

Club of Three Fireside Chat with David Lammy MP
German House, London
Monday 26 February 2024

In February, the Club of Three organised a fireside chat with David Lammy MP, Shadow UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. The event was hosted by Miguel Berger, German Ambassador to the UK, at German House in London, on Belgrade Square.

It took place on 26 February as a number of European leaders and allies were meeting for a major conference in Paris discussing how to strengthen Western support to Ukraine two years after Russia's full-scale invasion of the country.

Some 60 senior figures from business, diplomacy and security experts from France, Germany, the UK and other parts of Europe took part in the Club of Three meeting.

David Lammy outlined what the UK's foreign policy would focus on under a new government in the event of a Labour win following this year's general election in Britain, as well as the role that the UK could play internationally in the coming years.

On Europe, he spoke of Labour's proposed UK-EU security pact which would involve closer cooperation on a full spectrum of security issues. Labour expected it to go beyond traditional foreign and defence policies to include economic and climate security but also health and technological threats. Perhaps more importantly, cooperation through this pact would be done completely outside of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

NATO of course remained the cornerstone of Europe's security. But the Labour leadership believed that this new pact could be an important complementary mechanism not just for defending Europe against Russia, but also for dealing with instability in the Middle East

and the Sahel, the Western Balkans and issues such as the climate emergency.

At present, this type of cooperation between Britain and the EU was informal and ad-hoc, and fell short of what was required to respond adequately to the scale of the challenges faced by Europe. A Labour government would be ready to engage in a structured dialogue with its European partners on a range of issues, and to rebuild trust. There was no chance however of Britain rejoining the EU any time soon as this would require a political consensus backed by the Conservative party, which was inconceivable in the foreseeable future.

Regarding Ukraine specifically, Europe had no choice but to continue to support the country in its fight against Russia. Imperialists like Putin would never give up plans for territorial gains until they were stopped in their tracks. This was no time for 1930s-style appeasement. The next 6-8 months were going to be crucial for Ukraine, and Europe could not wait for the outcome of the U.S elections in November to significantly increase defence spending.

In the UK, Labour had a firm commitment on fiscal responsibility. But there was no doubt that security issues, whether at home or abroad, would be key priorities for Keir Starmer and his government. Public awareness of the national security threat posed by Russia and the necessary defence response was also essential. This threat was rising, not falling. The death of Alexei Navalny at the time of the Munich Security Conference was a powerful reminder of how defiant Putin was towards the West.

Through their longstanding cooperation on defence, the UK and France already had significant combined capacity, and since the *Zeitenwende* of 2022 in Germany there was a lot that these three countries could achieve together for Europe's security.

Internationally, a Labour government would be both progressive and realist. Progressive because its foreign policy would be underpinned by the principle of equality, the rule of law and internationalism;

realist because Britain would be pragmatic and practical with regards to what it wants to achieve with its partners.

During the UN votes on Ukraine, countries of the Global South had shown that they had very different views from the West, accusing western countries of having double standards. The West had to admit some legitimacy in this point of view. As a descendant of African Caribbean people, a personal priority for David Lammy as Foreign Secretary would be to address some of these concerns and to build a new, modern relationship between Britain and the Global South.

A pause in the conflict in Gaza was expected over the Ramadan period. If this failed to materialise, there was a significant risk of serious escalation in the Middle East with also the likelihood of a new wave of radicalism and terrorist attacks in Europe. A temporary ceasefire would give the international community space to consider long term solutions under a two-state scenario.

Other important aspects of a Labour foreign policy included economic diplomacy to help deliver the Shadow Chancellor's plan on "securonomics" to secure supply chains, reflecting the view that the origin of imported goods and materials was as important as other considerations such as manufacturing costs and industrial efficiency.

More partnerships and diplomatic collaboration were also needed globally to avoid bitter contests between major economies for access to critical materials for the green transition. On green energy, the Foreign Office would be mobilised to support the establishment of Labour's proposed Clean Power Alliance, a 'reverse Opec' group of countries committed to decarbonising their electricity systems.

Regarding China, a Labour government would seek to adopt a consistent policy that was firm on human rights and security risks while recognising Britain's important trade relationship with China. There had been too many different policies under the Conservatives over the past 10 years or so.