

Concept Note

Dissemination Conference organized by O.P. Jindal Global University

At New Delhi on 13-14 March 2020

Conference Theme: *Future of European Studies in Asia*

Introduction

While “European Studies” have already gained the status as a discipline, the epistemic interest around it has largely been limited to Europe. There is, however, a growing interest for European Studies in many non-European states, as the European Union (EU) has expanded its foreign relations as a single political union under a unitary social, political, and economic approach. The expanding role of EU as an independent actor in international relations has prompted many non-European states to take interest in European Studies, prompting them to establish Jean Monnet chairs; create research centres for European Studies; introduce postgraduate, graduate, and certificate courses in European Studies and; setting up visiting scholars programmes and scholarships for students willing to engage with European Studies.

Seen from an academic perspective, the burgeoning activities are refreshing. However, there has not been any regular and systematic audit conducted on the modalities of imparting European Studies in non-European states. While the “perspectives” of the “Bologna Process” have given a certain level of standard and consistency in designing and imparting European Studies in European states, European Studies education in non-European states has had a mixed reception in the rest of the world. The Europe-centric working of the Bologna Process has failed to create a wave of significant high impact changes in non-European states and the most successful European Studies programs and centres outside of Europe actually pre-date the Bologna process.

While there have been efforts to make the Bologna Process globally relevant, it is yet to achieve better results. It is likely that the continuing mismatch between the outreach efforts of the Bologna Process and the reception of the same by non-European states is a result of the differences in expectations and contexts. That is to say, in European states the interest in European Studies is prompted by the discourses on European integration, whereas in non-European states it is the latter’s interest in foreign relations with the EU that has engendered interest in this discipline. This approach has the European states, mindful of European integration, constituting European Studies with discourses on the history, culture, politics, and economics of contemporary Europe. Absent such a motivation among non-European states, European Studies is constituted largely with the socio-economic and foreign policy of EU. On balance, one finds a lack of uniformity in the epistemology of European Studies.

The above said trend becomes particularly manifest in the case of Asian states—their interest in Europe being in foreign relations with EU than on the lessons to be learned from the EU integration process. The “identity questions” of the EU integration, apart from the comparative lessons to be learned from regional co-operation, squarely miss the “foreign policy ambitions” of the Asian states. However, the fundamental question is: Whether these variations in the form and substance of European Studies substantially impact the philosophy of the discipline? This leads us to many further questions. Would Asian states have an interest in European Studies, if the discipline becomes predominantly a discourse on European integration? What

use integration discourses will be for non-European states? How would an acceptance of the foreign policy focus of European Studies in Asian states augment the epistemology of the discipline? How can the approach of non-European states towards European Studies be streamlined with the Bologna Process?

Although the above said variations exist, there are many modules in European Studies that serve both the interest and perspectives of European and non-European states. These *inter alia* include discourses that go beyond international relations per se and include European institutions and comparative study of regional co-operation, linguistic diversity, and foreign policy of EU. This persuades more epistemological inquiries into European Studies: Can the integration discourse—the leitmotif of European Studies—be streamlined to make it appealing to non-European states? At least certain re-imaginings/renewalism can be brought in to the discourse such that non-European states can subjectively receive the integration discourse within their respective frame of reference, propelling further their political interest in Europe.

This Dissemination Conference, *The Future of European Studies in Asia*, organized by the O.P. Jindal Global University under “Project EURASIA” (Revitalizing European Studies Across Asian Universities) provides an opportunity to reimagine the disciplinary foundations of European Studies and the utility of the discipline to Asian states. This is done by marshalling relevant actors from Europe to work with identified beneficiaries in Asia. As the project has completed its first phase, it is high time that we take stock of the outcomes. The Conference—which brings together academics, decision-makers, diplomats, students and stake-holders—aims to submit many of the questions raised above for discussion. It has, accordingly, divided the sessions into the following broad categories:

- The Epistemology/Philosophy of European Studies
- European Studies in Asia: Experiences from the Asian Region
- Asian Expectation *vis-à-vis* European Studies
- Making European Studies Relevant for Asia, thereby making EU relevant
- Comparative perspectives regarding EU and linguistic diversity