

Introductory Remarks

By Jean-Marie Palayret

This conference is one of the firsts major events organised by the Association Friends of the Historical Archives of the European Union Friends is an independent, non-political, non-profit association, which gathers all those who wish to lend their support to the enrichment and knowledge of the Historical archives of the European Union. Founded in 2013, it has three main objectives:

- Develop all activities liable to make these records known and accessible to the public (conferences, exhibitions, publications, historical and scientific works , granting scholarships and awards, etc ...);
- Facilitate to its members the information, access, consultation and use, of documents of the historical records from institutions, personalities and movements that contributed to European integration.
- Initiate and encourage donations, deposits and patronage of the historical archives of the European Union.

The Conference “EC/EU External Relations. Research Perspectives and Archival Sources” meets perfectly these objectives as it :

- gathers a **mixed group of academics, archivists and practitioners** enabling to ensure a better understanding of the various viewpoints and to answer some questions raised by this specific topic;
- founded on a **historiographical approach and on the use of accessible public or private archives** the Conference will seek to shed light on recent research in the fields in which the European Union plays important roles such as trade, diplomacy, defense and security, development aid and work with international organisations. A final session will be devoted to the coming back of Russia at the foreground of EU Foreign Policy. In this perspective, I will ask to the various speakers to dedicate as far as possible, a small part of their presentation to the available or identifiable sources dealing with their subject.
- To a later stage, the Conference will seeks to **build a permanent working group** of academics (professors and researchers) archivists of international archives, former civil servants of European Institutions and archives depositors. The group will debate on how to upgrade the existing documentary and archival collections on the external relations of the European Union from their origins to the recent creation of the European External Action Service.

During its formative years, The European Union was insulated from geo-politics because of the bipolar character of the international system and the security blanket provided by NATO. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union opened the way for the peaceful unification of the continent which, in turn, reinforced the EU’s self understanding as a “soft-power”. Today, geopolitics is back. The crises in Ukraine and the Middle East have underlined that the threat of war has not disappeared and how poorly equipped the European Union is to respond. The crisis has tested the capacity of the Union to agree on core foreign policy interests and actions when faced with a serious external security challenge on its borders. The new EU foreign policy leadership will have to contend not only with a world in which Europe’s weight is greatly diminished, in which we are attending the emergence of a new “référentiel stratégique” between

the United States and Europe, but also with certain reluctance at the heart of the EU to face reality.

In the end, I would like to thank warmly those who have contributed to the preparation and good outcome of this Conference:

First of all, the various chairpersons, who, as “chefs de file”, contributed to the elaboration of the programme and to the composition of the Conference’s panels.

Secondly, The EUI’s Robert Schuman Center and its director Brigit Laveran, the EUI’s Alumni association and its former president Sigfrido Ramirez, for their financial and academic support;

Thirdly, the Historical Archives and its director, Dieter Schlenker, who ensured the logistic support, and the secretariat of the Conference (Fabrizio Borch, Sylvie Pascucci, Niccolo Tognarini) for their patience and stubbornness in overcoming difficulties and answering questions.

And finally, Thanks a lot to all the guest speakers and European personalities who agreed to participate in our discussions.