

Laudatio by Christopher Hill

The Anna Lindh Prize Brussels, 19 October 2007 Dr Karen E. Smith

The Anna Lindh Prize is a very significant award, honouring a dynamic young woman tragically killed before she had a chance to fulfil her hopes and talents. It is thus a privilege for me to be able to speak at the award ceremony, and in particular when the prize is going to another committed and able young woman in Anna Lindh's image, although one following an academic rather than a political path. I have known Karen Smith for 15 years, and had the pleasure of supervising her PhD thesis at the LSE – which was not, in truth, an arduous task. Subsequently we were colleagues in the Department of International Relations at LSE, and have worked closely together on several projects. She is one of those students, become a friend and colleague, of whom one is proudest in a professional career.

I shall return to Karen's qualities later, but for the moment wish to provide some context for her achievement by sketching the kind of work which gets done in our field – the study of European Foreign Policy – and why Karen is such an appropriate winner of a prize named in honour of a practitioner. Anna Lindh was a politician, no doubt willing to learn from research, but probably also too busy to master the kind of private language and complex methodologies which academics can sometimes favour.

In a recent interview with Prof John Peterson for the University Association for Contemporary European Studies, President Barroso actually discussed five key articles selected for him by the profession. He evinced suitable respect and interest but could not resist pointing to the inward-looking character, even obscurity, of some of this otherwise impressive *oeuvre*. He seems to have felt that, important as academic freedom is, social science (to say nothing of tax payers' money) carries with it a certain obligation to address issues of practical relevance, and to do so with clarity and economy of expression.

Sadly it cannot be said that all academic work lives up to this ideal. Nor should it, of course. Some of the most brilliant scholarship over the centuries has been far from immediately accessible even to the educated general reader. How many of us can say that we have read Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*

through to the end, and this is a popularising book. Still, International Relations and European Studies are not astro-physics. Our subject does not submit to the discovery of key theories like relativity; no equations like $E=MC^2$ will unlock the secrets of the EU's role in the world. What we can do is to make sense of complexity; to use ideas and concepts to clarify the bewildering tangle of facts, and the multiple layers of political activity, which characterise the modern world. At one end of the spectrum, borrowing from economics, we could use game theory and rational choice to elucidate the decisions emanating from those responsible for European foreign policy. But whose decisions should we focus on? There are so many actors involved, in the 27 Member States, in their myriad ministries and representations, and in the Brussels Institutions. Even with a European President or Foreign Minister, there would hardly be one focus of decision.

At the other end of the spectrum lies pure history, which is at least likely to be written in comprehensible prose, accessible to citizens and practitioners, even if few historians write so well that they compel our attention – to the standard of Thucydides, Gibbon or Braudel. The historians' 'déformation professionnelle' is to overwhelm us with detail, or arid taxonomies. As it happens, although European foreign policy has been running since 1970 only one major history has been written, by Simon Nuttall. We have to fear that this is not just because the official records are so far available only for the early years, but also perhaps because European foreign policy has not done very much of interest. Its successes tend to be long-term and indirect; its dramas have mostly been those of failure.

In between the two extremes of rational choice and historical detail lies the majority of what has been done in this field: institutional analysis of the mechanisms created by EPC and CFSP; increasing numbers of case-studies on relations with other states, or groupings of states, and discussions of external perceptions of the EU; a focus on the Member States and the extent to which their foreign policies fit into the collective process – in contemporary terms, this has developed into an emphasis on the degree to which national foreign policies have become 'Europeanised'; and also theory, indeed ever more theory, as mainstream IR and political science discover the area, with its distinctive but not wholly unfamiliar *problématiques*. Constructivism and discourse theory in particular are burgeoning, since in the absence of hard power, the questions about EU foreign policy inevitably limit themselves to what Europe *says* about the world, and how certain positions come to be taken.

Much of this writing - it is not always 'research', given that more and more authors are chasing a limited amount of data, and problems - is insightful, informed and open-minded. Yet a significant minority is repetitive, thin and more concerned with political or normative motives than with telling it how it is. In this respect we must all beware of generosity. Our funders kindly support our research, in particular through buying us time to write and subsidising interesting conferences, often in very pleasant venues.... But they naturally have their own agendas and hopes for the kind of research that will result. Only the unsophisticated actually try overtly to influence findings, while respect for the principle of academic freedom is still, thankfully, a dominant norm. But the very selection of topics, and of individuals to do the research, always subtly shapes the process. The European Commission, for example, makes no secret of its agenda-setting agenda, and this can at times be set quite narrowly. When running FORNET, I fielded queries from some officials about why the Commission was funding work on the CFSP, the province of its rival in the Council Secretariat. And enthusiasm for enlargement has tended to have an unhealthy repressive effect on any debate as to whether an open-ended process actually served the interests of the Unions and its citizens. The stress has been on how to implement enlargement, not to think about it more deeply.

Still, if talent and independence of mind remain the primary criteria for advancement in the academic profession, as they must, a critical spirit of enquiry will survive, and in the best sense of the word 'critical' – that is, not carping, negative or cynical but questioning, constructive, sceptical and fearless. These qualities have been essential for the accumulation of knowledge in our civilisation, and enlightened funders always celebrate them, even at the price of short-term disagreements or embarrassments. Indeed, we need more debate and controversy in our own field.

Happily, it is precisely the case here that we have funders celebrating an independence of mind, for Karen Smith possesses that quality in abundance. As it happens she is thoroughly committed, at a normative and political level, to the European project. But this would never blind her to its failings or illusions. In this sense - and only in this sense - she is a realist. While attached to the notion of 'civilian power', for example, she was not afraid to foretell its end in the aftermath of the St. Malo meeting. She has never allowed hope and principles to blind her to circumstances. Furthermore, she has, in her joint book with Margot Light, reflected in a detached and analytical way on the difficult business of acting on ethical principles in international politics, all too aware of the damage that can be done by glib moral certainties translated into public policy.

Yet Karen has also maintained a positive commitment to the ideals of peace, justice and development which have motivated so many during the construction of the European Union. She is a genuine internationalist, with Europe the priority but not the exclusive focus. There is nothing in her approach of the narrow Euro-nationalism which characterises some enthusiasts for 'the cause' . Her recent book with Katie Laatikainen on relations between the EU and the UN combined the two main hopes for multilateralism, and threw light on both, as well as the increasing forms of interaction between them. Despite her Virginian twang, and indeed her new British citizenship, she is more of a genuine European in her understanding of, and empathy for, the politics of the EU than many indigenous inhabitants – indeed, Karen was herself born in Ankara, which may explain her interest in the enlarging EU, and in cultural dialogue. She comes from a family dedicated to international public service, speaks fluent Italian as the result of living in Bologna, and has travelled all over the EU giving talks, taking part in workshops, and encouraging young scholars.

It is through her support for students that Karen's values and professionalism are most easily observed. She is already an experienced doctoral supervisor and examiner, despite her youth, and is one of a sadly declining breed in these competitive days, a good citizen and colleague in the academic community. It is all too easy to ask 'what is in it for me?' when asked to comment on a manuscript, give advice by e-mail, or travel to a remote venue to give a talk. Karen, by contrast, gives ungrudgingly of her time, and is a model professional in the way that she lives up to the commitments she makes. This does not mean that she will indulge students (or colleagues!) in their comfortable illusions. This is again where her realism and complete intellectual integrity cut in, to ensure that the truth is faced up to, however uncomfortable. She is a perfect example to students of dedication, honesty and productivity.

These qualities, admirable as they are, would not have been enough to gain Karen Smith the Anna Lindh prize. That has come her way because she is also a master (or mistress) of her subject. She has a great depth and breadth of knowledge, but also sharp analytical insight and moral sensitivity. This is, in part, because she values both theoretical and empirical scholarship, and moves easily across the frontier between them, as between the two subjects of the EU's internal functioning, and its external relations. Her two major books, on *The Making of EU Foreign Policy: the Case of Eastern Europe*, and *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, have both gone to second editions because they have genuinely illuminated our understanding of a subject which has finally become

widely recognised as significant, not just for Europe but for the world. They bring clarity and subtlety to a mass of material, and in particular lead the reader to accept how interpenetrated are domestic politics and foreign policy questions inside the EU and in its negotiations with third parties, yet without falling into the crass error so common in the 1990s, of believing, in the risky phrase of Peter Hain (at that time a Minister in the FCO!) that foreign policy was 'dead'. She is fully at ease in what is still, *pace* Robert Cooper, the 'modern' phase of international relations, where territory and borders have changed their meaning, but still have momentous consequences for all of us.

Karen is a modest and thoroughly decent person, who will be embarrassed if I praise her too much. But this is a *laudatio*, and praise comes with winning a prize. I know how honoured Karen will feel to be receiving this one, in honour of Anna Lindh. I shall finish by returning to my earlier theme of the obscurity and scholasticism of some academic work. These are not criticisms which could be levelled at Karen. She has always written with great clarity and accessibility, in large part because she wishes to address an audience rather wider than that of her immediate peers. All of her books and articles can be read with profit by any educated person. She has the eye of the journalist she once was for a significant or telling trend, and the ability to communicate that significance. She has also brought her literary talents to the editing of the *CFSP Forum*, an internet publication born out of the ashes of the hard copy version produced by the Institut für Europäische Politik in Bonn, and funded by the Commission – credit where credit is due - through first FORNET and then EU-CONSENT. She has been a superb editor of the *Forum*, imaginatively commissioning useful articles and ensuring its regular appearance, six times a year. Her last challenge with it will be to find a successor capable of maintaining her own high standards. Sir Christopher Wren, at the end of a long life had inscribed on his tomb in St Paul's Cathedral, *Lector, si monumentum requiris circumspice*. Karen Smith is only half-way through her own career, but she has already given us an impressive set of concrete achievements to draw on. I congratulate her on the latest of them, in this most deserved award of the Anna Lindh prize.

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