Interview - Anand Menon

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Anand Menon (@anandmenon1) is Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at Kings College London. He also directs the Economic and Social Research Council Initiative The UK in a Changing Europe. Previously, he was Director of the European Research Institute at the University of Birmingham. Prior to this, he taught at the University of Oxford (St Antony's College). He has held positions at Sciences Po, Columbia University and NYU. He has written on many aspects of contemporary Europe including EU politics and institutions and European security. He is co-editor of the *Oxford Handbook of the European Union* and author, amongst other things, of *Europe: The State of the Union.*

Where do you see the most exciting research/debates happening in your field?

One of the newest and most interesting areas of research is one that links my two interests of domestic politics and international relations. This is the work that looks at the impact of populism on politics and foreign policy. I have always been interested in the links between what happens within states and how those events interlink with events in other states. At the moment that seems to be happening in an extreme form, ranging from the talk about states interfering in elections in other states, to the way shifts in domestic politics can completely reorientate a state's foreign policy. If you look at what is happening in the UK, we have a whole new foreign policy doctrine, albeit a poorly fleshed out one, called Global Britain, that has come to the fore as a result of the referendum.

These linkages are fascinating in terms of the domestic-international link but so is the impact of partisan politics on both foreign policy and world politics, which relatively few scholars have talked about. The partisan nature of all of this is absolutely fundamental, which is already apparent after the Brexit vote and the election of Trump but would be increasingly the case should the National Front win the election in France. It is simply not the case that there is some national interest that stands above party contestation – that old notion that politics stops at the water's edge. Domestic politics are shaping approaches to world politics.

There is a whole literature on populism but it is one of those ironies that when a notion that has been used a lot in academia becomes more broadly used, it tends to lose some of its sharpness and analytical value, which I do think is happening with the term at the movement. One of the things about populism is that a lot of it aims explicitly at overcoming traditional left-right divides, a lot of the populism you see it partly values based. Values are completely different divides to those which divide the left and right, which is why you have those messy results in the referendum. It was very hard to predict and interpret the result because it doesn't abide by our traditional left-right divide but it is about something totally different. There are many reasons that populism and anti-EU parties are becoming more prominent within Europe as some people are dissatisfied with the euro, rising unemployment (particularly among young people), immigration, economic performance, and fear terrorism.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

Simply put, the events of 2016. The way politics has changed, referendums, the perceived link between far-right parties and foreign powers, and the impact of foreign powers on domestic elections. I think the whole year has been a challenge for social science because a lot of the traditional ways of looking at politics have been challenged. You can

take your pick, look at the polling industry, which has been challenged because they didn't get the outcomes right. Most of theories that try and explain European integration have been challenged. Some because they simply assumed implicitly that European integration is a good thing and then focussed on explaining how it works rather than questioning it. Others because few of them focus on public opinion and just talk about elites and businesses. I think that those who try to maintain a neat separation between domestic and international politics in international relations more generally have been challenged.

What lessons do you think both British and European politicians, civil society, and voters should learn from the UK's EU referendum campaign and its outcome?

I think it is almost too soon to draw lessons, though people are trying. I think one of the lessons that you see in the UK now is the effect of the populist uprising during the referendum, on the government. There is now a notion that government shouldn't ignore the people and that the ability to do what you want is crucially shaped by the electorate, who in the current circumstances might vote in unexpected and surprising ways. The impact of that is enormous. We have a Conservative PM who can barely utter a sentence without mentioning the word fairness, which is slightly unusual.

We are already finding that the Prime Minister is having to do a balancing act between her relationship with the United States and the EU. In part, that was implicit in Brexit because the idea of Brexit was that the UK could become more international by leaving the EU. There is pressure on the Prime Minister to show she understands that, but at the same time she realises, not least because she experienced it as Home Secretary, that we have to co-operate with the Europeans in some areas. The problem is that we have an American president who seems committed to seeing the EU fall apart, making it very hard to be close to both at the same time. So she is walking something of a tightrope.

How would you like to see the Brexit negotiations proceed?

I would like to see them proceed calmly and in a good natured way, so I suspect I am going to be disappointed! I think the negotiations are a wonderful expression of how politics cuts across economic self-interest. In the short term at least it is absolutely clear to both sides that it is in everyone's economic self-interest to maintain as much trade between the UK and the EU as possible. Equally, it is at present, politically very difficult to achieve that on both sides. For the British economy, in the short to medium term, it is probably best to remain within the single market but we can't because the referendum was about control so we can't accept the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. Similarly the referendum was about immigration so we can't accept freedom of movement.

If you look at the European side, German business associations are falling over themselves to say they don't want a punitive deal with Britain and want to treat us well. Politicians are thinking differently for a variety of reasons, ranging from not wanting to give the Brits a good deal because it will benefit the National Front in France, to the German government arguing that if they start unpicking the EU bargain by doing favours for Britain, then the European Union will get weaker and that is the last thing they want. So you have a sort of economic interests cutting across political interests.

Do you think the EU will survive the rise of these parties and other recent difficulties such as the migrant crisis and the Brexit vote?

The rather disappointing answer here is 'it depends.' If, say, Marine le Pen is elected to the French Presidency, that might make it very hard for the EU to survive. However I do not think this is likely. More likely is that populism continues to put pressure on national politicians to adopt slightly more eurosceptic positions, which in turn makes it harder to find collective solutions to the very real problems facing the Union, such as the migration crisis and the ongoing travails of the Eurozone.

The EU hasn't had a great response to the migrant crisis but it couldn't have had one because it is one of those areas, very much like the euro, where the EU has been given a little bit of authority but not enough to act decisively. It doesn't have the power to impose quotas on member states, but it has enough power to be blamed for a fiasco that

has been caused partly by natural phenomena that are beyond the power of anyone – the surge of people coming from the south who want to get to Europe. That is not the EU's fault and it has actually taken some halting steps in places like Somalia to try and stem the tide. However, the EU is trying to coordinate member states who have ultimately retained the authority to make their own decisions, so the EU is in a bit of a lose-lose situation.

The EU is often considered to have a democratic deficit. Do you think that this has improved? Does it need to improve further? How?

I do not think this has improved, no. The simple fact for me is that the EU operates somewhat separately from national politics, despite attempts, such as the Spitzenkandidaten experiment in the last European elections, to address this. This separation means that it is often in the interest of national politicians to blame the EU for policy failures and to distance themselves from these. My solution would be to try to link national politics more closely to what happens in the EU, by, at a minimum, giving national parliaments a greater role in EU policy making.

What do you think of EU efforts to strengthen its defence and security policy?

The EU does not have a unified foreign and defence foreign policy in the sense that you have 28 foreign and defence policies, so EU policies are not meant to supplant the policies of member states, but to complement them. There are obviously problems there because member states might have differing foreign policies, and it might be that differences among member states lead to the impossibility of creating a European Union foreign policy because the member states ultimately control those policies.

In an ideal world you have everybody pushing in the same direction and EU action would complement the direction in which members are going and serves to bring them all a long, even those who are reluctant. A case in point would be EU sanctions on Iran, where some member states were very reluctant to go along with sanctions because they traded a lot with Iran. I think peer-pressure within the EU can be quite important though it obviously does not always work. I think most observers were pleasantly surprised that the EU imposed such dramatic sanctions, in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, especially as they managed to do so despite the reservations of several member states. However, there is a counterbalance to that, which is that I think EU actions in the run up to Russia's intervention in Ukraine was slightly provocative and rather badly thought through. It will be interesting to see what happens next, regarding sanctions over Russia, now that some member states are starting to express their dissatisfaction.

There is also the influence of the United States to bear in mind. For instance, if the United States choses not to continue with sanctions on Russia, it would be very hard for the EU to continue, if only because EU governments will come under massive pressure from their own businesses, saying that if EU sanctions continue but the US ones do not, the US will just hoover up all the opportunities.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of European Politics and Foreign Affairs?

Make sure you examine both EU and national levels if you want to understand what 'Europe' is and what it's role in international politics is. And beware of the kind of teleology or normative pro-EU bias that has afflicted much work in this area over the years.

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This interview was conducted by Jane Kirkpatrick. Jane is an Editor-at-large for E-IR.