

Europe and its neighbours

A round-up of EU foreign & neighbourhood policy

By Hannes Swoboda

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EUROPE AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

The following brief and deliberately selective report is based on my experiences on issues of the wider European neighbourhood, in the framework of my work in the European Parliament since 1996. In my functions as rapporteur for Croatia and for Russia, as member of different inter-parliamentary committees (South East Europe, Ukraine and South Caucasus and Central Asia) and after many visits to most of the countries of the Mashreq and Maghreb (as well as Iran), I had the privilege to gain both information and experience. My views were complemented by countless discussions with a variety of interlocutors when I was a member of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, and as Vice-President and subsequently President of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament in Brussels and in Strasbourg.

My basic conclusion is that Europe cannot and must not choose between strengthening its internal structure and developing a strong and noticeable Common Foreign and Security Policy. The EU has to be effective and serve the interests of its citizens both inside and beyond its borders. Our neighbours are still drawn to Europe, but there are no automatism, as we recently witnessed with the crisis in Ukraine. Also, our influence in the different neighbourhood regions is limited and requires allies and cooperation. And I would add that we need comprehensive strategies, but at the same time a high degree of flexibility because the regions surrounding Europe are continuously evolving and remain very fragile. New challenges are arising, with Russia led by an authoritarian and sometimes aggressive nationalism through Vladimir Putin.

For a serious and ambitious neighbourhood policy, Europe must first strengthen its own institutions. The European External Action Service (EEAS) was a good start although much remains to be done. We have to give the whole internal European structure an overhaul to make it suitable for a global player. At the same time, we must make sure that every new crisis does not overshadow challenges in other regions, to avoid neglect and short-termist reactions.

A RING OF FRIENDS

The European Union finds itself surrounded by a multi-layered, fragile neighbourhood, abuzz with unresolved crises. Just like any state, or union of states and peoples, the EU seeks friendly relationships with its neighbours; ideally with neighbours who in turn live in peace and harmony, on a path of economic and social progress, fighting poverty and fostering democracy. If only it was as simple as that.

When the former President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, introduced the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2002, he spoke of a "ring of friends" the EU wanted to have. It would be the neighbourhood policy of the EU which would establish and nourish such a ring of friends. Alas, since the introduction of the special Neighbourhood Policy many unforeseen events have affected and changed our environment and have created new challenges, to which we have to react with new strategies and policies.

It must be noted that at the time of the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the scope of the EU's neighbourhood stretched largely across the countries that would soon be joining the Union, in 2004 and 2007. With these historic enlargements completed, the EU found itself larger, more diverse in economic, social and historical terms, and with a new set of bordering nations to the East, many of them belonging to the direct sphere of influence of post-Soviet Russia.

It was a big mistake to think of the EU as an almighty magnet which would automatically attract surrounding nations to its market and values. There are other forces in the region, and notably Russia which has its own strong (financial) magnetic power. Notably in the countries of the "south" different fundamentalist and terrorist groups influence the development of the societies. Time has

shown that economic aid and the opening of markets - both limited in scope - are not sufficient to create a genuine ring of friends. We need more and radically different long-term strategies to bring countries closer to the EU. Even on the Balkans, the direct and natural sphere of influence of the EU-28, there are countries like Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina which seem immune to offers and incentives to prepare well for starting accession negotiations.

The 'one-size-fits-all' approach of the European Union may be at the heart of unfulfilled, half-hearted integration processes, resulting in lukewarm relations with neighbours. Essentially, there is only one direct line of development from neighbourhood to full EU membership, without much flexibility except for the time needed to complete this development. The lengthy processes however, are precisely what discourages citizens and institutions and eventually lead to new EU member states with chronically low enthusiasm for the European Union.

Instead of forcing every country into the identical mould, we should think about a long-term reconstruction of the EU with different levels of engagement and different levels of rights and responsibilities. A strong core - around the common currency of the Euro - could commit to common social and economic systems, while a looser ring of countries that would not like to or may not yet be able to join this core with all its obligations could still benefit from the single market.

The outer core could be a faster way of bringing countries closer to the EU - including as an intermediary step to full 'inner core' membership - and thereby take pressure off hurried enlargement processes. Simultaneously, countries within the EU could disengage without losing some essential benefits, if they wish so. Such a reconstruction would certainly create new challenges, but in view of historic levels of citizens dissatisfaction and continuous enlargement 'fatigue', the mere debate of a different, more flexible system has merits.

The freedom of movement in a common labour market and much stricter criteria than today concerning the rule of law and democratic development could be concentrated in the core European Union. Others could and should follow, but it would not be compulsory at the moment of joining the outer ring. With such a reconstructed EU we could combine our value-oriented policies with our interest to have European power and influence strengthened.

I EU ACCESSION CANDIDATES

For many years to come, some of the Western Balkan candidates and potential candidates for EU accession will stay outside the Union. The process of enlargement has become slow, and often tedious. Despite 'enlargement fatigue' even among the once enthusiastic leaders of EU enlargement, like Great Britain and the Netherlands, the European Union must abide by its own criteria and insist on the perspective of these countries to become members of the EU as soon as they have achieved the necessary reforms and are ready for accession.

I.1 WESTERN BALKANS

Since the last big enlargement round in 2004 and the addition of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, only Croatia could join the EU. Montenegro and Macedonia are candidates, but far from entering the EU. There has been recent progress concerning the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which helped especially Serbia in its path towards the EU. The last elections and subsequent peaceful government transition improved the image of Albania, but the country has not yet been rewarded with a date for when it will obtain candidate status. Bosnia-Herzegovina on the other hand is still far away from gaining this status because of lack of internal consensus on basic questions.

It is no secret that the willingness of some member countries and their governments for the next steps of enlargement is fading or at least very weak. Engaged with their own economic and social

problems and in view of rising nationalism and narrow-mindedness some countries would rather like to stop the - already slow - enlargement train.

Instead of engaging in drastic reforms of the EU which would strengthen the community and its institutions like the European Commission and Parliament, some member countries try to challenge the benefits of enlargement and put the burden of our problems on the South Eastern neighbourhood countries, which could not yet enter. They would be the victims of the unwillingness to strengthen the EU and its basic institutions including the readiness for establishing effective economic governance which would finally give the Eurozone its missing backbone.

It would be a disaster for the whole of Europe if we let down our Balkan neighbours, who did not yet achieve membership. What Europe and the Western Balkans need is a combination of vital EU reforms and a strategy for a well prepared enlargement to the Balkan countries and accession of these countries according to the merits of each country.

I.2 TURKEY

In principle, the same strategy should be implemented for Turkey's accession negotiations. Because of the size of the country and an array of rational as well as emotional prejudices against the accession of a Muslim country, the situation is even more complicated than with the countries of the Western Balkans.

In addition, the recent developments inside Turkey create new challenges. Prime Minister Erdogan - who started with a widely accepted reform programme - has become progressively authoritarian in dealing Gezi Park protesters and growing dissent to his regime. He has succumbed to emotional reactions in dealing with different accusations concerning corruption and also regarding his former ally, Fetullah Gülen. The reconciliation with the Kurdish people - which Erdogan had begun under wary European eyes - has undergone many ups and downs, but did not really proceed to become a decisive element of the government's strategy.

Turkey's assets for the EU would not only be its large market and young labour force but also its potential role in our common neighbourhood. Erdogan's foreign minister Davutoglu spoke about Turkey's main foreign policy objective to have 'a neighbourhood with no problems'. It transformed itself into a situation of 'no neighbours without problems' although this is certainly not only Turkey's doing.

Turkey was not able to develop a clear and courageous foreign policy strategy. Turkey did not take important steps to improve the relations to Armenia. It supported some rebel groups, then demanded a military solution in Syria and could not convince the NATO partners to intervene militarily. It did not really try to improve its relations with Israel after Israel high-jacked a ship bringing aid from Turkey to Gaza. It had high hopes to be a model nation for the countries of the Arab spring, especially for Egypt, but today it is further away from this position than during the Arab Spring uprisings. Turkey is increasingly eyed with scepticism in many Arab countries. This isolation has reduced the strategic value of a Turkish membership in addition to doubts about the democratic future and the still existing 'Kurdish question'.

This does not mean that the EU has not made mistakes in the course of its accession negotiations with Turkey. But parallel to the resistance and hesitations on the EU side the development in Turkey itself did not promote the idea and attractiveness of Turkey as a member of the EU given its own problems and challenges.

The European Union should not withdraw from Turkey however. Concerning the accession talks it should open the chapters covering human rights, minority rights and the state of law. Only the discussion of these chapters can prove whether Turkish EU in the near future is possible. We

should be engaged in and with Turkey and help that Turkey can regain its position as centre of stability in this fragile region.

Turkey can then play also a decisive role in connecting Europe with the South Caucasus and Central Asia. A modern, open-minded Turkey on the basis of an open-minded and tolerant Islam as the majority religion could play an important role in supporting similarly open-minded groups in Arab countries.

II EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND RUSSIA

There is no reason why our Eastern European neighbours should stay outside the EU. As the Lisbon Treaty states: Any European State which respects the values (...) and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. Russia's opposition towards enlargement cannot prevent us from inviting our neighbours to develop a close partnership with the EU and eventually join the Union, when both sides are ready for accession. The setbacks the European Union has witnessed must not lead to a halt of mutually beneficial enlargement strategy. If this process can be managed with Russia as a partner even better. If this is not the case, the EU must find the strength to shape its own neighbourhood and enlargement policy, if necessary, against Russia's will.

II.1 UKRAINE

The Ukraine is the biggest, and also the most important country in our Eastern neighbourhood. It was correct to concentrate our neighbourhood policy on this country, knowing that especially under President Yanoukovich, the reform processes were slow and hardly changing the oligarchic structures in Ukraine. The imprisonment of former Prime Minister Tymoshenko – herself representing an oligarch group – was another sign of the regime in power, trying to prevent the country from transforming into an open democracy.

We were all surprised by the last-minute refusal of Yanukovich to sign the EU association agreement in Vilnius in 2013. And we were all surprised by the Maidan revolt. The 'Weimar triangle' consisting of the foreign ministers Steinmeier, Fabius and Sikorski achieved a major success in brokering an agreement among all sides. Not pushing harder for the implementation of this agreement however gave Russia a perfect excuse to annex Crimea, an act that appears to have been planned for a long time and in great detail. It is unrealistic that Crimea will be returned to Ukraine, certainly in the short-term. Therefore, the primary goal has to be the cohesion of the "rest" of the country.

To this end, the reasonable political forces in Ukraine now have to do their job by reaching out to all citizens of Ukraine, and in particular the Russian-speaking groups. Europe can help Ukraine by assisting political and economic reforms as well as the modernisation of the country, not least by separating business from state structures. Europe's ambitions of democratisation will not be sincere unless we make it very clear that the fight against oligarchic political structures and corruption is essential.

What Ukraine - like Moldavia and Georgia - needs, is clarity concerning prospective membership in multilateral organisations and unions. I advocate for a clear membership perspective for the EU. However, NATO should seriously consider a formal halt of its expansion and define a policy of neutrality or non-alliance for these countries. This would stabilise the situation, and reduce the risks of Russian provocation.

Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's new, democratically elected president, faces demands and pressure from the inside and outside. His commitment to take steps towards both Eastern Ukrainian representatives and Russia's government - during the campaign as well as in the first days of

taking office - confirms the impression I had after meeting him several times: a realistic, pragmatic politician, who is willing to broker compromises. It has to be hoped that the international community will support him in this endeavour, so that Ukraine can peacefully decentralise and focus on the fight against corruption and oligarchy, while fully respecting the rights of all Ukrainian citizens.

II.2 PUTIN'S RUSSIA

Russia as a state and nation has great potential that may unfold; however for the past years, Russia has found itself in the grip of one single man and his determined international and regional choices. Putin is determined to prevent a stronger regional role of the EU and to instead strengthen Russia's say in the world. There have been clear miscalculations as to which lengths he would be willing to go to. Despite all legitimate criticism of Putin, he has a clear strategy: regardless of the big economic, social and demographic problems in Russia, he wants to use the country's energy quasi-monopoly to play a strong regional and global role. This is true for Russia's immediate neighbourhood but also for Putin's position in relation to the conflict in Syria.

A close strategic partnership focused on issues of mutual interest is the only viable way to deal with Russia. Pragmatism must prevail in relations with our big neighbour. Without refraining from sharp criticism of the many human rights violations in Russia, as well as Putin's schizophrenic relationship with terrorism, we have to engage with Russia to solve any global challenge, from Syria's civil war to Iran's nuclear programme. A partnership without illusions is the most adequate way of dealing with Putin's Russia. Some commentators claim that the country is in a weak position and will soon suffer an economic and social breakdown. I am hesitant with such forecasts. For the moment, the Ukrainian crisis has further strengthened Putin and there are no signs that the vast majority of Russia's citizens would turn on its President. Irrespective of how long Putin can count on his people's support, the EU needs a strategy that will outlast his.

The recent annexation of Crimea is an obvious violation of international law and cannot be tolerated. It is in our all interest to avoid military clashes that could lead to an outright war, or even an economic war. Any measure taken now must lead to a clear exit strategy. Irrespective of the current deep confidence crisis, we cannot but focus on building a long-term cooperation instead of confrontation relationship and strategy towards Russia.

Some time ago I envisaged a possible "Black Sea Union", consisting of all the countries bordering this sea, including the EU as a whole, based on mutual respect and cooperation especially in the energy field. The establishment of such a union together with Russia could go hand in hand with further enlargement of the EU - but not of NATO - and a larger free trade zone including Russia and its neighbours. The present crisis in the relation between the EU and Russia makes this all but impossible. But all said and done, statesmen and stateswomen are characterised by thinking beyond the orthodox and easy.

Today's situation is one of instability and misbalance that cannot be maintained forever. We need to find a path towards a new and more stable, durable situation. It may not be for today or tomorrow. But we have to start planning for the day and week after tomorrow. At least a Black Sea Conference with all countries concerned including EU and possibly USA (and China?) could bring some stability in the region. Energy cooperation could be one of the subjects.

To find a way out of the present crises by insisting on future EU membership for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia combined with assurances on stopping NATO enlargement could create a basis for a serious dialogue with Russia. But such a dialogue can only be successful, if we negotiate from a position of strength from energy to defence, and that means more Europe in these areas, and not less. If we do not find a new relationship with Russia, there will always remain a danger of crises and interference from Russian side. In addition, even if Russia will always try to find a close relationship with China, we should not push them to much into such an alliance.

Parallel to the design of a strategic concept of inviting Russia to an honest cooperation, we need to insist on the concept of multilingual and diverse societies where Russian-speaking citizens have a comfortable and fair place. This concerns Ukraine but also the Baltic countries with a relevant number of Russian-speaking citizens - and non-citizens. Only full respect towards them, their integration and inclusion in society and the political system will make any intervention from Putin, pretending to defend his fellow Russians, superfluous.

If Putin's ambition is to act as "protector" of all ethnic Russians in the world and, worse, bring Russia back to the supposed glory of its former Soviet size by leeching into all surrounding territories where Russians live, our best bet is to preempt their frustration and gullibility through full integration and inclusion.

II.3 The South Caucasus

The South Caucasus region recently gained new fame through the events in Ukraine and particularly the Russian annexation of Crimea. The region is all but identifiable as a cohesive construct, instead long-time diverse and also conflict-ridden. The transition from the Soviet Union into three independent states was all but smooth. The Georgian regions of Abchasia and South Ossetia remain under Russian domination and act as a permanent reminder of Georgia's fragile position next to its big brother. The separation of Nagorno-Karabach - supported by Armenia and Russia - creates ever new tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The different countries require different approaches by an EU neighbourhood policy. Georgia being clearly oriented towards the EU - as well as the US - should sign an association agreement. Although Armenia rejected to sign an agreement, even after lengthy negotiations, it must not be rejected or fully neglected. Azerbaijan will not become a reliable partner as long as it maintains its position of staying independent, comfortably financed and secured through its energy resources.

Stronger ties with the South Caucasus countries are not as easy and quick as Europe had anticipated. Instead, patience, ingenuity and creativity are necessary to design, develop and implement a viable neighbourhood policy, tailor-made to country and region, but fitting into an overall EU strategy.

There is a young generation, qualified and growing, in all of those countries that looks to the EU for orientation and its future. A long-term investment through reforms will be more beneficial than the short-term advantages of signing up for Russia's customs union. The EU's historic success is forming a civilian union. Against authoritarian leaders like Putin or Turkey's Erdogan, we owe it to our neighbours and to ourselves to offer a peaceful alternative, built on human rights and civil liberties, democracy and transparency.

III THE MIDDLE EAST AND IRAN

The region of the wider Middle East is - and has been for a long time - in deep turmoil. New conflicts inside the Muslim world have added to the core conflict between Palestine and Israel. Europe must help to find a new balance by intensifying the dialogue with all countries in the region, albeit by insisting on political solutions.

The core problem in the Middle East - the conflict between Israel and Palestine - can only be solved by the parties concerned. The US and EU can albeit assist, mediate, and facilitate. The intermediate nations, notably Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and even Egypt, could contribute to the process if coordination among them was better. In reality, animosities and hesitations prevail. It should be the EU's ambition to not only strive for good bilateral relations but to promote ties between different third countries, to strengthen peaceful competition and simultaneously add to our count of peaceful friends in the region.

Religion is an obvious factor in the Middle East conflict history. Yet sub-groupings of Muslim faith, notably different groups of Shiites and Sunnis, as well as additional Kurdish groups, play a defining role and must be taken into account in our general strategy towards the region. Our European interest clearly is to establish and strengthen constructive dialogue with all groups and thereby contribute to a new regional order where countries and peoples strive for peace and stability.

The Kurdish population, spread across several countries, has a particular issue in the region. Kurdistan as a semi-autonomous sub-entity within Iraq is gaining ground internationally and as a model for an embedded minority state, also due to the vast energy resources on its territory. From this state within a state, a new contribution towards a peaceful transition and solution for the Kurdish people in other countries may arise. The European Union - inextricably linked to protecting minorities - should continue to express its solidarity with the Kurdish people without prejudging the merits of different developments that may arise.

Without forcing any society into a Western mould, it remains undebatable that certain steps towards democratisation are necessary for peace and stability. It is not the European Union's duty or right to impose Western-style democracy onto societies anywhere in the world. But by enhancing trade and economic relations, always accompanied with a clear human rights agenda, societies can open from within to find their own model of progress.

III.1 SAME OLD TUNE - ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

The continuous conflict between Israel and Palestinians is akin to a wound that will not stop bleeding. But the end of the Israel-Palestine conflict would not be the magic wand of the Middle East either, with which the whole region would automatically transform into a haven of peace if only this one long-standing conflict were to come to an end. Yet it is a major factor of instability and division within the region and a lasting peace agreement could mean that other issues of discord could be addressed easier. The European Union therefore fully supported the US initiative, led by Secretary of State John Kerry, to broker a final peace agreement between two sides. Israel and Palestine are also Europe's neighbours.

While the past decades of negotiations have not led to a lasting solution, expectations have risen on both sides regarding a final outcome. Instead of fixating on a package solution, we should return to the basics necessary for peace: regardless of whether or not peace will lead to a two-state solution or a different format, the basic and lowest common denominator must be the mutual recognition of basic fundamental rights for all people in Israel and Palestine. Taking the pressure off the 'endgame scenario', an intermediate agreement on this level could aid in advancing the process.

The European Union - which has committed to fostering human and fundamental rights in the world in its treaties and statutes - should insist on the mutual recognition of basic rights for everybody in Israel and Palestine. On this basis the institutional framework for a future, long term solution can be designed. If this should be the "orthodox" two state solution or not can be determined at a later stage. What is essential is to obtain a sincere commitment of all parties to find a solution which can bring peace and prosperity, where all citizens concerned by this long lasting conflict know their rights to be respected and protected. The election of Reuven Rivlin as Israeli President might turn out helpful, considering his insistence on equal rights for all, including Palestinians. There will be no fast-track solution and no big win in the near future. Therefore, the EU must be ready to stay engaged for some time in finding and safeguarding that solution.

III.2 A NEW APPROACH TOWARDS IRAN

There is no second country in the world where determined EU engagement has made as much of a difference in the last years. Iran has come from an international pariah, considered 'a rogue nation' by many Western allies, to a serious interlocutor and negotiating partner. President Rouhani and his government have opened the window of opportunity needed to once and for all resolve the nuclear issue and simultaneously make the country a constructive partner when it comes to conflicts and tensions in the region.

The West has made grave mistakes in its past dealings with Iran. President Bush's condemnation of Iran as part of the 'axis of evil' was all but helpful and on top hypocritical when taking into account that the same US President helped the same Iran to get rid of enemy regimes in the neighbourhood not once but twice: the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Even against protests by Israel and Saudi-Arabia, a new balance in the region is necessary to bring stability and peace. Recent events in Lebanon and in Iraq do not yet show a constructive and peaceful involvement of the Shiites and Iran in finding a fair political solution to the crises in the region. Nevertheless, for a balanced peace in the region, we will have to find a balance between Sunnis, Shiites and Israel.

The EU does not need to choose between individual countries in the Middle Eastern region or between different branches of Muslim religion. But we have an interest in establishing a balance of power, which would help to bring peace and stability to the region. All of the regional powers, Iran and Turkey as non-Arab Muslim countries as well as Saudi-Arabia and Egypt as Arab Muslim nations should be invited to contribute to a new status quo in the region. Other nations of the region should of course join as well, to extend the net of stable, peaceful nations.

III.3 THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

The West has given in to too many illusions about the civil war in Syria. The first was the belief that Assad and his regime could and would be overthrown quickly. The next illusion was that Russia's objections against a military intervention could be overcome without too much effort. But Syria was no second Tunisia and it was no second Egypt. In addition, Iran is a decisive factor in the region and the Syrian conflict and its intentions remain shady at best.

Another illusion concerned the character of some of the anti-Assad forces. Some were true democrats, who wanted to overthrow a dictatorial regime that prevented democratic and necessary economic reforms. But other opposition groups were and are jihadists, supported by some kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf. And these groups caused anxiety and fear among the Christians, Kurds, and democratic people of Syria.

There can be no apology for Assad's reaction to the opposition against himself and his regime. Killing one's own people with bombs and chemical weapons cannot be excused. But it was naive to think that everybody in Syria wanted to get rid of Assad, irrespective of who would succeed him. Fortunately the attempt to intervene militarily was halted due to massive resistance - from Russia (and Iran) but also from the population of the countries whose governments were willing to launch another uncertain military experiment.

Nonetheless, the mere threat of military intervention succeeded in convincing Russia to make an effort in finding a political solution including the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons. Six months after the chemical weapons agreement however, the armed conflict in Syria is nowhere near an end. The only chance for an end is still a political solution, where "the West", Russia and Iran join forces. Assad's supposed re-election has worsened the situation and will probably further extend the conflict.

A development that goes far beyond Syria is the emerging and continually expanding *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* (ISIS). The Al Qaeda splinter organisation has taken over - in brutal fights - a number of Iraqi key cities and is seeking to control a territory going beyond national borders. The Maliki regime - albeit supported by the US and Tehran - is in no position to counter the ISIS invasion. The helplessness, with which also Europe and the US are following these developments, is symptomatic for an uncoordinated foreign policy, which relies more on observation than influencing. The conflict between the powerful players in the region - Saudi-Arabia and Iran - contributes to ISIS' strength as long as both countries cannot agree to fight the insurgents together.

The lesson the EU must draw from Syria, is that all countries, oppositions and citizens have different levels of receptiveness towards revolutions and regime change. What Syria should - finally - teach us is to look into political solutions before threatening military interventions, particularly when no exit strategy is on the table. Meanwhile, the EU must face the issue of a large-scale humanitarian crisis, including huge refugee flows, mostly to Syria's neighbour countries including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

III.4 A SILENT GLOBAL POWER: ENERGY

The US under President Obama have clearly embarked on a transpacific journey - the US's traditional regions of interest in Europe and the Middle East have moved into the background. While geo-strategic choices shift the world order of allies and partners, energy is the foremost resource to determine engagement and withdrawal.

While the US are discovering Asia and moving out of the Middle East, it is up to Europe to ensure that this fragile region is not further destabilised. The US may be flirting with energy independence due to their hydrocarbon resources and growing availability of "cheap" oil and gas; simultaneously new resources were found off the coast of Cyprus, Israel and Syria. New energy resources could lead to new opportunities for cooperation, but also to new reasons for confrontations as resource borders can be impossible to define. We are in the midst of global power and energy resource reorganisation. Uncertainty will prevail despite new opportunities.

Europe needs to develop a policy of diversification of its energy supplies. We have to scale down our dependence on Russia, but not simply rely on increased US gas imports - linked to strategies and interests that are not always ours - either. There is a range of alternatives, if only to have a stronger bargaining position towards Russia and specifically Gazprom's intransparent and politically motivated price policy.

IV OUR SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURS

The development of our southern neighbours varies massively. No one model can be recognised, applied or multiplied. Terrorism is - albeit to a varying degree - a common feature in many of our southern neighbour countries. The fight against terrorism has been stepped up over current years, yet fundamental logistical challenges and questions of cooperation remain the biggest threat in this battle. Europe, wanting to preserve peace and stability, has an immeasurable interest in cooperating with our Southern neighbours, and bringing them closer together.

To this end, comprehensive economic, social, political and security reforms in those countries are necessary. The European Union can contribute its part not only through financial assistance but through training, initiating and mediating cooperation and exchange, and building lasting professionalised networks.

IV.1 ARAB SPRING: BLOOMING UNCERTAINTIES

The Arab Spring in its different forms created big expectations in the region, but also in Europe. But the naive belief that a wave of revolutions would bring democracy and prosperity to the countries in question soon had to be replaced with a new form of realism. Revolutions almost always disappoint in the short run, notably on questions of democratic development.

On the one hand new forces seek radical changes after years of suppression, prison and torture. This is particularly true for the different Islamist movements. Tunisia - until now - has been an example of a country where Islamist movements are dominated by moderate leadership which is ready for compromises. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood did not capitalise on their President or regime, and the backlash has been enormous.

On the other hand the lack of preparation and skilful governance has been abused mainly by an odd mix of secular revolutionaries and old forces. In Tunisia the process of designing a new Constitution and preparing elections has continued peacefully. In Egypt, a new constitution was designed with basic consent from the left, secular forces as well as the military and the Salafists - though without the Muslim Brothers, who have in the meantime been declared a terrorist organisation and whose members and supporters are undergoing nothing short of a witch hunt. This does not prevent clashes between them and the security forces - in spite of the threat of harsh sentences including mass death sentences. It is difficult to forecast what kind of development will take place in Egypt and how the very fragile domestic situation will influence Egypt's traditionally strong regional role.

Europe has to be patient and has to help the countries concerned to find democratic ways to deal with the transition period. Disappointed as we are we should not turn away, but insist on dialogue with all relevant forces. The countries themselves have to find their form of transition, but we should offer advice on the basis of our own experience. We should join the societies in the fight against extremism and especially terrorism. Police and military actions may be necessary, but sound economic and social development must form the basis of any comprehensive attack on terrorist gangs. In the interest of our own security we should invest into the development of our southern neighbours.

IV.2 CHAOS IN LIBYA AND TERRORISM

If Tunisia and Egypt show different degrees of fragility and uncertainty, the situation in Libya is one of total chaos. The military intervention in Libya was launched without a clear exit strategy, especially concerning the mercenaries and their weapons. Many analysts describe Libya as a country without government, a 'failing state' at best. In addition, many fighters from Libya itself and many other countries found their way into neighbouring countries, especially in the Sahel zone. New structures of terrorism which combine fundamentalist Islamist attitudes with purely criminal organisations create massive insecurity in this region.

Attacks on industrial complexes, hostage-taking, trafficking of people and drugs; it's all happening in this region. And the security forces of the countries concerned are neither able nor equipped to deal with these structures efficiently. On top of it, part of the illegal migration into Europe is also organised by such gangs. A lot of money is changing hands in this region to finance terrorist groups.

Europe has to develop a comprehensive policy to fight these different criminal groups. To combat illegal migration, the EU must offer reasonable paths of legal migration and insist on strong cooperation against the groups responsible for illegal migration. And Europe must help to build up some basic government structure in Libya itself.

Terrorism has developed into the biggest security threat to Europe. From Afghanistan to Central Africa different terrorist organisations are endangering the countries' governments and regimes. France has an obvious interest to fight this development in this traditional sphere of French interest, for which it understandably seeks European support. But instead of France leading unilateral interventions and then asking EU member states for financing and assistance, joint preparations with clear aims and integrated into a regional dimension, should be preferred.

IV.3 ALGERIA, MOROCCO AND THE WESTERN SAHARA

This cooperation has to involve all countries of the region including Algeria and Morocco. In spite of their differences we need a close cooperation of these two countries themselves as well as with Europe. Everything should be done to help solve the differences concerning the Western Sahara. The different approaches and principles prevent not only the functioning of the long-agreed Maghreb Union but especially a more efficient security cooperation. For the moment both countries demonstrate a reasonable level of stability, despite justified criticism of parts of the opposition and especially civil society. It seems to be more sustainable in the Kingdom of Morocco than in Algeria, where everybody is concentrated on the uncertain future of long-term President Bouteflika.

Unfortunately, Europe is divided concerning the future of the Sahaouris. In principle we all defend the UN position and the planned referendum, but we know that there is a big difference in the opinion of both sides, as to who should be entitled to vote in such a referendum. This is the reason why a referendum seems unrealistic in the near future. A compromise could lie in a widely interpreted and internationally guaranteed autonomy of the occupied area inside Morocco. Europe should test the seriousness of the formulated Moroccan proposal of such an extensive autonomy for the people of the Western Sahara.

What our Southern neighbours, but especially our southern member countries need is a comprehensive European immigration policy. Opening up controlled corridors of legal immigration and an enhanced fight against the organizers of illegal migration are cornerstones of such a comprehensive policy. In addition we should offer education and training to the immigrants. They should receive skill and knowledge they could use either at home if they have to go back or in the new countries they may immigrate to. And in any way the "burden" of immigration should be shared between all member countries.

V CONCLUSION - COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY - DIFFERENTIATED ACTIONS

As stated at the beginning, Europe's neighbourhood is split, contradictory and fragile. This is also true for the neighbourhood of our neighbourhood, if you think about Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, Mali and Central African Republic in the South or about the North Caucasus and Afghanistan to the East of our neighbourhood. Our Common Foreign and Security Policy cannot stop at the borders of our neighbourhood. On the contrary, EU neighbourhood policy must be embedded in our foreign and security policy. It must always be seen as a comprehensive policy, which is dealing with economic and social development, trade and aid, security issues and human rights concerns at the same time. Our actions must aim to enhance these objectives jointly. Trade can for example be one of the main instruments to enhance economic development and human, especially social rights.

In using these instruments to defend our interest of peace and stability in our neighbourhood, we must recognise that different countries and situations demand different answers. Only consistent and - more often than not - patient dialogue can help design and formulate these different answers. We cannot avoid setbacks, but we should prepare better for all different possible outcomes. We will always be criticised for our willingness to dialogue with the "wrong" parties or persons anyways. But dialogue is and remains one of the main element of the EU's policy. Intervening

through military or police force should be seen as a means of last resort and must be inextricably linked to a viable exit strategy.

The US governments are redirecting American focus to our Southern neighbourhood as well as the Far East. The EU cannot ignore this rising region, but our immediate neighbourhood must remain our priority. Neighbourhood policy isn't sexy. But our own security and stability depends on peace and order in our Southern neighbourhood. In our own security, energy, and democratic interest, we have to maintain and increase engagement in this region.

Sometimes we in Europe concentrate too much on our internal problems and forget the global challenges. While we may be overlooking the need to define a global strategy, others will not. New alliances, new energy and transport links will be created. The economic power of these active powers will increase and in turn reduce Europe's influence.

Our global strategy has to start to be defined and elaborated in our own - often difficult - neighbourhood. The more we can contribute to stability there, the more we can concentrate on strengthening Europe's strategy beyond our neighbourhood. For the safety and prosperity of our citizens we cannot afford to overlook new global challenges.



Hannes Swoboda
HSwoboda@spoe.at

Hannes Swoboda was Member of the European Parliament for Austria from 1996 - 2014. From January 2012 - June 2014 he was President of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.