

EIN TF 5

Europe and the Near/Middle East

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I Introduction

Definition

In this paper, the Near/Middle East is taken to refer to: Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and the Arab Gulf States (that is, Afghanistan and Turkey are not considered).

Aims

A country by country survey of the region would show that most are in a state of crisis. The first aim of this paper is to sketch out the inter-related nature of these crises.

Despite the cross-cutting problems, however, international approaches tend to be fragmented. In Europe's case, the fragmentation is of more than one kind. When addressing the Middle East, the trans-Atlantic relationship is often fractured in practice. Within the Union itself, there often are important divergences. In certain cases the divergence may be actually desirable or just inevitable, but it is worth exploring ways of constructing more integrated approaches.

A third kind of fragmentation is perhaps noted more often in the Middle East itself than in Europe: the Union has several instruments and strategies geared towards the region – the Euro-Med process (which is intended to be largely multilateral), the Neighbourhood Policy (intended to be bilateral) and the Middle East Strategy. These multiple approaches give a certain flexibility, but the multiplicity has sometimes given rise to the perception, among Middle East diplomats, of insufficient coherence or clarity of intention. The perception may be mistaken, but where present it needs to be addressed.

So the second aim of this paper is to make proposals that would facilitate, where appropriate, a more integrated European policy towards the region's problems. The proposals take into account the respectively different roles that can be played by the Union and the European People's Party.

II Three arcs of crisis

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict of course spans beyond the disputed territory itself. The issue, in various and contradictory ways, sucks in most Arab States. For countries bordering territory, the

conflict is partly a matter of internal security, since popular feeling on the issue is strong and can react against a government that is perceived to be supporting the Palestinians too weakly. A significant proportion of the Jordanian population is Palestinian, or of Palestinian origin; there are Palestinian refugee camps in the Lebanon, and Palestinian migrant workers across the region.

Increasing tension between Sunnis and Shiites

There are increasing tensions between Sunnis and Shiites – an arc that takes us from Iran, through Iraq (where tensions have been exacerbated deliberately by some Sunni terrorists) and into the Lebanon (where the Shiite political-military group, Hizbollah, receives some \$300-500 million in aid from an increasingly belligerent Iran). Iran's nuclear programme is a source of apprehension for its neighbouring (predominantly Sunni Muslim) Gulf States.

Democracy movement

Democracy movements, of various and varying strengths, are to be found in several States in the region, from Egypt to the Gulf. They are the cause of the frequent oscillation of regimes between concessions and crackdowns. They are also not always easy to read, because while some activists are evidently campaigning for a liberal parliamentary democracy, other activists are Islamists, some radical, some not, whose commitment to democracy is more difficult to appraise – even for their fellow citizens, sometimes.

III Highlights

The three arcs of crisis highlight two features that may be considered important for the formulation of an integrated European approach to the region.

Combination of State and non-State actors

Each arc of crisis involves both State and non-State actors. Iran's increasing regional activity, for instance, is enabled by the collusion or partnership of non-State actors like Hamas and Hizbollah; the democracy movements naturally involve non-State actors pitted against regimes in control of the state apparatus; the multifaceted nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be understood without taking into account the various non-State actors.

Given the importance of their role, an integrated European policy will therefore need to address the various kinds of non-State actors.

The Lebanon

It is in the Lebanon that, uniquely, the three arcs of crisis coincide: Not only is there the democracy movement pitted against Syrian interference; the Shiite interests, at least as represented by Hizbollah, are increasingly diverging from Christian and Sunni interests and conceptions of the national common good; while the rivalry between Fatah and Hamas is being played out in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Lebanon.

This coincidence would make it very important for Europe urgently to engage the country, even if it were not experiencing the current violence. A successful engagement with the Lebanon is likely to have a wider regional effect. And the country itself has a number of features that perhaps make it easier to tackle, in some respects, than others: for example, it has a large, politically

assertive Christian minority, and its professional middle class is prominently active in the democracy movement (whereas in certain other States it appears more ambivalent about democracy, fearing an Islamist victory at the polls).

III Country by country approach

Because of the implications of many EU members on Middle East issues, UE has actually a strong opportunity to set a long-term policy in the Middle East. France is involved in the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty with the United States; Germany in one of the main partners of the proposal group on the Iranian nuclear issue.

EU is especially involved in the Middle East process in the Quartet with Russia, the United States and the UN. Concerning all these Middle East issues, EU has to be present in all the negotiations. Europeans also have to show a specific point of view together with an original policy specially based on long-term action. EU involvement should take place in 5 main issues:

- Peace process between Israel and the Palestinians;
- Support to Lebanese sovereignty and security, against Syrian threat;
- Implication on the Iranian nuclear issue to set a solution in accordance with international law;
- Propositions for a political and social project for Iraq;
- To tighten the links with Egypt and Jordan.

A. EU involvement in peace process into the Quartet.

During the last European summit in Brussels on June 16th, EU members decided to set on a specific program to help directly Palestinian people without passing through the official government led by Hamas. A special mechanism of health assistance already exists and is directly connected with PA presidency. According to Mrs Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU commissioner for foreign relations, European help to Palestinians should represent 250 millions Euros in 2006.

EU must also support any project for a viable and independent Palestinian on Gaza and Cisjordania, and Israel's unilateralism must be rejected. The Union should be more involved in advocating a return to the 1967 borders, accordingly to the Arab summit of Beirut in 2002. The wall of separation does not respect this settlement and has been condemned by the International Court of The Hague.

But EU must also defend Israel security, and Hamas must recognize Israel existence. Moreover, Israel should keep control of its eastern borders (in connection with Jordan and Palestinian Authority).

B. European support to Lebanese independence, security and prosperity.

Today, Lebanon is targeted by Israel because of the Hezbollah's involvement in Middle East conflict. Lebanon independence, freedom and stability have never been accepted by Syria nor Israel.

In fact, Tel Aviv and Damascus fully agree to squeeze Lebanese's authority. On the one hand, Israel wants to recreate a new Middle East according to its own and specific identity, with many ethnic and religious states. On the other hand, Syria's policy is actually dictated by Iran and its interests. The main issue is to fight Syrian and Iranian behaviour instead of breaking Lebanon, its people and its unity.

The Union has a special link with Lebanon, for Europe was a Phoenician princess...But Lebanese people is very close to EU principles, understand what democracy and human rights mean. Beirut is also a specific place for Mediterranean exchanges, and should become the new symbol of euro-Mediterranean partnership, the Barcelona process.

Syria has officially withdrawn its troops from Lebanon in April 2005. But thousands of intelligence agents stayed in Lebanon and many figures of "Beirut spring" have been assassinated (journalist Samir Kassir, former communist leader Georges Haoui, MP and editorialist Gebran Tuéni) or strongly injured (journalist May Chidiac, Minister of Defence Elias Murr), all members of the Christian community. Syria still refuses to set diplomatic relationships with Lebanon and to sign an agreement to establish definitely its borders with Lebanon, despite the resolution 1680 of the Security Council.

EU must put pressure on Syria. Europeans could propose their collaboration to establish the definitive borders between Lebanon and Syria. They also could set on a diplomatic initiative for the specific issue of Chebaa. EU must also refuse any peace project based on the implantation of Palestinians in Lebanon.

According to UN Security Council resolution 1559, all militias in Lebanon must be disarmed, and specially pro-Iranian and pro-Syrian Hezbollah, and also all Palestinian groups.

EU must also support all the resolutions since Rafic Hariri assassination, and must support the extension of international investigation to others murders and bomb attacks.

C. EU and the Iranian nuclear issue.

Europeans are strongly involved in Iranian issue. Mr Javier Solana has made many proposals to find an acceptable solution to every the different sides represented in this issue.

But the main point of view is to respect, first of all, the Non Proliferation Treaty. Iran is engaged in NPT since 1973 and must absolutely respects this settlement. Uranium enrichment must be stopped, as the German Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier said. EU must also support AEA resolution which condemn Iranian attitude.

But Europeans must also support NPT dispositions: Iran could have civil nuclear energy, but under absolute controlled of the 5 main atomic countries. Until now, Iran didn't sign up the additional protocol for international inspections which could allow this path of cooperation to be seriously evoked.

D. EU and Iraq reconstruction.

Final declaration of Brussels Summit in last June showed that Europeans are also ready to propose a large program for political, economic and social reforms in Iraq. One key starting point would be the designation by EU of a special Representative in this country.

Europeans should support a return of social interactions in Iraq. Christian minority must be specially protected because they have usually been involved in Iraq national solidarity. EU should also support stability in Iraq and fight any partition of the country. The Member States could propose mediation to support the resolution of delicate internal difficulties (Kurd question, Sunnites' place in the Iraqi State, respect of Christian minority...).

E. Special links with Egypt and Jordan.

Egypt and Jordan are actually threatened by Islamic pressure. But they are also members of the EUROMED partnership. How could EU help them to reform their political and economic system without destabilizing their societies?

Egypt is engaged in an Association agreement with European Union since 2001. Egypt government must respect a special clause about human rights and democracy. President Mubarak decided to increase the numbers of the seats concerning free elections for parliament. Muslims Brothers won an important part of them. The question is that even before democracy, it's time to stand up a real "Bill of Rights" concerning human rights, minorities respect, women's rights, pluralism and main liberties. EU policy in the Middle East must not repeat the errors of Great Middle East principles, which insist on primary condition to set on democracy.

In Egypt, Copts, the main Christian community – more than 10% of Egyptian people- are actually threatened by Islamic violence and Egypt authorities do not really defend them. EU must, especially in the Middle East, defend the right of the minorities. Euro-Mediterranean agreements must be connected with such settlements.

Jordan has also signed up an agreement with European Union in November 1997. In June 2004, in connection with the European Neighbourhood Policy, Jordan and EU formed 9 specific comities (trade, agriculture, science and technology, social affairs, human rights and democracy, energy and environment, transports, reforms). Under the leadership of King Abdallah II, Jordan is actually involved in a vast program of political, financial and social reforms.

With Lebanon, Jordan has a specific vocation to become one of the main partners of EU policy in the Middle East, because its authorities perfectly understand European values.

IV Proposals for the EPP

- Agricultural liberalisation in trade agreements with the EU. (To increase employment prospects of youth in the region, particularly the Mediterranean part, and hence combat the attractions of radicalism. This proposal has been made by, among others, former External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten.)
- Positive conditionality in EU agreements that rewards good behaviour, and not sanctions against bad behaviour. (The aim is to support democracy activists in countries whose regimes have a wavering commitment to political reform.)

- An EU broadcasting network aimed at the region. (Several Member States conduct public (or cultural) diplomacy in the region, and have gathered considerable experience. But there is a value added by having a European dimension to public diplomacy. There is role here that can also be played by the European Parliament: for example, the EPP can routinely host journalists and civil society leaders in Brussels, or support those of its MEPs that want to do so.)
- The EPP should help set up and participate in a regional (i.e. Euro-Middle Eastern) network for democrats, which will have two principal aims: first, support for the formation of democracy activists in the region; second, to explore ways to develop the transparent governance of the Euro-Middle Eastern region.
- More routine dialogue with counterparts in the US.