

9 May 2014

At the invitation of the Bridge Forum Dialogue and the European Investment Bank (EIB), Mr Pat Cox, former President of the European Parliament and current Member of the Board of Yalta European Strategy, Ukraine, gave a conference under the title "*The EU and Russia – Ukraine, a border or a bridge?*" on the 8th of May 2014, at the EIB premises.

Mr Werner Hoyer, President of the EIB introduced the speaker and the very subject of the conference which attracted more than 350 participants including representatives from European Institutions, the Government, the diplomatic service, various public authorities and actors of the economic and social life in Luxembourg.

According to Mr Cox, the complexity and the gravity of events occurring in Ukraine make it difficult to qualify Ukraine as a bridge or a border, at least at the present stage, even if the goal should be for Ukraine to serve as a bridge.

Mr Cox, who had on numerous occasions visited Ukraine, described the situation of "unprecedented strain since its independence" (1991) which the country is experiencing, its sovereignty and territorial integrity being under the threat of Russia. United by longstanding cultural and historical heritage, the relations between both countries are undermined by the non-respect of the principle of territorial integrity which is an important rule of international law.

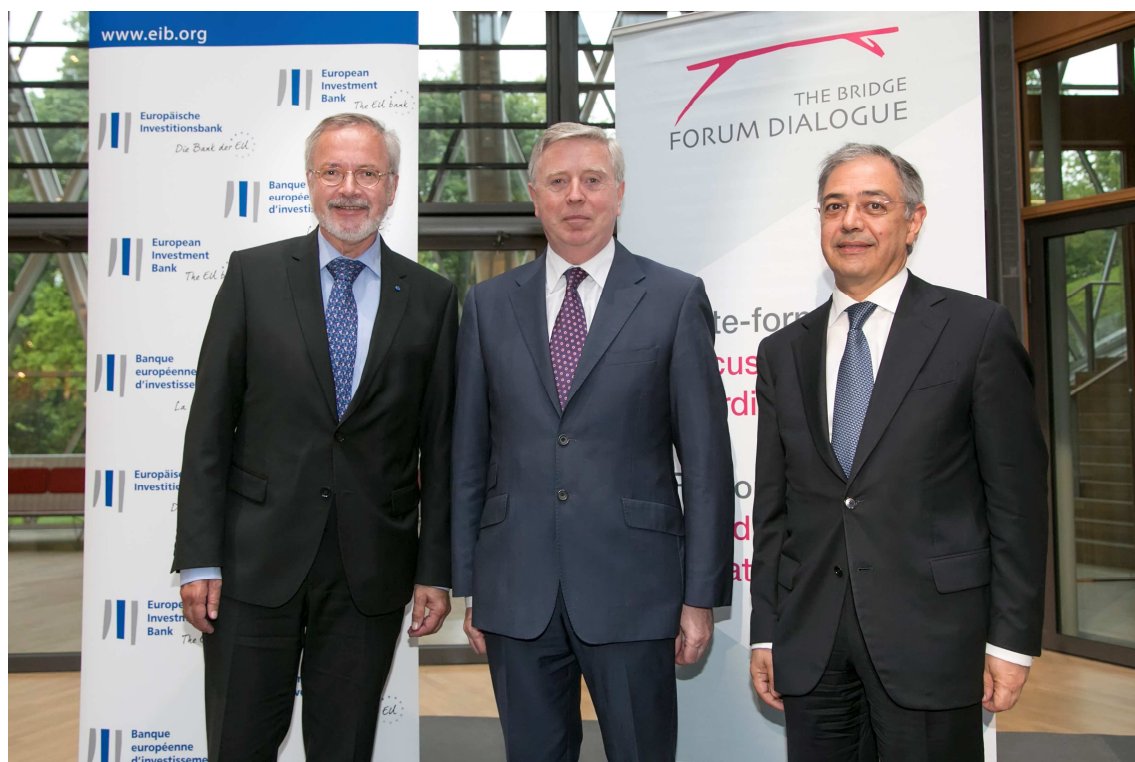
Faced with national political instability and economic distress (exacerbated also by increased gas prices from Russia), the Ukrainian government has to deal with pro Russian rebels; the risk of a civil war, with spillover effects, cannot be ruled out. The recent history concerning the association agreement EU-Ukraine and the pressure exercised by Russia during the negotiations are significant.

Mr Cox quoted extensively a speech of 18 March 2014 by Mr Putin where the Russian President justified the annexation of Crimea, presented the creation of a Eurasian Union (comprised of ex Soviet states and beyond) as Russia's "key foreign policy priority" and pointed to the emergence of a "Putin's doctrine" i.e. Russia's right of intervention abroad for defending Russians or Russian interests.

Finally, Mr Cox turned to the European response, namely the state of the EU foreign affairs and security policies, arguing that the EU needs to become more strategic on big issues such as the relationship with Russia and the evolution of the EU neighbourhood policy. Many questions are to be answered by Europeans: do we want a EU foreign policy that is the 29th policy of 28 Member States or a policy that, on crucial issues, is *primus inter partes*? Should we limit the effects of EU multilateralism by privileging bilateral relations? Can we reduce Europe's energy dependency and increase diversification of energy sources?

The speaker concluded by observing that the EU response to Russia's annexion of Crimea has been unanimous, calibrated and cautious. A military intervention has been correctly excluded; sanctions are under preparation where the key will be to strike a right balance. All the efforts, by any partner, institution and the international community should be aimed to stabilise the situation in Ukraine.

The speech triggered many questions and comments from the audience. Some pleaded for a genuine European approach, encouraging dialogue, diplomacy and compromises to resolve this crisis.



(From left to right : Mr. Werner Hoyer, Vice-President of the Bridge Forum Dialogue, President of the European Investment Bank; Mr. Pat Cox, former President of the European Parliament and current Member of the Board of Yalta European Strategy, Ukraine; Mr. Vítor Manuel da Silva Caldeira, Vice-President of the Bridge Forum Dialogue, President of the European Court of Auditors)