colonial battles were resurrected with the Commonwealth v EU argument. Different immigration rules for those inside the EU were seen as unfair and discriminatory by a considerable amount of BME voters. South Asian people were told if they voted leave, their family members would be able to come to Britain. Diversity and rule still works as powerfully as it did in days of Empire.

One of the saddest things I witnessed was the exploitation of ordinary people’s fears. The racist innodoxy “we are being swamped” rhetoric. Nigel Farage and his merry men exploited that fear of the other, saying they could “save us” and “get our country back.” In the UK and un-UK to promise what could not be delivered. Farage could no more close our borders then Puddington Bear can, and his subsequent disappearing act exposes their dishonourable intentions.

People are scared. Of a world that is changing, of politicians they don’t trust, of an elite that doesn’t care. I understand that. I am from the same community and wanting someone to blame is understandable but easy. Deep-rooted financial and cultural insecurity were key elements that produced the Brexit result. Sticking-plaster solutions will not heal the wounds.

As an elderly man is quoted as saying in the Open Societies Foundation’s 2014 research series, Europe’s White Working-Class Communities, “If there was work, and there was houses, and there was everything what’s needed, I wouldn’t have a problem with (immigration). The problem is that there’s too much looking for too little, and you’re bound to get trouble when that happens. If you have starving people and throw a loaf in amongst them, there’ll be a murder committed to get that loaf. That’s what’s happening here on a much bigger scale. There’s not enough”.

A starting point would be for government at every level to engage with citizens in a meaningful manner, not with empty gestures. Until that happens, we should expect more uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity.
THULI MADONSELA: A CASE STUDY IN TAKING ON CORRUPTION

Caroline Crampton

When Thuli Madonsela speaks, people listen. The South African Public Protector is very softly-spoken, but journalists and samples of state alike hang on her every word. She has been named as one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world, and vilified by politicians in her own country. Now coming to the end of her seven-year non-renewable term as the country’s highest-ranking government ombudsman, Madonsela has investigated everyone from police chiefs to political activists to the South African president, and is an unprecedentedly popular figure with the public as a result of her efforts.

Born in Johannesburg in 1960, Madonsela grew up in the Soweto township. She holds law degrees from several of South Africa’s most prestigious universities, and has focused her legal work on human rights and women’s oppression for decades – in interviews, she has cited Nelson Mandela and as models as diverse as anti-apartheid activist Albertina Sisulu and Labour MP Pat McFadden. In 1994, she gave up a Harvard scholarship to help draft the constitution for the new South Africa. She reportedly visited seven times turned down the chance to serve as an ANC MP, instead seeking a very different kind of public office.

The position of Public Protector is an unusual one, by international standards. Mandated by the constitution, it is independent from the state and has the power to hold state officials to account. She has also earned it to that of the ombudsman, traditionally the patronal aunt of the Venda chief, who serves as a non-partisan buffer between the tribe’s traditional leader and its people.

Part of the reason Madonsela’s tenure as Public Protector has been so remarkable is because of the incredibly low expectations South Africans have of their public servants. Her critics have at times accused her of counting media attention, but her constant communication of her work has helped build tremendous public goodwill towards the office she has helped to create. It was “part of innovative constitutional institutions that are meant to help the people exact accountability in the exercise of state power and control over state resources through administrative scrutiny.” She has also freed up to that of the mahlakatla, traditionally the patronal aunt of the Venda chief, who serves as a non-partisan buffer between the tribe’s traditional leader and its people.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Arguably Madonsela’s three biggest scandals as Public Protector have all come from the ANC ranks. Julius Malema, the former president of the ANC Youth League, was subject to her investigation over “kickbacks” from government tenders.

The former national police commissioner General Bheki Cele was fired by the President in 2012 after Madonsela uncovered corrupt practices involving inflated leases for police buildings. And most significant of all, President Jacob Zuma himself has been under pressure for months now, following her investigation into the taxpayer-funded improvements Zuma had done to his private residence.

When Zuma’s investigation the so-called “big five” of “the visiting centre, amphitheatre, swimming pool, cattle kral and chicken run”, which she cited as the most alarming and excessive examples of the ANC’s abuse of public funds. After a long and convoluted constitutional process, Zuma was eventually forced to apologise in April 2016, and has until the end of August to repay R7.8 million (about $500,000). There has been widespread outcry at this, as conservative estimates show that his family has benefited to the tune of R8m, and many prominent figures called for his resignation.

The fact that Zuma remains in office after this and many other scandals, including rape allegations, is a matter for international concern. As recently as May, the UK government decided it was “part of innovative constitutional institutions that are meant to help the people exact accountability in the exercise of state power and control over state resources through administrative scrutiny.” She has also freed up to that of the mahlakatla, traditionally the patronal aunt of the Venda chief, who serves as a non-partisan buffer between the tribe’s traditional leader and its people.

For a couple of decades, South Africa has been a key Commonwealth partner for the UK – a stable democratic state in a region where such places are few and far between. But earlier this year, the country’s own finance minister described the South African economy as “in crisis”, and with exchange rates the Rand very low and unemployment it’s hard to argue otherwise. Tackling corruption is a big part of addressing this crisis, and this is where Madonsela’s work is key – she has shown that South Africa has the potential in place to confront the problem peacefully and democratically. Zuma may not have resigned, and he may yet not pay back anywhere near what many South Africans think he owes, but the fact that he admitted fault at all is testament to the power of the Office of Public Protector, and the extraordinary abilities of the woman who has occupied it for the last seven years.

In an even more connected world, interdependence and shared progress is recognised as a worthwhile future whatever happens with Brexit. We live in a world where international connections give social and cultural meaning and where regardless of the UK vote, the connections can shape policy. And that internationalism can also take women’s empowerment forward.

UN Women is the UN body responsible for promoting and advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment. We support governments on progressing these aims, work with others who have an investment in them, such as women’s organisations and researchers and we lead in the UN system on women’s empowerment.

This stretches from getting women into the global peace process to sending independent investigators to document sexual abuse in conflict. It involves setting up and supporting the Secretary General’s initiative on women’s economic empowerment and leading work on women migrants. It involves developing guidelines for work on violence against women and working with the IMF on gender responsive budgeting.

Close to everything we do now is focused around a new global compact called Agenda 2030, and the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it lays out. But not everyone knows about these.

Agenda 2030 is a new vision of the world which member states of the United Nations confirmed and signed up to in September 2015. Its key principles include being relevant to all people and all countries (universalism), being built around human rights principles and obligations, and a promise that nobody will be left behind. Implicit in this is the recognition that progress to date: economic, social and political has worked for some, but others have been left out in the cold.

The 17 SDGs seek to end poverty, address inequalities within and between countries, tackle climate change, build peaceful and inclusive societies and much more. Gender equality and women’s empowerment is woven through the goals and includes sexual and reproductive health rights, as mentioned above, and a pledge to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training through the values of inclusiveness, including persons with disabilities.

The goal is practical – we might have wanted to see, for example, explicit commitments to promote the role of women in peace-building. Even so, they are highly ambitious and have equality and justice at their core. All the more specific targets, numbering 169 across the 17 goals, are to be met by 2030 and there are just 14 years to go for their full realisation: the challenge is on!

Sharing with feminists in the UK is important, as some goals have been focused on developing countries, whereas this time the goals apply to everyone.

Given recent developments in the UK, it may interest readers to know that we are working on political violence against women. The problem is starting to gain international attention at the same time that it is perhaps getting worse. Recent tragic deaths have sharpened a more general understanding of how very difficult it is becoming for women to be active in public life. Our Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka recently issued a statement on the killings of Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres and British MP Jo Cox, both killed this summer.

We are working on a definition of political violence – likely to be along the lines of ‘any violence that impedes women exercising their political rights’. While it is so very challenging to raise a public profile we will continue to see under-representation of women and a diminished politics. The UN is not immune from this skewed pattern itself, and has recently committed to reach at least 40 percent women in total staff by 2020 and achieve a 50 percent balanced workforce by 2030.

The effort to deliver the SDGs is considerable. Part of that work is to ensure that women across the world, including in richer countries, know that these commitments have been made and advocate for their delivery. Understanding this agenda will help women’s movements and organisations to hold their governments to account.

Fifteen years is not very long – we must be demanding, irritating and tenacious in pushing this agenda forward.

A letter from the UN: Agenda 2030 applies to you too

Purna Sen

A goal specifically addressing gender equality includes the elimination (“non-reduction”) of violence against women, ending harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM as well as providing public services and social protection policies so as to value unpaid care and domestic work.

The goals are not perfect – we might have wanted to see, for example, explicit commitments to promote the role of women in peace-building. Even so, they are highly ambitious and have equality and justice at their core. All the more specific targets, numbering 169 across the 17 goals, are to be met by 2030 and there are just 14 years to go for their full realisation: the challenge is on!

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Fourteen years is not very long – we must be demanding, irritating and tenacious in pushing this agenda forward.
THE BREXIT MYTH

Marie-Noëlle Laeue

Last year, I spent about six months working on the so-called EEA “renegotiation” at the Treasury. As Whitehall gets ready to implement Britain’s exit from the European Union, I do not envy the civil servants tasked with this negotiation. Stories from Ministers were chaotic at best, and largely based on completely unrealistic perceptions of the EU and ultimately Britain’s importance in it. The result was a practically meaningless deal, which understandably did not fetch much in the referendum campaign. I am being told that, unfortunately, the newly created “Department for Exiting the European Union” suffers from a similar attitude.

The Leave campaign was riddled with outright lies and deliberate inaccuracy. It is not surprising Theresa May’s cabinet is split on the best way forward, particularly on whether Britain should attempt to remain a member of the single market. At the time of writing, it is still unclear if and when Article 50 is going to be triggered, though one thing for certain: negotiations will neither be easy nor straightforward. It’s time to take a closer look at the myth of a brave new post-Brexit world.

“Of course we will stay in the EEA.”

Brexiters have often insisted that the EU needs Britain more than Britain needs the EU; consequently, the EU will doubly ensure to give Britain preferential access to the world’s largest market. We have heard several “explanations” for this argument: Germany wants to continue to sell cars to the UK, France wants to continue to sell wine, and, as IDS told the Today programme in May, the UK will be “profoundly” to keep Britain in the EEA because of the large trade deficit the UK is running with the rest of the single market.

And although there is some truth to each of these explanations, the conclusion, apart from being drenched in post-colonial arrogance, is simply untrue. Apart from the fact that there are 25 other European countries that will have to agree to any deal, there are actually other countries which will want to buy French wine and German cars. With ever growing markets such as China and India, the EU can afford reduced sales into the British one.

It is true that Britain runs a large trade deficit with the rest of the EU. The UK currently exports about 40% of its goods to the EU, whereas less than 10% of EU goods are being sold into the UK. However, having a large trade deficit is nothing to boast about, as these are usually only sustainable if a country can attract large inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Should these dry up, countries are more prone to be hit by recession. The UK has an FDI stock of over £1 trillion; part of the UK’s attractiveness for foreign investors is that it brings access to the single market. As a result of Brexit, King’s College London’s Economic and Social Research Council expects a drop of 22% of FDI into the UK, and other European countries are already trying to attract these funds their way.

After Brexit, the EU will continue to be the world’s largest market, and the UK’s biggest trading partner. But it has no economic incentive to give Britain any preferential treatment, and after the shooted-earth approach of Britain’s new Foreign Secretary, we should not look for any goodwill.

“Who needs the EEA when we have the WTO?”

As it becomes clearer that access to the single market will require everything Brexiters apparently voted against - equivalent implementation of most EU rules, continued contribution to the EU Budget (albeit at a slightly reduced rate) and most importantly, continued freedom of movement for European Citizens - the claim is now made that the UK will be better off through the World Trade Organization anyway.

Under WTO rules, each member must grant the same “most favoured nation” (MFN) market access to all other WTO members, including charging the same tariffs. However, this does not mean that the UK would retain access to the single market, as the principle is that countries may choose to enter into free trade agreements such as the EU, which may grant beneficial terms of access to its members. So the UK’s exports to the EU would be subject to the EU’s MFN tariffs, which would raise the cost of exporting to the EU for UK firms. The trade in services, one of the UK’s biggest exports, is currently not subject to a WTO free trade agreement, which would mean reduced access to EU markets for UK service producers.

It is true that the WTO route would give the UK more sovereignty (whatever that may mean). However, this would come at the price of less trade and a bigger fall in income for UK firms.

So although Theresa May has been very clear that “Brexit means Brexit”, we still have no idea what else it means. The Government, and particularly the ministers responsible for executing Brexit, need to start being honest about the magnitude of the challenges ahead. Although, given that the reality continues to look rather bleak, I begin to understand why some might prefer to stay in denial.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO INTERNATIONALISM?

Jessica Toole & Anna-Joy Rickard

When we stop talking about something, there are consequences. There were on housing, on immigration, and on Europe. Housing was ignored for decades. Immigration was the controversial issue we avoided mentioning. And at every European election, we relied on the fact there was also a local election we could talk about instead.

In 2016, we are living with the consequences.

There is something else we are not talking about enough - international issues. We live in a globally connected and interdependent world where no country is an island (as hard as Britain may try to be). Yet at the same time we have a problem with the way we talk, or sometimes more accurately don’t talk, about international topics. There is a false division between domestic and international policy, with domestic issues often addressed as though we live in isolation. Yet domestic challenges are rarely the result of domestic inputs alone. Our energy, jobs, and future prosperity are all affected by influences beyond our borders.

To make matters worse, foreign policy is one of the most divisive areas of policy for the Labour Party. Issues are framed around binaries that link with different factions of the Party – pro-nuclear or anti-nuclear, pro-EU or anti-EU, pro-war or anti-war, Israel or Palestine. Thus foreign policy issues are the controversial ones - the hard-to-talk-about, easy-to-ignore topics, where only experts or avid enthusiasts are seen to comment.

There is an urgent need to address the way we handle and communicate on international issues as we face the result of the EU referendum, ongoing attacks on our international aid budget, the Government’s back-tracking over foreign investment in our energy sector and the refugee crisis, to name a few. We suggest the following answers for the Labour Party.

First, we should re-discover our core values of internationalism, cooperation and solidarity, and be unafraid to talk about these. Politicians and activists must understand them and use them when we are talking about our economic development, our social policy, our ability to tackle poverty or our potential to be a world leader. We are truly stronger when we work together – both within our communities and with our global partners. This should be the basis of our narrative.

Secondly, we must re-integrate international issues into debates on domestic issues. They should be part of our top lines’, and feature prominently in speeches.

Much as One Nation was a common theme across Shadow Cabinet briefs under Ed Miliband, too so should our leader and front bench teams think about the international impacts affecting their briefs. They must think in a more systematic way about international issues and how they affect domestic challenges.

Thirdly, we need to encourage more cross-departmental working. To truly tackle many of the challenges facing the UK, there must be a joined-up approach which integrates the international departments. For example, how do you tackle issues like modern day slavery, the refugee crisis or climate change without the input of the FCO and DfID, and other departments that are working daily to understand the root causes and are involved in the international negotiations? The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals could provide a powerful framework to encourage this.

Finally, we have to take the drive for policy coherence seriously. In many areas, our domestic priorities and approaches contradict our overseas ones. This damages our reputation in the eyes of the international community. Examples include providing humanitarian support in Yemen but supporting Saudi Arabia with weapons, or an overseas drive for tax transparency but with little done on the City of London.

We have seen that where domestic and international issues align, there is the greatest potential for mobilisation and action, for example when unfair tax practices at home and abroad rose up the agenda with the Panama Papers revolution.

As Labour members working in international policy, we have both been told these areas are “not a doorstep issue”. We would argue that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. By not defining our internationalism values or continuing to talk about international issues, we have created these conditions. The EU referendum result and the sad rise in hate crimes and nationalism are partly symptoms of this.

We have a tradition and history as an outward-looking party and outward-looking nation. We should be proud of it. We need to embrace our global connectivity, and robustly communicate our place in the world and what that means – both the opportunities and the challenges. This is the only way truly to make in-roads into addressing the issues facing communities around the UK and to provide hope for the next generation. And we should all feel we can talk about that.

Jessica and Anna-Joy are both members of the Fabian Member Interest Group on International Policy.

All member welcomes - if you would like to get involved please contact jtoole@gmail.com
The Interview: Zita Gurmai

Zita Gurmai has been the President of PES Women, the gender equality organisation within the Party of European Socialists, since 2004. She is an MEP for the Hungarian Socialist Party.

1. Tell us about PES Women

PES Women is the women’s organisation of the Party of European Socialists (PES). We promote gender equality and women’s representation, both within and outside the party. Our members come from the member parties of the PES. We formulate policies that we back with campaigns towards the EU institutions. Our priorities are the closing of the gender pay gap, a European Youth Guarantee, childcare, pensions, breaking the glass ceiling, protecting women migrants and their children and the fight against human trafficking.

2. You talked about not using the “smallest common denominator” for women’s rights. What are the biggest challenges of addressing women’s under-representation in politics across so many different countries?

There was a momentum in Beijing some 20 years ago. Progress has been made but is far from significant. Worse, in Europe, in the deep of a complex crisis, we lose means and ambition. The ideal of the countries with the best policies is only a faint reference. Instead, we are trying to reach an agreement on what is the least likely to create disagreement. That is the smallest common denominator. At this rate, we will need another 40 years to achieve gender equality!

Women are the majority in the population across the globe, but still a minority in politics. We are 53%. Yet when in charge, women exhaust the social needs of the people directly around us. This is what politics needs. The current European Parliament has the highest rate of elected women, from 35.05% in 2009 to 36.88% in 2014, but still far from 50%. We must keep people engaged. Grassroots activism is extremely important to keep the conversation on equality going at the heart of the society. Leadership is also key. The PES declared itself “the party for women”. This is the strong engagement we need. It is for leaders to show the way, design adequate policies and pass them through the corridors of power.

There are countries where the task is tougher. We are working with our sisters of the Thaera Network in the Middle East, on political representation for example. We receive their field experience and bring best practices from Europe, such as compulsory quota on electoral lists or party governments and party boards. PES Women also participate regularly to the activities of the National Democratic Institute, like mentoring women aspiring to a political career. I treasure the value of mentoring. It is the key to a gentle revolution where women who slowly but surely gain confidence and the place that they deserve in the society.

3. The importance of women in preventing international conflicts is firmly on the agenda now, but how do we make it a reality?

Women must be given the space to act as leaders and true agents of change and progress.

I recently met with actors of the peace process in North Cyprus. There a specific commission on women’s rights have been created as an integral part of the discussions. The government has recognised that women have specific issues to bring to the table and, and a role to play in settling peace. Concerning prevention, I firmly believe in the African saying that if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation. Education of girls and the training of women is key for them to take their full part in economic and political life. Then the society will not to be violent, and that is the fundamentals of prevention: women know when the immediate interests of the community are not being served. Women have in it to stop men from falling into the trap of spiralling violence, and this is why women must be given all the tools to share the power of decision making equally to men.

4. How much has women’s equality across Europe changed in your political lifetime?

I was born in a country separated from Western Europe by the Iron wall. The Arab Spring broke back memories twice: when it started, and when women were sent back to their kitchens at the end, despite being at the forefront and even at the origin of this attempted revolution. Women have gained the right to vote, to work, to earn and spend their own money and have their own bank account, to plan their pregnancies. The battle for the right to contraception or a safe and legal abortion was led and won in most countries by such wonderful women as Simone Veil.

Yet the battle for abortion still has to be fought in countries like Ireland where women have died in horrific conditions only recently. The government in my own country, Hungary, has modified the national constitution to protect the unborn, women’s lives don’t matter to them. Spain is challenging also on the front of domestic violence, still a problem of pandemic proportion in Europe.

Countries like Sweden, Denmark or Finland are doing an excellent job at putting women in charge, but others are seriously lagging behind. We are making progress, but the financial crisis has turned into an economic and social crisis, with tough austerity measures as a political consequence, and it is a disaster for women as you well know in the UK.

5. Here in the UK, xenophobia is on the rise. What can we learn from the Hungarian experience?

As progressives, it is our duty to listen to people’s worries and fears and propose constructive solutions that are not based on creating imaginary enemies, as is a speciality in Hungary. A big part of the “success” of extreme-right movements is based on giving simple answers to complex socio-economic problems. It is up to us to show the alternative way and explain it in a way that is understandable to citizens.

6. Will Brexit make a difference to your work?

Yes and no. The way we can influence women issues in the UK would change, but we will continue working with the Labour Party, and organisations like the Fabians. The question of abortion rights is also very topical the UK. We are supporting the work of the Abortion Rights Campaign team in Ireland. This country is sending countless women to the UK for abortions. It is therefore a European problem and PES women want to keep working with partners in Ireland and the UK. We will keep a close eye on the devolution of power to Scotland and what it could mean for abortion rights there. A Brexit would not mean the end of European cooperation for us. We will bring our solidarity to British women equally as before, because the fight for women’s empowerment and freedom knows no boundaries.

7. What are the best and worst moments of your job?

The best and worst moments of my job are, surprisingly, the same. At part of my work, I meet a lot of people, from various backgrounds, in Hungary and all over Europe. I often get to hear first-hand about their struggles. The individual stories of single mums struggling to make a living, discrimination at the workplace or experiences of violence touch me deeply. These are very bad, sad moments of my work.

However, I cherish them because they help me focus on what is at stake. They give me the energy to work hard.

8. Who are your political heroes?

The founders and first leaders of PES Women: Karin Junker and Fiorella Gilliardotti. They were pioneers in their time. They showed courage and determination, even in the face of considerable opposition. I strive to be such a politician. Let me also mention a man: Gyula Horn, former prime minister of Hungary, a true European politician. I am sure many readers saw the photo where he cut the iron curtain in 1989, literally, with his own hands. It took a lot of bravery to stand by his European values. He did that all his life. He is gone now but his dedication to Europe keeps being an inspiration for me.

9. Which rising stars of progressive European politics would you tell Fabiana Women’s Network members to look out for?

The young generation of European progressives is an exceptional group of talented people. I will name just two: Zsófia Domonkos from Hungary, one of the Vice-Presidents of PES Women and Vice-President of the Hungarian Democratic Forum. She is active in promoting sustainable development in a crucial issue today. Neza Gracic is Vice-President of Young European Socialists, and definitely a rising star.

10. What does modern Fabianism have to offer our international partners in 2016?

In a world of rising inequalities, a rapidly-changing world and the spread of populism, I believe that the values of Fabianism have a lot to offer: there is an ever-increasing need for greater equality of power, wealth and opportunity. We need to emphasise the value of collective action and public service. I feel personally inspired by what Fabianism teaches us about an accountable, tolerant and active democracy.
FROM CRISIS TO COOPERATION: THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Isiana Bartoletti

During the summer, as I was digging through old documents in my parents’ house in Italy, I found an essay on the 2003 European Security Strategy. The first sentence read: “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free.” It’s shocking to see how much the world has changed since then, and in so many different ways.

Just think of the past few weeks – the referendum here in Britain, the attacks in Nice, the dramatic situation in Syria, the Orlando attack and tensions in American society, terrestrial and global. This is the Troy and so many different parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and what’s happening in Turkey. The threats we are facing have never been so multifaceted and complex: conflicts for the control of land or even for the control of resources have made an unexpected comeback, while new kinds of wars, like cyberwar and information wars, have also emerged. The reality is that, as this complexity increases, military power can be necessary but is no longer sufficient alone.

At the same time, never has the unity of the EU been challenged so much as it is now. We are seeing both a resurgence of nationalism and a profound antipathy towards the nature of the EU infrastructure, which was partly responsible for the Brexit vote here. More people are on the move now than there have ever been. The refugee crisis has become a continuing story of misery, with children dying in the Mediterranean on a daily basis. Horror stories about abuse in camps in Greece and those in Calais seem to leave too many people indifferent.

Our economy has changed, and has done so globally. We are living in a Japan-style flat economy, with little growth, and have yet to understand where growth and prosperity are going to come from whilst preserving our social security and working rights standards. These are unprecedented challenges, our societies having become more fragmented and less resilient than ever. The European Union, still the most successful project of regional integration in the entire world, may not survive. Where do we go from here? First, we have to deal with terror, a critical issue of our time. Cooperation is key, and no county can ever think of defeating terrorism by itself. We will have to work with others.

Likewise, we will have to increase reliance in our own countries. Now more than ever, our safety starts at home. Jobs, social security, shared values, education – they are all vital to make society less permeable to radicalisation.

Sadig Khan has spoken eloquently about this in his mayoral campaign and so have others – and I am glad that double on the Prevent plan have now been cast from politicians across the political spectrum. Secondly, we must rise to the challenge of the global movements we are witnessing. We have the capacity to deal with this at a global level. The situation might worsen over the next few years: the new realignment between Turkey and Russia might bring news on that front, too. Will Turkey’s commitment to host 3 million refugees stand? Or will Erdogan press on with an undemocratic rule, including reinstating the death penalty, and becoming more hostile to refugees? In that case, refugees will seek another route which will probably involve the Balkans and Northern Europe, perhaps resulting in new discontent and a shift to the right of other parts of Europe, too.

This summer has been dominated by dramatic images of Syria. News of the use of civilians as human shields in Manbij and the reported abduction of 2000 people by Da’esh (also known as ISIS or ISIL) from the town shows that civilians are not again the main victims of Syria’s conflict. As I write, the EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini is calling for an immediate halt to fighting in Aleppo to allow medical and humanitarian aid to reach 1.5 million trapped people. The images of dead and wounded children have perhaps joined the conscience of the world into seeing that a political solution to the “civil war” is needed in order to defeat Da’esh, which continues to endanger the people of Syria, Iraq as well as Europe and beyond.

We cannot navigate this very complex set of threats unless we recognise that our safety is as important as our neighbours’. This means that Labour not only has an opportunity to recalibrate our international politics, but to make a compelling case for solidarity as a means to ensure our security. That at least would be a positive vision for Britain’s role in a post-Brexit world.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE CRACKS IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM?

Sasjikta Otto

In the past three years, voter participation has increasingly been under systematic attack in several US states. In 2013, American voters lost the full protection of the Voting Rights Act, which had outlawed barriers to political participation by racial and ethnic minorities. After the VRA became law in 1965, it became illegal to use literacy tests as a means of restricting voters’ access to the political system; this had been common practice in Southern States. All states with a record of electoral racial discrimination to get permission from the federal government for changes to voting processes.

In Shelby v. Holder in 2013, the Supreme Court invalidated the formula that decided which states are covered by this requirement. The results started filtering into the political system almost immediately – mainly in Republican-controlled districts. The day after the Shelby ruling, the Speaker of the North Carolina House introduced what became known as the “monster” law, which has a reputation as one of the most restrictive pieces of election legislation in the US. This eliminated same-day registration and the ability to vote outside the district of registration, which dramatically shortened early voting periods that allow voters to cast their ballots ahead of polling day. These changes may seem innocuous, but in the 2012 presidential election in North Carolina, nearly 900,000 votes were cast during the part of the early voting period that has now been eliminated. 90,000 voters used same-day registration, and more than 7,000 voters cast their ballots outside of their district of registration.

Since then, more than half of the states in the US have considered or passed similar laws. Another common change in several states has been the requirement to show specific voter ID to register or to vote; in many states, a gun licence, will suffice but student ID will not. None of these changes would have been possible with the full protection of the VRA, as they all place a disproportionate burden on communities of colour.

North Carolina’s 9th Circuit Court this July found that black voters were more likely to have incomplete voter registrations and use same-day registration services when they are available, and that moving between counties more frequently invades that they needed to re-register more frequently. Moving also made them more likely to need to vote out of district. A report by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and the Advancement Project – two prominent racial justice organisations – found that the loss of early voting days in Florida had a dampening effect on black and Hispanic voter participation, and led to prohibitively long queues in communities of colour. Polling stations in these communities face closure or shortened opening hours in several battle-ground states – including Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, and Arizona. In Alabama, some black voters have to find a way to travel across two counties to get the right kind of voter ID.

These effects are felt by others who already have a pressing need to be visible to policymakers: lower income and education level are common in the most affected groups. Those are the most restricted mobility – including people with disabilities and elderly people – hardly need more barriers to getting to the polls. Married women who have changed their names, and campus-bound students, are more unlikely to need – and find it fadically to obtain – voter IDs.

These developments could play a critical role in determining the outcome of the presidential election in November. The Leadership Conference Education Fund, a civil rights lobby group, calculates that voting rule changes in swing states could sway 84 Electoral College votes, control of the Senate, and a number of Governorships. The policy implications of all this are likely to be far-reaching, both in the US and internationally.

After watching events unfold for some time, and heavily influenced by my upbringing in post-apartheid South Africa, I decided to take action by creating an online platform that aims to address some of these restrictions, by linking volunteer drivers with anybody who needs a lift to claim their vote. The response has been overwhelmingly positive; we’ve teamed up with several national voter organisations and currently boast a team of over 50 volunteers contributing various skills and amounts of time to push the project forward – an example of social movements meeting mainstream politics.

In the UK, we face our own voter participation problems that are diluting the voices of core Labour supporters. Whilst the barriers to voting may not be as targeted or explicit as in the US, crossing membership and voting procedures do affect the vulnerable and those previously affected by discrimination, and are out of step with the lifestyles of millennial voters. IPSOS Mori reports that voter turnout in the 2015 General Election was lowest amongst young people, workers, middle-class people, renters, and BME citizens – all overwhelmingly Labour-leaning groups.

Clearly, the current government has little to gain from addressing this issue. As a party, and as a movement, it is up to us not just to encourage but to understand and to innovate ways to make it easier for our natural supporters to engage in the democratic process – and thus become visible to their newly-elected policymakers before we go the way of the US, and end up having to take similar urgent action.
Join a lively discussion on what Brexit means for women. From international politics to workers’ rights, business and food safety, we will be working on a manifesto to reach out to women all over the country to ensure female voices are heard in the Brexit negotiations.

Confirmed speakers include:
- FWN President Seema Malhotra MP
- Mary Honeyball MEP
- Clare Moody MEP
- Emma Reynolds MP
- Melanie Onn MP
- Catherine Fookes, Organic Trade Board
- Jayne Almond, Food and Drink Federation
- Jessie Jacobs, Stronger In campaign in the North East.

Monday 26 September at 8.30am
The Event Suite on the fourth floor of the Merseyside Maritime Museum

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