Preface

In its role as a global actor, the European Union is under heavy pressure. The crisis in Ukraine has plunged the EU into a sharp conflict with Russia. At the same time, certain member states of the Union are particularly dependent on good relations with Moscow, which impedes the EU's unity of action. The Ukraine crisis has thus shown the difficulties the Union faces in playing a meaningful role in foreign affairs.

Moreover, as a result of the recent years' economic and financial crisis, the EU has been forced to focus primarily on its internal affairs. The fight to save the euro, which has increased the prosperity gap between member states, has not just increased political divisions within the Union; it has also reduced the EU's economic importance, and thus its influence as a global player.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the EU has an important role to play in today's world, in view of the severe economic, legal and political imbalances that prevail at the global level. The Union's role in bridging imbalances between the world's different regions – through its involvement in trade flows, poverty reduction and protection for human rights, for example – are the focus of this book. Despite its internal divisions, the EU is still a global force in which others place much hope. So what can and should the role of the Union be in fighting global imbalances? That is the main question raised in this book.

The impetus for writing this book came from Swedish scholars with a special interest in understanding the global role of the EU. Since 1998, Swedish universities have cooperated within a national network structure for European studies. This structure consists of networks for political science, economics and law. The purpose is to enhance our understanding of the European Union in research and in postgraduate education. Special resources are made available for this purpose by the Swedish Parliament (Sveriges Riksdag), and they are used for a shared infrastructure of conferences, seminars and events. Together, the networks are responsible for an annual yearbook on European studies – *Europaperspektiv* – which has been published in Swedish every year since 1999.

The present book represents a joint effort by the editors and authors of the 2014 yearbook to reach a broader readership by publishing a

thoroughly updated version in English. We greatly appreciate the efforts made by all of our contributors in putting this volume together. A special thanks also to Peter Mayers for touching up the English in the larger part of the manuscript, and for translating certain portions of it from Swedish into English.

*Antonina Bakardjieva Engelbrekt, Moa Mårtensson,
Lars Oxelheim and Thomas Persson
Stockholm, Lund and Uppsala
April 2015*