

The European Union as a Model for its Neighbors

From Dream to Nightmare?

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Europe's Mission: A Force for Peace?

The European Union (EU) quite rightly presents itself and is perceived in many ways the world's greatest and most successful peacebuilding project. Its early development coincided with the aftermath of years of war and genocide, the common experience which inspired the establishment of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. The UDHR was adopted during the same year the Congress of Europe took place in The Hague.

At this Congress a "Message to Europeans" was adopted stating:

Europe's mission is clear. It is to unite her peoples in accordance with their genius of diversity and with the conditions of modern community life, and so open the way towards organised freedom for which the world is seeking. It is to revive her inventive powers for the greater protection and respect of the rights and duties of the individual of which, in spite of all her mistakes, Europe is still the greatest exponent. Human dignity is Europe's finest achievement, freedom her true strength. Both are at stake in our struggle.

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***The views expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Parliament.*

The union of our continent is now needed not only for the salvation of the liberties we have won, but also for the extension of their benefits to all mankind. Upon this union depend Europe's destiny and the world's peace.¹

Almost 70 years later, the EU clearly faces internal challenges—ongoing economic and financial crises in several member states, threats to its unity and falling popular support challenge its effectiveness and legitimacy at a time in which it also finds itself surrounded by zones of extreme violence and conflict. The basic values of freedom, justice and the rule of law, which characterise any liberal democracy and are at the core of the EU foreign policy, are not only challenged by revisionist Russia but even by some of the 28 national leaders.

European countries also face the constant threat of terrorist attacks from those who explicitly reject the basic Judeo-Christian values which underpin universal conceptions of human rights. These attacks also originate from inside the EU with inspiration from a terrorist group, the Islamic State, whose strength has only grown since the Arab Spring began in 2011.

Time to Soft-pedal on European Values?

Recognising the enormity of the challenges the president of the European Commission seemed to suggest that the EU should reassess the place of values in its basic mission. At a press conference held on 14 January 2016, *The Guardian* reported that Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission (EC) president, struck

... a pessimistic note about the multiple crises facing the EU, ranging from terrorism to the future of Ukraine and the continent's ability to deal with refugees fleeing chaos and war in the Middle East and Africa. Europe was "running the risk of major reputational damage worldwide" because of its failure to tackle the refugee crisis, he said. "We are the richest continent in the world. . . now we appear as the weakest part.

Juncker said this record meant the EU had to be more modest when it talked to other countries about good governance. "*Less arrogance and more performance —I think that has got to be our watchword for the future.*"² Such a statement appears to confirm a crisis of confidence at the heart of the EU leadership. In the weeks following this statement events in Syria led to the arrival inside the EU of thousands of more refugees. These events have highlighted the connections between the Syrian tragedy and the strategic weakening of Europe and, some now argue, the West in general. Russia not only paid close attention to but also, in effect, fueled this course of events. The spread of instability fits perfectly with Russia's goal of seeking dominance by exploiting the hesitations and contradictions of those it identifies as adversaries.

The events in Syria come at a time when the EU is in the process of reconsidering sanctions on Russia following its annexation of the Crimea and ongoing destabi-

lization of Ukraine. Turkey, NATO member, and the largest and longest standing EU candidate country, has seemed close to war with Russia at a time when its record on democracy and human rights has been increasingly tarnished.

Europe Should Be More *Realistic*?

If the president of the EC is right, does this mean that that the EU should put less emphasis on values both in external relations and even within the Union itself? This seems to be the view adopted by Jan Techau of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who calls for a renovation of the European project and foresees that:

. . . the EU will be a lot more *realpolitik*-driven. . . . *Realpolitik* here means that the EU will be a union less of values and more of transactional politics. It will be less idealistic and more functional. . . . Europeans will find out that ironically, by toning down their values rhetoric among themselves and by accepting a larger variety of approaches within their integrated club, they will be more effective at preserving the core of their values in the age of political globalization. So I predict a Europe in which values will be handled closer to the lowest common denominator than to the great ideals that Europe wants to stand for. This will be a source of never-ending tension, but it will prove less costly than becoming divided over maximalist morals only to lose out in the harsh world of political globalization.³

At the beginning of 2016, this seems to be a widely-held point of view and comes at a time when one EU prime minister, Viktor Orban of Hungary, accuses another, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, of “moral *imperialism*.”⁴ This was not only a rejection of criticism over his authoritarian tendencies and antiimmigration policies but a neat way of reversing the arguments and somehow blaming the German leader for her commitment to open borders and a humane response to the deepening refugee crisis.

Putin’s Alternative Vision

Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, seems to be immune from such nagging self-doubt apparent in the remarks of President Juncker. Despite the economic crisis at home and uncertain results from military adventures abroad, he insists not only that America should abandon its exceptionalist pretensions, but also that, along with Europe, it should drop the illusion that its values and model of society have anything to offer to others. In fact, he sees things quite differently and has done so for some time. Addressing the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015, he launched what is clearly a direct ideological challenge.⁵

Taking the 1940s as his starting point and emphasising the stability provided by the Yalta system, he argued that:

We all know that after the end of the Cold War the world was left with one center of dominance, and those who found themselves at the top of the pyramid were tempted to think that, since they are so powerful and exceptional, they know best what needs to be done and thus they don't need to reckon with the UN, which, instead of rubber-stamping the decisions they need, often stands in their way. . . we consider any attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations as extremely dangerous. They may result in the collapse of the entire architecture of international relations, and then indeed there will be no rules left except for the rule of force. The world will be dominated by selfishness rather than collective effort, by dictate rather than equality and liberty, and instead of truly independent states we will have protectorates controlled from outside. . . . Nations shouldn't be forced to all conform to the same development model that somebody has declared the only appropriate one.

We should all remember the lessons of the past. For example, we remember examples from our Soviet past, when the Soviet Union exported social experiments, pushing for changes in other countries for ideological reasons, and this often led to tragic consequences and caused degradation instead of progress.

It seems, however, that instead of learning from other people's mistakes, some prefer to repeat them and continue to export revolutions, only now these are "democratic" revolutions. Just look at the situation in the Middle East and Northern Africa already mentioned by the previous speaker. Of course, political and social problems have been piling up for a long time in this region, and people there wanted change. But what was the actual outcome? Instead of bringing about reforms, aggressive intervention rashly destroyed government institutions and the local way of life. Instead of democracy and progress, there is now violence, poverty, social disasters and total disregard for human rights, including even the right to life.

I'm urged to ask those who created this situation: do you at least realize now what you've done? But I'm afraid that this question will remain unanswered because they have never abandoned their policy, which is based on arrogance, exceptionalism, and impunity.

It is interesting to note that President Juncker seemed, albeit implicitly, to accept the charge of arrogance by the West which President Putin denounced. Like his Chinese ally, President Putin likes to insist upon national sovereignty as the basis of international order and stability but his willingness to violate international law and national sovereignty is contradicted by his efforts to counter what he sees as Western interference in his neighborhood. Military action in Georgia in 2008 was an early example of his ability to seize the initiative as he did again in Ukraine in 2013.

It is clear that EU leaders did not take the measure of the challenge they face, and even now there are those who prefer dialogue to confrontation. In the past decade, there was a collective failure of European leaders to anticipate the possible reaction of Russia to an effort to establish a closer relationship with its neighbors. Descriptions of such a misjudgment range from inexplicable to catastrophic. Apart from public statements of concern about the EU Eastern Partnership by Russian leaders, the events in 2008 should have provided a warning. In the spring of that year, a NATO summit in Bucharest held out the prospect of NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In August 2008, Russia went to war with Georgia. In fact, at the time Western relations with Russia were good enough for President Putin to address the NATO summit. In doing so, he explained that NATO membership for these countries was inconsistent with his country's interests. Earlier, at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, he deliberately avoided politeness, making clear the links between economic relations, political stability and the provocative nature of NATO enlargement. His rejection of the unipolar world at the end of the US President George W. Bush years could not have been clearer.⁶

In Riga in May 2015, the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership restated their view that democracy is essential for a closer political and economic association. The fact, however, is that if there is now a ring of fire in place of the ring of friends originally foreseen by the EU Neighborhood Policy (ENP), part of the explanation is that Russia chose to perceive the very nature of the ENP as a threat to its interests and even to the Putin regime. It is the Russian response, rather than the European efforts to advance democracy, which explain the current nightmare which Ukraine is living through. If the EU can be faulted, it is in having shown a complete inability to anticipate such a tragic course of events even if the warning signs were evident. European ambitions cannot advance through mere wishful thinking but to abandon them at the first challenge is unlikely to appease its challengers. As Nicholas Bouchet of the GMF put it:⁷

... countering Russia's anti-democratic agenda requires a better understanding of why and how it has been successful in containing and rolling back Western democracy promotion efforts. Three points need to be made in this regard. First, the anti-democratic and illiberal political developments in Russia since the 1990s have gradually amounted to a coherent set of norms. They are not far from forming an ideology, even if one has not been formalized or expressed as such. Second, the argument that Russia's actions are purely geopolitical—rather than ideological—is also flawed. Moscow's domestic norms are closely linked to its policy toward the post-Soviet states and to President Vladimir Putin's vision for Eurasia. Russia's leadership supports and encourages these norms abroad because it sees this as essential to its survival at home, as well as for driving back general Western influence in the region and rebuilding a Russian geopolitical sphere.

Third, the sum total of Russia's actions abroad—however reactive, improvised, or tactical each may be on its own—indicates an embryonic strategy to support and promote non-democratic norms.

European Neighborhood Policy from Naivety to Failure?

Events since the Arab Spring confirm that it would be quite wrong to see Russian revisionism as the only explanation of the fires raging around the EU's neighborhood. In fact, when dealing with its southern neighbors, the EU had until 2011 faced constant criticism for its failure to coherently or systematically treat human rights as a central element of its relations with the countries concerned. The southern neighbors of Europe did not entertain any serious aspirations for EU membership, and yet the Union adopted a set of policy instruments based on its enlargement strategy as developed since the early 1990s. In Article 8(1) of the Treaty on the European Union, the member states pledged that:

The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation.

In November 2015, the EU presented a review of progress achieved which recognised the limitations of a policy designed in similar terms for very dissimilar countries.⁸ It was interpreted as a step towards a more “realistic” approach with more emphasis on interests than values, but this brought the risk of leaving the ENP in a state of “*suspended animation*” or little more than a fig leaf to cover up a strategic retreat in the direction of greater realism as to what can be achieved. Steven Blockmans of the Centre for European Policy Studies put it this way:

Economically strong and confident about the process that was intended to put the EU on a firm constitutional basis and serve the reunited halves of the continent, the EU set out a policy to “prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours.” Yet, in the absence of a clear membership prospect for ENP countries, the EU's demands and prescriptive methods of harmonising legal frameworks and reforming institutions and economies have largely failed to inspire the neighbours, especially those who do not share the Union's values.⁹

The ENP had not managed to tackle the root causes of the protracted conflicts in the region: poverty, lack of education, and unemployment or, as events in Georgia (2008), the Arab uprisings of 2011, the war in Syria and the consequent refugee crisis made painfully had it offered any real value in terms of conflict prevention or crisis management.

Indeed, the former Commission Director General for Enlargement, Sir Michael Leigh, commented on the recent commission review of ENP in stark terms:

The review effectively acknowledges that the ENP has failed in its goal of building a ring of well governed states around the EU. Most countries covered by the ENP are more unstable today than they were a decade ago. Violence and instability have, tragically, spilled over into the EU itself, the very risk the ENP was intended to avert. What's more, the ENP was the pretext, if not the cause, of the tense standoff with Russia over Ukraine. It has brought the EU little or no increased influence while complicating efforts to achieve a new strategic balance in Europe.

Today's review recognizes that the ENP's attempt to export the EU's model of society to the Middle East and Eastern Europe has foundered.¹⁰

It is hard to disagree, but is it convincing or meaningful to argue that the attempt was doomed from the start? As Blockmans argues:

... the Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with the EU, the highest form of contractual relations under the ENP, even ended up inciting violence, as was shown in Ukraine in 2013 after President Yanukovich pulled the plug on the conclusion of the country's AA/DCFTA. In spite of a remarkable pro-EU revolutionary wave that swept out the ancient regime and managed to keep most of the country united in its determination to sign the agreement, the ENP—and in particular the Eastern Partnership—suffered a serious blow as a result of the EU's collective lack of strategic foresight about Russia's belligerence in Crimea and the Donbas.¹¹

Certainly, by failing to treat Russia as a genuine partner of both the EU and NATO, the EU and the US failed to anticipate Russia's reaction. Any optimism as to the rapid stabilization of Europe's neighbourhood is hard to justify in the current situation, but to somehow blame the EU for events in any of the countries concerned seems to go beyond analysis and enter the realm of surrender. Strategic failure has certainly resulted from a failure of anticipation, yet the vision at the origin of the ENP cannot be simply abandoned. The basic idea that people should choose their governments, respect human rights, seek economic development and live in peace and security with neighbours is an idea which Europe has no reason to give up on even in the face of the overt challenge from Russia and the tragic counterrevolutions in many of the countries of the Arab Spring. Being realistic does not mean abandoning basic values, and as Leigh summarises, Europe does need new policies (plural) for its neighbourhood as:

... there will never be a common foreign and security policy worthy of the name unless the EU manages to act effectively in the part of the world where its poten-

tial influence is greatest. Well-designed neighborhood policies would also help to check the growing radicalization of young people within the EU itself... Europe cannot afford inertia when facing challenges of the magnitude of those unleashed by the Arab uprisings and by failed or partial transitions to the East. The EU should move away from high sounding strategies towards well-targeted initiatives with real impact and effectiveness.¹²

In fact, the confirmation of the need for well-targeted initiatives can be seen by the relative success of the EU strategy towards the Balkans. The situation in 2016 in the region is quite different from 20 years ago, and there is no reason to assume in advance that such progress in the right direction cannot be achieved, at least in the Eastern neighborhood. Standing up to pressure from Russia was necessary in Serbia and other countries of the region just as it will have to be about Ukraine, for example. The EU Balkan strategy does, in fact, replicate some of the elements of the original coal and steel community with elements of financial assistance and regional cooperation. Europe's basic message that there is an alternative to war is confirmed by developments in the region where the "pull of Europe's soft power" has proved effective. Ivan Vejvoda of the German Marshall Fund has made this point convincingly.¹³

It is the very success of the EU enlargement strategy that led to many of the problems the Union faces today. Twenty-eight countries with different histories and even geography all signed to the same treaties, but that is clearly an inadequate cement for a political union with explicit aspirations for a common security policy. The success of a peaceful enlargement could not be simply repeated via a neighborhood policy establishing a basis for relations with countries which do not have an EU accession perspective. Anyone who believed in that possibility a decade ago has been bitterly disappointed. This is not a reason to abandon Europe's basic message. To do so in a vain attempt to define a single global foreign policy strategy would be particularly inappropriate.

Looking East

As S. Neil McFarlane and Anand Menon see it:¹⁴

The EU overestimated the significance of its attractive power in the eastern neighbourhood. It ignored the fact that its political and economic prescriptions cut across established interests of key members of the political elite in Ukraine and Armenia. It also denied itself its major leverage... the firm prospect of accession.

A neighbourhood policy for countries without an EU membership goal or perspective was not necessarily doomed from the start, as real success depended on decisions by the leadership and the peoples of the countries concerned. After 1989, the

countries of central and eastern Europe, like Spain, Greece, and Portugal some years earlier, made apparently irreversible changes to establish democracy and the rule of law. Even now the disturbing developments in Hungary and Poland do not presage a return to the era of gulags and mass murder.

Clearly, EU policymakers underestimated the capacity and the will of Russia to contest the space between the Russian Federation and Europe. The region is diverse and densely populated, and EU preferences did not necessarily coincide with those of local leaders. Corruption, old Soviet-era networks, and ethnic issues could be used to counter the overwhelming power of attraction which the new EU members had, at least initially, bought into. Russia could certainly claim deep historical ties to many Eastern Partnership countries. In fact, it had a considerably greater material capacity to influence the policy choices of these states than the EU, which had even discounted or ignored the possibility that its approach would ever be contested, even after President Putin made his views clear. It is, however, unconvincing to somehow blame the EU for ignoring the signs and therefore being somehow responsible for the violent backlash from 2013 onwards. In the opinion of the former German chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, the EU's fundamental mistake was its association policy which meant that Brussels "ignored" Ukraine's deep cultural division between traditionally pro-European western regions and Russia-leaning regions in the east.¹⁵

That Russia would use soft power and overwhelming military force never seemed to have occurred to the EU, or indeed the United States. It is worth recalling the context of the US-Russia reset announced so optimistically by the Obama administration. If Brussels misread the signs, especially during the Medvedev presidency, it took its cue from Washington, the global superpower which also saw Europe-wide stability as being in its national security interest.

The Arab Spring

For some, the unfolding events in the Arab world since the rebellion broke out in 2011 could be seen as similar to 1989 in Eastern Europe and the USSR, another triumph for human rights and democracy and a string of defeats for dictatorial regimes. Europe's history of revolution and counterrevolution was ignored. The fact that most of the countries (Syria being a notable exception) had an association with the EU did not seem to make a difference as European institutions welcomed the overthrow of leaders with whom they had been doing all kinds of business for some years. Coming so soon after the evident failure of the invasion of Iraq to advance democracy in the region this seemed like a breakthrough. The idea of the EU being surrounded by a ring of friends seemed within Europe's grasp. In this case, cultural differences combined with differences of geography and history were underestimated.

As early as 2011, however, Viilup and Soler had succinctly described the ENP as “a *weak response to fast changing realities*.”¹⁶

In Eastern Europe, the European model was attractive and based on common history and values with the countries concerned. Mostly the peoples concerned were Christians. Western culture, and the idea of individual freedom was widely admired and not perceived as a threat except to those with a monopoly of power. Indeed, many of the Arab dictators presented themselves as westernized modernizers ready to contribute to stability in their region. In fact, the historical context of the Arab Spring was quite different, and the explosive elements in the opened Pandora’s box were as invisible to outsiders, as were the forces leading to the unexpected uprisings in the first place.

Visiting Cairo in March 2011, Jerzy Buzek, the president of the European Parliament, was naturally deeply impressed. A leading member of the Polish *Solidarnosc* revolutionary movement, Buzek seemed to feel at home in the atmosphere in Cairo at the time. After meeting the new Egyptian leadership, he said:

The road to full democracy is long and difficult. I know it from my own experience in Poland, which overthrew its autocratic regime 22 years ago. Egyptians had a first free choice in yesterday’s referendum, but the process of constitutional change cannot stop there. People aspire for more. Democracy depends on strong political parties, independent media, and active civil society. It requires a solid legal basis, respect for minorities and a constant fight against corruption. Europe wishes to be a partner in democratic transition. The European Parliament stands ready to provide expertise. It will put pressure on other institutions to offer further steps in assistance and concrete projects.¹⁷

A few weeks earlier, he expressed the same sincere optimism when he received nongovernmental organizations’ representatives from both Tunisia and Egypt.

When moving away from the old regime, the fight against impunity is a crucial one. Things done in the past and in transition cannot be forgotten. Justice cannot be neglected. Today, we are at the beginning of what might become a renewed partnership between the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean, a partnership that will be based on truly shared values: justice and peace, democracy and freedom. This will be a partnership of the people, by the people and for the people.¹⁸

Mr. Buzek’s words reflected the optimism of the time but even as events evolved rapidly, contradictions emerged, most notably over the possibility of military action in Libya. Even before hostilities ended in that country, France and Italy were struggling to come to terms with an outflow of refugees and were fearing, rightly as it turned out, that a bigger exodus was coming up. In April 2011, the shape of things to come could already be seen. A Franco-Italian initiative, as reported in *The Guardian*,

“called for accords between the EU and north African countries on repatriating immigrants, a policy certain to spark outrage among human rights groups, the refugee lobby, and more liberal EU governments.”

Promising strong support for the democratic revolutions sweeping the Maghreb and the Middle East, Sarkozy and Berlusconi added: “In exchange, we have the right to expect from our partner countries a commitment to a rapid and efficacious cooperation with the European Union and its member states in fighting illegal immigration.”¹⁹

Five years later the drift from dream to nightmare (as the former Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi described the situation) is all too evident. At the time the threat of terrorism in Europe, in the context of a much larger than imagined migration into Europe, was not a major concern. Currently, the EU is still having great difficulty in coming to terms with a tide of humanity largely flowing towards Europe from the countries of the Arab Spring. The Islamic State, which was unknown in 2011, now controls almost 300 kilometers of the coast of Libya. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are escaping a horrific situation in Syria, and the EU is providing 3 billion euros in aid to Turkey in the hope that it will help slow down the surge into Europe. In fact, Turkey itself is increasingly unstable, its president seems to be moving in an authoritarian direction, and it is not keen on opening its border to more refugees. This is a human tragedy as well as a political nightmare and is all unfolding at a time EU countries are looking at ways to slow the tide of refugees.

In the second part of 2011, Poland held the rotating presidency of the EU, and as a country whose own peaceful revolution in the 1980s had been profoundly influenced by outsiders explicitly promoting democracy, it responded with understandable emotion to the events of the Arab Spring which unfolded in the months leading up to the beginning of its presidency. Even if the historical analogy may well turn out to be overstated, the reaction to the Polish approach seemed logical and understandable. Poland’s underground “Solidarnosc” movement had benefitted from under the radar “democracy promotion” assistance, in particular from the US foundations. This was the context for the establishment in 2013 of the European Endowment for Democracy.

In its 2014 Annual Report the EED described its objectives, not just in terms of promoting democracy as such but explained that:

In the face of closing spaces for democracy and freedom, the democracy support agenda has been brought back into the geopolitical game. EED focuses on local and grassroots needs, the young fledgling and unsupported, who struggle to fight for democracy and reopen these free spaces.

Initially its focus was precisely on the neighbourhood countries, but in 2015 its activities were extended to Russia,²⁰ it also operates in Central Asia.

Pragmatism, Differentiation Do Not Mean Surrender

It is certainly the case that at moments of dramatic change huge hopes are raised, and false comparisons are adopted which overlook profound differences of history, culture, and geography. To put it simply, Egypt in 2011 was not Poland in 1989. That was the kind of thinking which led from the dream of irreversible change in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 to the evident nightmare of 2016. Now that this harsh reality is so evident, should the EU simply reduce its ambitions? This seems to be the implicit message from the review of the European Neighborhood Policy launched in Brussels in November 2015.

In the years after 2011, the EU maintained its aspiration of contributing to democracy, the rule of law and good governance. These could be described as the *raison d'être* of the ENP, but recent indications are that the level of ambition of the ENP is being reduced and that EU leaders seem unaware of the intimate link between achieving these ambitions and having a meaningful security and defence policy. In June 2015, Federica Mogherini announced a yearlong review of a Global Strategy to steer EU external action stating that:

... it will be essential to work even more closely together at European level and with partners around the globe: "The European Union has all the means to be an influential global player in future—if it acts together. In a world of incalculable risk and opportunity, crafting effective responses will hinge on the Union's ability to adjust, react and innovate in partnership with others. We need a common, comprehensive and consistent EU global strategy."²¹

By advancing with the ENP review, Brussels may have missed an opportunity to develop a strategy taking into consideration both the issues of regional *and* global security. By the time the global strategy review is completed in June 2016, it will be clearer than ever that the main threats to European security are on the EU doorstep.

The End of Ambition?

As Tobias Schumacher put it in January 2016:

... the EU's aspiration to contribute to democratic development, good governance, the rule of law, and the strengthening of human rights in its Southern neighbourhood became more salient. In fact, it provided EU policies towards Europe's Southern periphery with their normative *raison d'être*.

The ‘new’ ENP, presented by EU High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Johannes Hahn in the European Parliament after one year of discussions and four months of unprecedented public consultations, puts an abrupt end to this. While many Arab regimes, after years of either suspicion towards or outright rejection of EU democracy promotion efforts, are overwhelmingly rejoicing at this development, it is a blow for reform actors in the Southern neighbourhood and for anyone who was hoping that the EU was serious with its normative approach. Strictly speaking, the ‘new’ ENP is a step back when compared to its two predecessors, the revised ENP of 2011 and the original ENP of 2003/2004, as it invariably leads to the substantiation of and thus support for autocratic rule in the EU’s Southern neighbourhood.²²

This abandonment of ambitions risks depriving the EU of its power of attraction and dropping the fundamental purpose of the ENP. By dashing any of the remaining hopes for reform in its region, the inevitable consequence is indeed mass migration by people who have every reason to abandon hope of a better life in their country.

As one former EU official observed:

The gravity of the situation should encourage Member States to go beyond bland references to “differentiation” and “local ownership” in the ENP review and to commit themselves to policies better adjusted to current realities.²³

As Michael Leigh added, many others—Russia, Iran Turkey, China and the Gulf States—are active influences in the EU’s neighbourhood. Originally, the EU had reason to believe that after its peaceful enlargement its success in expanding the space of democracy and stability in Europe would flow outwards without any counter movement or backlash. In fact, the whole of Europe’s neighbourhood is now the theatre for hard and soft power conflict of global significance. Again, Russian leaders are clear enough. The same Mr. Medvedev with whom the reset took place recently accused the west of moving towards *a new cold war*.²⁴

Russia has certainly understood the new situation, and this has not gone unnoticed in Washington. As US Sen John McCain argued, Moscow is using its bombing campaign to add to the flow of people from the Middle East and thus feed divisions in Europe. McCain said Russia’s strategy in Syria was to “*exacerbate the refugee crisis and use it as a weapon to divide the transatlantic alliance and undermine the European project.*”²⁵

The European Council on Foreign Relations also concluded that:

The failure to face the facts sooner—deluding ourselves that conflicts as complex as Syria and Libya would somehow burn themselves out without the need for

sufficient diplomatic energy from Europe's countries—may mean that EU governments now have to function on the terms of leaders such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin who have taken a more realistic approach to (and in no small way been complicit in) the regional trend towards instability.²⁶

In 2003 the EU adopted a security strategy which saw the Balkans rather than the wider neighborhood to the South and East. Just before a major enlargement, it seemed that the ambitious objectives of the 1948 declaration quoted above had been achieved. The document noted that:

Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the twentieth-century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history. The creation of the European Union has been central to this development. It has transformed the relations between our states, and the lives of our citizens. European countries are committed to dealing peacefully with disputes and to cooperating through common institutions. Over this period, the progressive spread of the rule of law and democracy has seen authoritarian regimes change into secure, stable and dynamic democracies. Successive enlargements are making a reality of the vision of a united and peaceful continent.”

The strategy also recognized that:

It is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbors who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe. The integration of acceding states increases our security but also brings the EU closer to troubled areas. Our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations.²⁷

Referring also to the threats of terrorism, coming particularly from the territory of failed states, the document identified the main risks. The enormity of these risks—their immediacy and proximity so evident in 2016—could barely have been imagined in such an optimistic scenario just 15 years after the end of the Cold War. For this reason, the strategy was short on concrete steps and vague about the nature of future relations with the countries concerned. The ENP similarly has turned out to be good on procedure but weak on substance. The migration crisis which was developing before 2011 is partly the result of this ambiguous low-key approach.

External Sources of an Internal Crisis

Apart from the ideal of spreading its values in its region, there is little doubt that the expectation was that stable modernizing neighbors would reduce the pressures of

illegal and legal immigration which have concerned policymakers since the beginning of the century. The current situation is one in which none of these objectives are being achieved, and the consequences for the very existence of the EU are coming into focus.

As Roger Cohen put it in *The New York Times* in February 2016:

The European idea has not been this weak since the march to unity began in the 1950s. Germany is awash in so-called Putinverstehers—broadly Putin sympathizers like Schröder—who admire him for his strong assertion of Russian national interests. Michael Naumann, a former minister of culture, told me: “The United States has left us, we are the orphaned kids in the playground, and there’s one tough guy, Putin. It’s really that simple.”²⁸

What has been described as a nightmare is not going to end soon, and the threat to the unity of the Union is evident. Basic questions as to the identity of Europe and its boundaries have always been avoided precisely because addressing them was bound to prove divisive. The fact that in the same month EU leaders were obliged to postpone discussions on the refugee crisis to spend days and nights on a fruitless search for cosmetic arrangement with the UK is just a sign of the times.

In the Cold War era, basic existential questions could be overlooked. In the years immediately after 1989, the answer seemed easier: the EU would define itself in response to efforts by outsiders to join. In the years since 2000, Putin began to plan a response and to provide serious competition to the EU’s vision of itself and of its role in its region. Brussels did not seem to notice. It does now. The Russian president openly mocks European pretensions to spread its values in its region even as Russia discreetly deploys soft power to assist the political forces encouraging the weakening or breakup of the EU. BREXIT would just be a bonus, and even if it does not happen, the UK vote to leave the EU threat represents a further example of the Union’s internal instability.

The refugee crisis has clearly put a huge strain on the whole EU structure but, in fact, whilst the lack of foresight of Europe’s leaders can be faulted, the crisis affecting Europe results to a substantial extent from the actions of others, not just Assad, other dictators or even the huge pressures for emigration resulting from instability in the whole region. Russia and the United States are still competing in the Middle East just as they are in the eastern neighborhood. America decided, with European acquiescence, to forego the use of hard power to influence the course of events in Syria whilst Russia took an opposite course directly assisting the Assad regime in a way which is likely to increase further the migratory pressures on the EU. That these events create pressures on EU-Turkey relations is a bonus for Russia which is using every opportunity to divide Europeans. The fact that former US president Barack Obama chose not to exercise leadership as a reflex against the interventionism of his

predecessor facilitates Putin's grand strategy at a time when the United States and Europe do not have any strategy at all.

Developments in Libya confirm that security challenges in the South are becoming a more significant consideration for NATO. As a German Marshall Fund expert puts it:

NATO is already moving in this direction at the political and military levels. Minds on both sides of the Atlantic are concentrated on the need for closer cooperation between NATO and the EU. There is now a critical mass of political will for this, and rapid progress might be made if key diplomatic obstacles, including the Cyprus dispute, can be resolved. The diverse nature of challenges in the south, from territorial defense to issues of development, reform, and human security where the EU's instruments are most relevant, means that closer cooperation between these two leading institutions will be felt first and foremost in the Mediterranean. A division of labor along these lines may well be emerging. If so, the NATO naval mission in the Aegean may be an early test case, with more to come.²⁹

The current albeit relative sense of urgency may prove difficult to maintain at a time of extremely sensitive relations with Turkey, both an EU candidate country and a NATO member on the front line of the refugee crisis and close to military conflict with Russia.

Regional Stability Is the Key to European Security

Anand Menon and S. Neil McFarlane have succinctly summarized the harsh reality of the EU today:

The EU design has turned out to be an ill-adapted institution for the pursuit of interests in the face of geopolitical competition. Coupled with internal divisions and interests the result has been an evident inability to aggregate differing perceptions into a common policy.³⁰

In such a large and diverse union, different countries have different priorities whilst all signed up to common texts, treaties and policy declarations. All subscribe to the noble goals of the Lisbon Treaty whereby they are committed to work together for peace prosperity and human rights as well as to developing close relations with the neighboring countries. As stated in Article 7a:

The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighboring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighborliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation.

With regional instability as the main threat to national security, the response of member states to the rapidly developing but unexpected events on its borders have been demonstrably quite different. Even when decisions have been made, they are not implemented. France and Germany follow different priorities whilst Britain sets an example of introversion on refugee issues whilst like others, it is involved in the military action underway against ISIS. Not all interpret their responsibilities to asylum seekers in the same way. Not all show sensitivity in selling arms to dictatorships. Not all are influenced by religious issues in defining their policies towards migrants and refugees. Not all seem to be as resistant to Putinist ideas of illiberal democracy. This was not always the case, as even during the Cold War the European Economic Community, as it was then called, could actively promote human rights as a key element of the Helsinki process.

In 2003, Europe's internal divisions had already been on global display as Britain, Spain and the soon to be new EU member states of central and eastern Europe failed to line up behind Franco-German leadership in challenging the decision of the United States and its coalition of allies to invade Iraq without a UN mandate. The invasion provided part of the backdrop to the Arab Spring which produced the destabilizing flow of refugees into Europe. In the same year, the EU could still adopt, however, a new security strategy with an emphasis on soft power as Europe's primary contribution to the promotion of democracy which the United States was ready to advance with hard power.

This difference of perspective underlay attitudes to Russia even before its military adventures in Georgia and Ukraine. As Desmond Dinan noted:

... the new countries generally adopted a harsher approach towards Russia and a friendlier approach towards the United States.³¹

In fact, the Union's unity in implementing sanctions on Russia after its annexation of Crimea has proved quite an achievement. Failure to maintain this unity could provide a further weakening of Europe's ability to influence events in its neighborhood. Even Dinan's description is outdated as Russia has succeeded in splitting the Central Europeans with Hungary developing friendly relations even as the Baltic countries fear that they could be a target of destabilization. Poland shares such concerns even as its leadership adopts elements of the Putin playbook such as limiting media freedom or reinterpreting major historical events. The Baltic countries feel immediately threatened.

Divisions over geopolitical priorities had always been particularly marked in EU policy to Belarus. The decision in early 2016 to re-engage with the Minsk regime will clearly be a test for the new, *realistic*, approach. This will enable, for example, the European Parliament to restart official contacts with the Belarusian Parliament and to set out EU expectations for democratic parliamentary elections in Belarus later

this year. In this way, dialogue can signal to Belarus that a democratic election process is a crucial opportunity for engagement with the EU. In the spirit of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review, the EU has stressed the importance of assessing country by country the reality of the situation and demonstrating flexibility. This could enable the EU to become more influential.

Normative Power Europe: Game Over?

At the beginning of this century, while the EU was developing its security strategy and preparing for enlargement, the institutions, civil society, and academia reflected an optimistic view of the Union's potential as a civilian, normative power. As the Iraq invasion failed dramatically in its goal of promoting democracy or spreading stability, Europe was encouraged to see itself as a new kind of global power. At a very minimum, the EU should be a model for others, particularly in its region. What the EU was could, somehow, be more important than its external actions.

This approach was mirrored in the structures and strategy put in place under the leadership of the first EU High Representative, Baroness Catherine Ashton. As the various crises have unfolded, this approach has seemed to be pursued with less conviction. I have written elsewhere that in its current policies on human rights and democracy promotion the EU is now tending to *blow an uncertain trumpet*.³² The implications of this may be profound.

No Longer the City on the Hill

Throughout the decades after 1989, the United States supported enlargement and the concept of regional partnership as these processes embodied American hopes that the EU would take the lead in stabilising the former Soviet space. Similarly, after 2011, Washington chose to explicitly *lead from behind* in the Middle East.

With the question of EU membership in at least one country on the table, the existence of the EU is being openly questioned. Leading figures no longer hide their sense of anxiety, and in Washington, the danger of even greater instability is a source of evident anxiety. Sen Benjamin Cardin, the senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote recently that:

As the European Union confronts unprecedented challenges which collectively threaten the future of the European project, the US has an obligation to stand with our friends there in support of the principles that we all share: democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights, economic prosperity and peace and security. The pressures on the union are considerable, but there are measures that the US can take to help. . . . Another alarming trend that has emerged in several countries across the EU is a rising nationalism exacerbated by the migrant crisis.

In some countries, governments have embraced a brand of “illiberal democracy” which calls into question the very democratic values of the EU. It is worrying that we have seen an erosion of these principles in some corners of the union. We should make clear our support for the EU’s democratic principles and our opposition to the chorus of illiberal voices in Europe. . . . Russia has also sought to erode support for EU institutions by funding anti-EU political parties, think tanks, NGOs and media voices, using the very strengths of Europe’s democratic societies — free press, civil society and open debate — against it. The EU and US should work together on affirmative messaging that clearly and unequivocally states our shared values.³³

In 2004 Jeremy Rifkin, an American, was so impressed with the EU that he could describe it a bit like a new USA regarding the attractiveness of its model for the rest of the world.

Europe is the new “city upon a hill.” The world is looking to this grand new experiment in transnational governance, hoping it might provide some needed guidance on where might be heading in a globalizing world. The European Dream, with its emphasis on inclusivity, diversity, quality of life, deep play, universal human rights and the rights of nature, and peace is increasingly attractive to a generation anxious to be globally connected and at the same time locally embedded.³⁴

Rifkin wondered whether Europeans were capable of the kind of hope and optimism which inspired and inspires the American dream. He noted a

. . . deep pessimistic edge ingrained in the European persona. . . . after so many misbegotten experiments and so much carnage over so many centuries of history. Failures can dash hopes. . . . no dream, regardless of how attractive it might be can succeed in an atmosphere clouded by pessimism and cynicism.³⁵

Weeks ahead of a referendum in the UK on EU membership with no sign that the refugee crisis is abating or becoming manageable, the divisions and uncertainty are all too evident. Those, inside and outside the EU who dislike or feel threatened by its very existence, see a historic chance to destroy decades of progress. The lessons of history which have underpinned the process of European integration are being forgotten in these new and unexpected circumstances.

The excessive optimism of the 1990s is being replaced by a fashionable so-called *declinism*. As Martin Schulz, the former president of the European Parliament, put it, “*Europe’s current political generation (is) in danger of squandering the achievements of the EU’s founding fathers.*”³⁶

Current circumstances may well lead to a lowering of expectations and a priority for crisis management. The divisive atmosphere in which such crises are to be managed is not one in which any new meaningful global strategy will be easy to develop

and implement. The urgent priority is the stabilization in the face of a maelstrom of clearly momentous and dangerous developments. The refugee crisis merely confirms that basic somewhat dramatic reality. To close the gates, return to introversion, and abandon basic values would be to abandon the identity of the EU and possibly the very reason for its existence.

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