

The European Union's Policy Towards its Neighbourhood

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As I was leaving Brussels, I read on a real estate advertisement the message "Change your neighbour!" Sound advice when things aren't going well with your next-door neighbour. But it does not apply to the European Union. We cannot up sticks when trouble with the neighbours becomes too much to take. Nor can we remove or arrange the disappearance of those that bother us. We can of course remove them physically, but that is not a solution guaranteed to succeed. More seriously, this is not part of our personal and collective thinking. We can bring them into the European Union, but this second option is not available to everyone. We cannot take in the whole world.

How then can we have neighbours that will be on the best possible terms with us? Neighbours who will not threaten our stability, our security, our economy, our values, our world view, our place in the international community?

The answers to all these questions are what constitute our diplomacy towards our neighbours. With those who live beyond our borders we have developed policies designed to harmonise our economic and social situations and to make their values compatible with ours. Our aim is to reduce and prevent the appearance or development of any factors that might be a source of instability and insecurity, for us and for them, on their side and on ours. And to achieve this we use not coercion but partnership. We do not use violence. We try to prevent conflict by peaceful means. We take steps to redress abnormal situations, whether they be economic, social or even political.

Of course, the means at our disposal are not always effective. Like many others, we have not found the key to resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict.

We are not good at using the carrot and the stick, like the powerful States. Most of the time we have a carrot in one hand and an even bigger carrot in the other. What I mean is that we are able to increase our assistance and our aid when necessary.

What, then, is this policy towards the "close foreigner"? I will say a few words about our diplomatic instruments, but I shall be very brief because they are well known and because others will be talking about them today. I shall talk more about the South here, in Malta, than about our partnership with Eastern Europe.

Before dealing with these instruments I would like to talk briefly about the Middle East and two of our neighbours, Israel and the Palestinians. The history of their region, of their two peoples, their conflict and their attempts at peace are an example *par excellence* of why we have an obligation to take the situation of our neighbours into account.

Our reasons are economic and cultural. The Middle East is one of the largest sources of fossil energy in the world. It is where different cultures and religions intermingle. It is where ideologies clash.

Everything that happens in the Middle East reverberates powerfully in Europe. We saw this with the Israeli military intervention in Gaza last January. There were countless demonstrations in Europe for and against these military operations. Why?

Questions of religion, of religious coexistence, the plan to establish a Palestinian State, Israel's place in the world, Judaism, the Israeli-Arab conflict, notions of justice and injustice, peoples' right of self-determination - all these issues are felt deeply in many European countries.

These issues seem to echo current realities and conflicts in our own societies such as immigration, the assimilation of incomers, the role and practice of religion in our cities.

They invoke socio-political phenomena which make up our real-life experience and have informed our collective or individual memories: movements of population, diasporas, borders - their imposition or abolition - the creation of States, wars, the use of force and violence.

In other words, to speak of events in the Middle East is tantamount to speaking about ourselves, our past and present and our future. Everything comes back to the Middle East. It is not irrelevant to note that in a number of languages, including my own, and in Maltese, to be lost is to be "disoriented", i.e. to "no longer know which way is East".

Coming back to our neighbourhood instruments.

**** The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, once known as the Barcelona Process***

Barcelona was about institution-building. It represented an ambitious multilateral programme. In a sense it was the child of Oslo. The belief was that prosperity would take over from insecurity thanks to the peace-making virtues of Oslo. We know what state the Israeli-Arab peace process is in today. And if we add the unresolved matter of Western Sahara we can see how hard it has been for the partnership promised in Barcelona, including the Political and Security chapter, to be converted into close cooperation. The ambitious aim of setting up a Charter for Peace and Stability for the Mediterranean has struggled to take root.

**** "The Union for the Mediterranean"***

This is a new process set up in 2008 under the French Presidency of the European Union, which extends and replaces the Barcelona Process. I refer to it only in passing. Gilles Mentre, from Paris, will speak in a few minutes about the new system of governance which lies at the heart of the Union for the Mediterranean.

**** The third instrument is our "neighbourhood policy"***

This policy seeks to make Barcelona more effective by adding a bilateral strand to the multilateralism of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. In other words, those countries of the South which wish to speed up their approach and their move towards Europe can escape the slower pace imposed by others, by means of Action Plans.

These plans include political and security elements. Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan have agreed to broach these issues in our Action Plans. Egypt and Lebanon have incorporated in their plans the principles of the Code of Conduct on Counter-Terrorism adopted in Barcelona in 2005.

The neighbourhood policy is an important instrument for promoting reform in the States which are our neighbours. These reforms are a major step towards prosperity and stability.

* **Enlargement** has been a powerful instrument for Europe's security. But as I said just now, it cannot be offered to all our neighbours. Turkey, which does have the prospect of accession, is the exception.

* **The European Security and Defence Policy or ESDP** Since 2002 the *European Security and Defence Policy* has been one of our instruments for restoring a political and security dialogue.

It is not directed exclusively at our neighbours in the South but we have mounted two operations with the collaboration of the Palestinians and Israel. I will talk about them briefly a bit later.

At its inception the ESDP was not received with great enthusiasm by our southern Mediterranean partners. Some even saw it as a threat. "Better the devil you know - NATO - than one you don't know", they said. They felt most of all that we were engaged in building military structures that would interfere in their internal affairs.

Mistrust prevailed. Since then, we have proposed an annual Action Plan to strengthen security and defence cooperation with our southern neighbours. Moreover, Morocco and Turkey have taken part in ESDP operations in the Balkans and we are conducting two operations in the Palestinian Territories.

- The first ESDP action is an operation to control the crossing point between southern Gaza and Egypt. It was closed for years. But during the first six months of its operation it has enabled hundreds of thousands of people to cross over.
- The second ESDP operation is on police training.

A few words about the ESDP

The ESDP is not a process of militarising the construction of Europe. It is a system of intervention in the international environment which seeks to mobilise all our available resources, whether economic, commercial, humanitarian, diplomatic or military.

It is thus a global approach, setting up a chain of intervention the links in which are early warning, prevention, crisis management proper, reconstruction once conflict is resolved and a return to development.

The ESDP is today engaged in nine operations throughout the world, currently divided into three types:

- support for a peace process (Bosnia, Rafah/Gaza, Aceh and Darfur)
- reaction to a crisis (Congo/Somalia)
- nation-building involving the setting up of a judicial system or police training (Georgia, Palestinian Territories, Iraq).

What have we learned in terms of European foreign and defence policy?

- The first thing is that the Union has the capacity to react to failure (Balkans). A contrario, it could be said that it is incapable of planning for the future and has to wait for a crisis and a setback to improve its instruments.
- The second lesson is that Europe is still a paper tiger, a proponent of soft power. In other words, we do not know how to, do not wish to and are incapable of causing harm.

In this sphere we are always compared unfavourably. I remember that at the time of the Iraq crisis someone said that on the great strategic and international issues the United States behaved as if it came from Mars, representing War, and Europe behaved as if it came from Venus, the goddess of Love and Beauty.

This comparison was of course not intended to flatter Europe. Wrongly, as it happens. Because you have to read Homer to the end: he knew that Mars, the god of war, was defeated by the wiles of Minerva and was unable to resist Venus. If we have to quote the Greeks, I prefer Thucydides, who said that *"Nobody is strong enough to always be the strongest"*.

But this criticism does have merit. I would put it differently and ask:

- Is Europe capable of doing things? The answer is yes.
- Is Europe capable of getting things done? The answer is probably yes.
- Is Europe capable of preventing things being done? The answer is probably no. The question could be asked in another way. Is Europe capable of deciding and going to war? The answer is obviously no.

Ultimately, our foreign policy will not be effective unless we can combine at least four elements:

- A strategy or a strategic vision. Europe showed this with Iran. In the absence of the Americans, the EU was able to make its presence felt and take initiatives. In other areas, our strategic vision needs to be firmed up: is democracy more important than the stability of a regime or the opposite?
- The second element concerns our diplomatic tools. We are progressing but much remains to be done, particularly in terms of human and operational capacity.
- The third element relates to our institutions. There are 27 of us. Our very essence is to seek consensus. Not an easy task. Our opinions differ. Sometimes even we need unanimity, such as when we have to take decisions in military or defence matters. But we manage to operate. Let's hope that the implementation of the next Treaty will start to offer a solution.
- The fourth element concerns the transatlantic relationship. We have neighbours but we also have allies. Basically, an ally is a distant neighbour who is prepared to come to your assistance. The new US administration is talking a language that we readily understand, unlike the previous one. It seems that its ideas of diplomacy are similar to ours:

With our allies and with our neighbours, I consider that the partnership should not be based on common values, common interests and common objectives but on compatible values, complementary interests and shared objectives.