

Member of European Parliament returns to his roots

by Kate Hofler, FUnet writer

Alexander Stubb, former Furman student and member of the European Parliament of Finland, stated Tuesday evening that the European Union (EU) exists in a state of constant crisis. As the final part of the Riley Institute's International Conference exploring the partnership between the European Union and the United States,

Stubb, a native of Finland, spoke to a filled room in the Younts center on the current nature of the European Union, its difficult challenge in approving a constitutional treaty, and the integration process among the nations involved that often changes mood, tone, and focus "like the swing of a pendulum."

For Stubb there are five key issues affecting the movement of the proverbial integration pendulum. These include the EU Constitution, definition of borders, foreign policy, economic security, and the public perception throughout Europe.

Introduced by his former professor and chair of the political science department, Brent Nelsen, Stubb expressed his excitement to be back where he started, thanking Nelsen, as well as political science professors Don Gordon and Ty Tessitore for inspiring his interest in international politics. Stubb came to the United States and Furman specifically after his brother was an exchange student with a local Greenville family.

"Furman changed my life and taught me how to think," Stubb added.

His sharpened mind for political thought is presently charged with the formidable task of developing a constitutional treaty for the EU. The difficulty lies in creating a document that is acceptable to all constituents in a region encompassing twenty-seven different nation-states who speak at least twenty-three languages.

Such a document could potentially narrow national independence so vital to the countries that form the European continent. With little surprise, the first introduction of such a document was not successful. Stubb hopes that by 2009, a new constitutional treaty will be approved that affords much more nation-state rights and less over-arching executive powers.

According to Stubb, there are two schools of thought on defining borders for an entity representing the nation-states of

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Europe. Some are very idealistic and are willing to welcome anyone who agrees to abide by the rule of law and a free market economy, while others believe that values should be the basis. For example, those in the second school feel that only 3-5% of Turkey is technically in Europe. Stubb believes that by 2030, there could be as many as forty states in the EU.

Foreign policy remains a key issue for the EU. While the EU is a superpower in both world trade and aid to developing countries, the United States is the only clear superpower in the realm of defense. For the EU, it is vital to become an equal partner with the US. The EU must have a common defense and speak with one voice if it wants to be heard.

Economic competition within the EU is detrimental to its unity and its potential to be an even greater force in the World Trade Organization. According to Stubb, “real competition comes from the outside.” With this in mind, the movement toward European integration would greatly benefit the EU.

Finally, the public perception of the EU throughout the different countries that form Europe is crucial in encouraging other countries to join. There is currently a communications deficit where EU legislation is often misinterpreted. The EU is blamed for all negative occurrences and receives little credit for the great good it is often responsible for facilitating.

Since its conception, the EU has remained committed to the four principles of “peace, security, prosperity, and stability” and has been an “absolute success story” according to Stubb.

He is optimistic for the future. Though the EU is in a constant status of crisis management, it handles these crises well and remains successful. Stubb expects the pendulum to swing more positively in the next few years.

“Though the EU is not eternal,” he said, “as long as it holds to the four principles it was created to maintain, it will continue to exist.”