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Major conference asks what are the choices for Europe?

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EU Commissioner Margot Wallstrom will visit Birmingham on 14 May to address a major conference at Birmingham University about the future of the European Union and to speak to first time voters in a televised Q&A from the City Council Chamber.

'Bringing the policy back in' hosted by the University of Birmingham and co-organised with the European Commission will look at the challenges facing the European Union over the next decade and asks how Europe's place in the world will be affected by the current global depression.

The conference brings together a host of high-profile speakers from politics, academia and local businesses including EU Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström, veteran UK Ambassador to the EU Sir Stephen Wall author of A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair, Bill Keegan from The Observer, David Marsh author of the best-selling The Euro: The Politics of the New Global Currency, and local MEPs Malcolm Harbour and Neena Gill.

The global economic downturn will be a thread running throughout the themes discussed at the conference with panels on the first day focusing on the single market and the euro. President of the West Midlands' World Trade forum Peter Mathews CMG will speak on the challenges faced by regional industrialists and how European single market regulations could be improved.

Conference organiser Dr Nathaniel Copsey from the University of Birmingham's European Research Institute comments: "The EU has a tremendous impact on our lives in the West Midlands – the fate of our car industry shows us that our prosperity is closely tied both to European regulation and global economic changes.

This is why we ought to take an active interest in European politics ahead of June's European elections.

Now more than ever we need to consider what role the EU will play going forward in leading a Europe-wide response to the global economic crisis."

The other pressing issue that will be under discussion is the impact of the EU's rapid expansion on the Union and its role as a regional guarantor of security in relations with its neighbours: particularly Israel and Palestine in the South as well as Russia and Ukraine in the East. This expansion of the EU has raised new challenges for foreign policy and migration – which once again are felt here in Birmingham. Commissioner Wallström will visit the Alyssa School in Smallheath, which teaches the children of some of the UK's newest citizens, who often have no experience of formal education – let alone any command of the English language.

Co-organiser and Institute of German Studies Deputy Director, Dr Carolyn Moore, adds: "We hope that this conference, which brings together politicians, senior academics and diplomats will look concretely at what the EU needs to be doing over the coming decade. Given the Europe-wide renown of Birmingham's European research expertise, there is no better place to talk about what this policy agenda should be."

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