

The European Council on Foreign Relations

The think-tank lobbying the European Union

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) was founded in 2007 as the first pan-European think-tank, with offices currently located in seven European capitals, in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia, and Warsaw. The ECFR brings together over 200 prominent and influential Europeans from 27 countries. Its founding charter was signed by former European prime ministers, business leaders, public intellectuals and activists. Its stated objective is "to conduct research and promote informed debate across Europe on the development of a coherent and effective European values-based foreign policy".

At present, the ECFR conducts research on the following programmes:

- Asia & China
- Middle East & North Africa
- Reinvention of Europe
- Wider Europe
- European Foreign policy scorecard
- Human Rights

Research surrounding Asia & China involve analysing trends and identifying business opportunities throughout Asia's core of emerging economies and developing nations. The programme pertaining to China explores how the EU could pursue more effective strategies in its relations with China on global issues like energy and climate change, development and human rights, nuclear proliferation and global governance (China is a permanent member of the UNSC).

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) programme, presently fronted by Daniel Levy (the son of labour peer Michael Levy), was founded in 2011 in response to the dramatic regional developments that first flared up in Tunisia and thereupon engulfed much of the region, an occurrence popularly dubbed the "Arab Spring". This topic of research served to analyse how Europe could strategically rethink its relationship with the countries involved in light of these seismic changes.

The ECFR's reinvention programme of Europe is concerned with reforms throughout Europe and seeks to find ways in which democracy can fit into a supranational union of confederated European nation states, each with their own national parliament. This programme also covers Europe's role in the world order as a cohesive union and what path its direction could take, aspiring to usher in common defence and fiscal policies.

The Wider Europe programme scrutinises the EU's relationship with its eastern block, including Russia and Turkey, both of which geographically have parts of their country in Europe but do not form part of the EU. The programme examines what can be done to use the prospect of EU membership, economic, military and political cooperation to advance democracy, human rights and the rule of law, resolve frozen conflicts, lessen the threat of energy dependence and integrate its eastern neighbours into a framework of shared interests benefiting all parties.

The European Foreign Policy Scorecard assesses the EU's performance in relation to the rest of the world by annually grading EU institutions on 80 policy areas, arranged around 6 key themes which are: China; Russia; United States; Wider Europe; MENA; Multilateral Issues.

The Human Rights programme deals with how the ECFR examines EU foreign policy in regard to human rights, democracy and justice in the rest of the world. It makes it a top priority to "...examine the scope and rationale for EU support of human rights and democracy in a "post-Western world"..."". This programme looks at what steps the EU should take whenever its liberal and democratic principles are challenged by a broad range of political and economic developments.

ECFR is a private, not-for-profit, organisation that relies on donations. Its budget runs in the millions of pounds. For its 2012 income and expenditure report, £4,712,000 has been raised in total income and £4,323,000 counts as expenditure, leaving the council a £389,000 surplus. The following year, in 2013, its total income was £5,428,000 and its expenditure totalled £4,936,000, amounting to a £492,000 surplus for that year end and an £881,000 surplus accrued for 2012–2013. In 2012, the ECFR spent 96% of its funding on charitable activities, whereas in 2013 it contracted by one percent to 95%. The ECFR's charity report is available for viewing online [see link:].

<http://choice.charityfinancials.com/1143536/0/>

This pattern indicates three things: (i) donations to the ECFR are inflating; (ii) money allocated towards charitable activities is deflating; (iii) income has expanded by over 15% whereas expenditure trails behind at just over 14% despite having more money.

The source of its donations also comes under scrutiny, with multinationals making out large cheques to the council, from corporations like oil and gas giants ENI and Repsol to telecommunications and banking corporations like Santander and Telefonica. These will each have their vested interests for sponsoring a European think-tank. Donations, whether given for noble purposes or tax relief, buy influence. Parliamentarians rarely write bills. Such arduous tasks are commonly outsourced to professional legislators. It has become a fact of modern day political life that the ones who put together the nuts and bolts work under the radar screen, and those who front the stage, who we perceive to be in charge, are merely the other half of an entity that makes up a parliament. This reality forms the distinction between those whose roles are in politics (politicians) and those whose roles are in government (advisors, civil servants, think-tanks, et cetera). Politicians are toppled by elections. The ruling class are toppled by regimes.