

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S POSITION IN THE WORLD AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Opening address at the conference organized by the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, in cooperation with the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, University of Cyprus, entitled "The EU's Position in the World and the Challenges Ahead", which was held on December 8, 2008

Thank you very much for having invited me to open this seminar, and also to believe that I would be able to make an acceptable presentation on such a broad question : EU's position in the World and the challenges ahead ; quite a subject indeed, on which much more qualified people could talk hours and hours. The fact that I am not an expert and that I am supposed only to introduce the discussion makes my job a little easier and, more important, will give other participants and the audience plenty of room for raising aspects I have omitted, deliberately or by mistake.

As all of you know, the European Union has had, since its creation, to face many challenges to become a global actor and succeed in its core objectives. Achieving peace among former enemies was obviously the first one. War and peace among Europeans is just not a subject today. If this would be the only achievement of the construction of Europe, it would be enough. But a lot more has been done in terms of integration, common policies – internal and external -, enlargement or institutional evolutions.

With all its shortcomings, Europe has undoubtedly succeeded in becoming one of the major global actors in today's world. It is the world's first trading power; it remains one of the most advanced regions in terms of research and development even if others do better; it plays an essential role in addressing what's now called "global issues": environment, development, health, human rights. And, even if this remains an area where a lot of progress remains to be done, Europe has developed a foreign and security policy.

Many of these goals were included in the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, as they were for previous presidencies and for the future ones: no country can claim bringing major changes or achieve fundamental objectives within six months, but each presidency can add its contribution to what is now called "trio programmes", involving 3 presidencies on 18 months.

And it is, I think, quite significant that one of this Trio programme priorities deals with Energy and Climate issues, subjects which would have hardly be regarded as that essential just 5 years ago. It shows, of course, how much global warming has become a major question recently, but also that Europe has the capacity to react to new challenges. And I don't see any challenge of more international interest that the future of our planet.

Another challenge for all of us, and another priority of our presidency, is the rapid increase in world migrations. Here too, changes are clear: no one, today, would seriously defend ideas like "zero immigration". Because movements of people around the world are intrinsically linked with globalization. In the same time, we must improve our common capacity to control and manage migrations.

Our continent remains extremely attractive to those who endure difficult situations in their countries. How to achieve this, while respecting our values, is certainly one of the challenges of our times. The European Pact on Migrations, adopted under our presidency, is a first attempt to tackle this question in a comprehensive way; it doesn't claim to give simple solutions to a problem that is everything but simple. At least, with the Pact, we have a common approach on this subject.

An economic giant and a political dwarf is the usual qualification of Europe in the international arena. As you know, making Europe a stronger actor on the diplomatic stage has been a long-standing objective of my country.

After years of work, I think we can say that the dwarf has grown a little bit but a lot more could be done. It is an important point of the Lisbon Treaty, with the creation of a European Foreign service and a clarification about who is in charge of EU's foreign policy. Let's hope that the treaty will come into force soon and that this important step, closely related to the future of UE/NATO relations, can finally be achieved.

The question remains always the same: how far European countries are ready to transfer their foreign policy to a centralized system? How to deal with the particular case of UK and France, who are both nuclear powers and permanent members of the Security Council? And, as far as substance is concerned, how ready are member states to define a genuine European foreign policy?

Finally, conducting a credible foreign policy implies concrete means to support it, mainly military. This translates obviously into financial consequences, and this brings to the question of burden sharing among EU partners.

European capacity to act can be real and effective when will and determination are shown. It was the case with the events between Russia and Georgia last summer; it is the case now with the common operation decided to fight piracy off Somalia coasts a situation that illustrates how much these concrete means are needed when it comes to practical actions: combating acts of piracy needs strong naval forces, capacity to project very far from its territory and special forces to take action.

A word on a recent initiative taken at the very beginning of the French presidency: the creation of a new organization, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Our conviction was that the Barcelona Process launched in 1995, despite its major successes and its political significance, had to be reinvigorated. Although much has been said on the negotiations that have led to the UfM, I think there are not many examples of an international organisation created in such a short time, especially in a region like the Mediterranean. Now, we are in a process of defining the institutions and the

rules of this organisation. It may take time because so many interests are at stake. But the passion put by many countries at this stage of the establishing of UfM shows that nobody regards it as an unimportant or second class body.

Making Europe a stronger and more influent actor on the international stage does not rely only on traditional aspects of power.

Obviously, military capacities and economic strength are, and will always be, essential elements for anyone claiming a role in the world. But Europe has its particular assets: it's a global power but no longer a conquering one. What Europe says or does can by no means be associated with any expansionist views. In this regard, we have done a lot in the past! Therefore, when Europeans try to bring world's awareness on subjects like development, action against pandemics, global warming, cultural diversity, universality of human rights, we may be criticised, opposed or regarded as naïve or idealist but the fact that we are not attempting to dominate or subdue anyone is, I think, very commonly accepted.

This gives to European "soft power" a particular dimension, partly a moral one, I'd say. Because the European tradition of tolerance and moderation is well known and generally admired or envied, and because the European model, based on a high level of social protection and solidarity, has no equivalent elsewhere, what we can propose or promote is undeniably related to what we are. This, I think, gives us quite a strong voice when we are addressing world challenges.

I think I will stop at this point although I know many other aspects could or should have been mentioned, from economic competitiveness to enlargement policy or the risk of technology gap to the institutional future of a more integrated Europe and the question of federation or confederation.

But I'm sure other participants will be happy, and much more competent than me, to complement what is just an introduction. The only thing I would like to stress, and I think this appeared in what I said, is that we should certainly be aware of weaknesses and drawbacks of Europe but also avoid the too common self-devaluating attitude many – first of all European themselves- have vis-à-vis Europe, which remains to date a unique, unprecedented and unparalleled historic experience and achievement.

Thank you very much.