

Going to Europe



Frans Bieckmann
Editor in Chief
editor@thebrokeronline.eu

It was the god Zeus who seduced the beautiful girl Europa. He turned into a virile white bull and took her on his back to Crete. In a similar way, some people are trying to seduce Europe into playing a more positive and proactive role in addressing worldwide problems such as climate change, growing inequity and violent conflicts. But although Europe may be a shining example of a group of states that used to fight each other to the death and now cooperate internally, as an alternative on the world scene to the US and emerging superpowers like China, it still looks like a little calf on wobbly legs.

Researchers in the fields of development and globalization might be able to help Europe play a bigger role in providing alternative solutions to worldwide issues. We asked some researchers from various European countries to contribute to the special report in this issue of *The Broker*, and to describe how Europe could be a stronger leader in creating a more inclusive and just world.

The Broker itself is also focusing more on Europe. Having started as a Dutch initiative just over a year ago, *The Broker* now wants to report on Europe. In terms of perspectives, the choice of relevant topics and research publications, and our readership, we want to broaden our scope to include the entire European community of academics and policymakers from all kinds of agencies. Writers from all over the world are invited to contribute to *The Broker*.

The Broker is a journalistic, research-focused magazine. The foundations of all its articles are academic sources and other 'evidence-based' publications. I highlight this because a recent survey of several hundred readers revealed that many had not noticed that all our articles are exclusively informed by research, as opposed to opinion, wishful thinking or political and policy preferences. This is one of the main features that distinguish *The Broker* from other journalistic magazines. We provide thoroughly researched and carefully edited pieces that summarize the current academic debates on various topics.

That some readers had not noticed the academic foundation of the articles could be seen as a compliment. We do try to make the articles accessible and readable. We encourage our writers to use plain, clear language, rather than academic or policy jargon. Our readers can understand the articles in *The Broker*, even those on subjects outside their own expertise.

The Broker delivers journalism that is 'evidence-based'. *The Broker* aims to be an intermediary between academics and what we call 'professionals in development and globalization'. These professionals include more than just development workers or policymakers in development cooperation ministries or development NGOs. *The Broker* is for all people active in developing countries anywhere in the world, and for

anyone working on issues concerning 'global goods' such as climate change or on other transboundary issues such as international diplomacy, peacekeeping or global trade.

The range of topics addressed in this issue reflects our view that traditional development cooperation is too much an idealized island in a stormy sea of conflicting interests and powers. In this issue, we have a piece on technological developments in precision weaponry – weapons that can change how wars in developing countries are fought. Although the eyes of development workers sometimes glaze over when we talk about subjects like defense, multinationals (see the article in this issue on corporate social responsibility), international trade, migration or diplomacy, these topics have perhaps even greater influence, positive or negative, on achieving justice in the world than poverty reduction itself.

Evidence-based policymaking is partly wishful thinking. There are always political forces and other subjective reasons why politicians do not choose the most logical, rational, fair and methodological solutions. In a recent seminar, I heard UK social anthropologist Rosalind Eyben use the term 'policy-based evidence'. Indeed, a good deal of research reports being published – deliberately or unconsciously driven by the invisible hand of funders or by more systemic biases or preferences that underlie academic schools and approaches – are not objective.

This is the great risk of having policymakers and academics work together. This risk is even bigger in the utterly complex European arena, with its mix of bureaucratic, political and economic interests of member states, business, organizations and egos. This is illustrated by the brief history of the European Report on Development, the subject of our special report.

To prevent this, we need to have an independent, journalistic approach when connecting academics and policymakers. We should make explicit the foundations and basic angles of the underlying research on which every article is based. This allows readers to be aware of the bias virtually every 'academic' publication contains. That's where journalism comes in – to explain both sides of the story and provide background information. We try to shine a light on each topic from the viewpoints of various academic disciplines.

The Broker is a work in progress. Just like Europe. To compare *The Broker* with a god like Zeus may be a bit far fetched. Admittedly, *The Broker*, like Europe in its foreign policy, looks more like a vulnerable Bambi than a powerful bull. But maybe by sharing views and new insights across national boundaries and creating an arena for true European debate and the exchange of ideas, Europe can realize a common foreign policy that aims more explicitly toward a world that is more equal and socially inclusive. To help ensure the grass can be greener for all. ■