

Dear Mr. Harris,

Your headline “China-backed think tank exits Brussels” might suggest to the hurried reader that the Madariaga-College of Europe Centre has taken a critical stance on TTIP because it was ‘backed by China’. Nothing is further from the reality. The best hint of our independence is that we equally disregarded the tentative EU-China FTA put forward by Xi Jinping during his visit to Brussels in March 2014, and for the same reason: mega trade deals undermine the WTO and evict third countries from the respective markets. Moreover Dr. Javier Solana himself, our respected President, has opted for supporting TTIP in an important syndicate paper. Pluralism of views is the essence of our organisational culture.

Madariaga was never a prestigious foundation as you put it nicely. We were a modest, militant and fiercely independent team working hard for promoting critical thinking on European affairs in Brussels. Our Citizen’s Controversies events - which were not subsidised by the Commission, any government, lobby or multinational corporation, but rather paid by the 10 euro collected for a fair sandwich from the individual participants - bear witness to our philosophy directly inspired by the thinking of Salvador de Madariaga, the founder of the College of Europe. We deal with the complexity of European thought through a lively exchange between speakers with different views. Neo-liberal economists, pro-TTIP officials and consultants, high ranking Chinese officials and critical experts have exposed contrasting views on more than a hundred topics over the last decade on our premises.

Our Foundation has, over the years, developed a constructive and balanced working relationship with the Chinese Mission allowing guests from Beijing, including CPC high-ranking leaders and renowned Chinese academics to exchange views with their European counterparts including distinguished MEPs, top staff members of the EEAS and of the Commission. My personal involvement with China dates back to the 1990’s when, as EU North-South Affairs director I came to realise that the renaissance of China was, along with the political integration of Europe, the main development of our times. My empathy for the energetic and deserving Chinese people, my sheer respect for the progress achieved over one generation by the leadership in Beijing, and, above all, the realpolitik impact of a re-emerging China on the new geopolitical balance of power have convinced me that China’s rise is today the most pressing reason for hastening the emergence of Europe as a global player in a multipolar world. Tearing down the Great Wall of ignorance between China and Europe is a key responsibility of academics and intellectuals in Brussels.

The Chinese Mission’s contribution to Madariaga has always been modest in absolute terms (50,000 euros) and the counterpart of organising conferences and seminars on topics of common interest. Incidentally, it is probably lower than the fees received for the same purpose by other Brussels think tanks. With regard to the tentative arrangement with the Peace Tour, I put an end to it as I realised that we could have been used as a lobby for special interests. Our ethics has always been extremely rigorous on this point.

I would be very thankful to you to bring these remarks to the knowledge of your readers.

Yours,

Pierre Defraigne,

Executive Director of the Madariaga – College of Europe Centre