

The European Union: a promoter of peace, development and dialogue.

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[Introduction]

The European Union is a profoundly political project which has attempted to achieve important political goals through economic means. After centuries of confrontation, culminating in two world wars, the founding fathers of the Union tried to bind together France and Germany, only 6 years after the end of the most devastating conflict, in an act of unparalleled political reconciliation, through the establishment of a coal and steel community.

Fifty years and quite a few achievements later, the *raison d'être* of the European Union can still be described with just one word: peace. Two generations of Europeans have by now been brought up in times of peace – in fact they take the absence of war for granted.

The early promoters of Europe had just one concern: to ban the demons of war from the European continent. The method was a new one : Cooperation and dialogue among nations, resolving their problems through common institutions, in a relationship no longer built on strength but on mutual respect and equal rights and the rule of law.

By dismantling barriers against trade and the movement of people, goods and money, Europe has created a successful single market with its own single currency. It has become the mightiest trading bloc and the most significant economic player on the world stage and provides more than 60% of all development assistance to poorer countries.

This evolution obviously widens the scope of responsibilities for the EU in international affairs, especially since over the years, there has been a growing recognition that there is a gap between our role as the largest trading block in the world and the role we are playing politically.

I consider it naïve to believe that the vicious demons, which brought war and pain have been chased away forever. The atrocities of Bosnia and Kosovo should remind us of the looming danger - and our responsibility - in Europe and elsewhere.

While European Union countries share their sovereignty in many areas, they have not abandoned it altogether to some great supranational entity. In other words, we are not witnessing the creation of the United States of Europe. The members of the Union remain sovereign states. But they have chosen to work together, sometimes supranationally, sometimes inter-governmentally. In other words, sometimes we act as Europe (for instance in the Common Agricultural Policy), sometimes as Europeans (in foreign relations) .

Nevertheless there has been a growing recognition that we can accomplish more in the external field when we work together than when we operate as separate national entities.

European leaders clearly understood this during the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s where a quarter of a million people were killed, millions became refugees and we had to witness the grim reality of mass graves and ethnic cleansing.

This painful experience was the main reason for the establishment of a Common European Foreign and Security Policy through which the member States of the Union are trying to move from a foreign policy of declarations full of strong nouns and weak verbs to a policy of real commitment.

Be aware we are not establishing a super state. There will be, for the foreseeable future, as many foreign ministers and foreign ministries as there are member countries, all with their different experiences and different perspectives. What we are establishing is not a single but a common policy.

Because the European Union and its political, economic and social benefits are the result of the unique way of so many sovereign countries working together to ensure peace and welfare for their citizens, Europe has the moral obligation to try and share this pattern of behaviour in international relations. This is done through the process of enlargement of the Union towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. On a wider scale we try to achieve it through agreements negotiated with other countries or groups of countries, through free trade and political dialogue and our commitment for a multipolar world.

Since preservation of peace was and is at the heart of the European project, the Union has a significant role to play as a promoter of peace, dialogue and development. Together the countries of Europe have the combined force to make the difference on the world stage.

Take the provision of development assistance, an area in which the EU countries are the largest contributor.

Spent properly, this assistance can make a real difference. Like in the Middle East where EU support for the Palestinian Authority has not only provided essential services in health and education, but also ensured the continuing existence of the Palestinian Authority.

The EU is the most important trading block in the world alongside the US. And nowhere has its increasing power and influence been more evident than at Doha. Described by one reporter as “the major driving force on world trade”, the EU succeeded in forging more links between trade and environmental issues than anyone believed possible, achieving a round which focused above all on sustainable development. We have been working efficiently to rebalance the scales in favour of the poorest, a step on which we can build on in the coming years.

But here we come to a conceptual argument which I want to address. Security in a globalizing world is not only about military capacity. For the Union, we have tried to develop a whole set of rules to secure a high level of security. The same pattern should apply to international relations. While the agenda of international meetings continues to focus on the traditional problems of foreign policy, more and more foreign ministers find themselves faced with issues which are rather new to the foreign policy debate. They have to address the relationship between security and the dark sides of globalisation. They have to discuss the illicit trade in drugs, money laundering, trafficking in human beings, international crime, terrorism, state failure. These are all problems which can only be resolved through efficient international cooperation. To tackle these problems we need international agreements, international rules and international institutions which can implement and police them.

We can no longer think of security in military terms or simply in terms of defending state borders. We have seen the widespread development of nuclear weapons as well as of weapons of mass destruction. We experience the proliferation of other threats such as environmental degradation; disease, famine and migration that transcend state borders. Capital moves around the world, electronic communications transmit ideas. Above all this lies a growing recognition that human rights are universally valid. Put all these things together and you recognize that no nation state however mighty, can impose its will. Not even the greatest countries can do everything on their own. What is required is multilateral cooperation? I believe that the main role of the European Union in international affairs must be to strongly advocate this multilateralism. The European Union is the best example of institutionalised multilateralism, of the sharing of sovereignty for a common purpose.

We Europeans are aware, that we cannot have development without peace. Most of the poorest nations in the world are either in the midst of an armed conflict or have only recently emerged from it.

At the same time we know that we cannot achieve peace without development.

It's this conviction that led us in Doha to insist upon a new WTO round, that would make the world trading system fairer for the poor. We not only want to give them improved access to the markets in richer countries. We want to ensure as well that they can take advantage of this market opening.

At the same time we want to increase development assistance. That is what we pledged to do at Monterrey. We want to reach a bargain with poor countries that we will provide them with more assistance in return for their commitment to higher standards of governance.

I said just a few moments ago that we are not trying to build a European super state, and this applies to all aspects of our societies. The different languages and cultures of Europe will not vanish into a common melting pot, just as national interest and different sensibilities will continue to prevail. The nations of Europe are not worried about their specific cultural identity. The strength of Europe is diversity and solidarity, not the search of hegemony or cultural domination.

Take the example of my country, in fact the smallest member of the Union. Surrounded by Belgium, France and Germany it has hardly 2600 square kilometers and a population of about 470.000 people, a country, that since the early Middle Ages has participated in both the German and French cultural spheres and still developed and kept an identity of its own.

Nowadays Luxembourg holds the highest percentage of foreign residents of all the countries of the European Union. The city of Luxembourg counts 53 % of non-Luxembourgers, divided into 118 different nationalities. As seat of a certain number of European institutions, the capital has become the home for many European officials working there. Its vocation as international banking center has attracted many foreign banks and a qualified working force. This massive presence has not given rise to major conflicts or xenophobia. On the contrary, most of my fellow citizens would probably claim that life in Luxembourg has become richer, thanks to the cultural and material input of those immigrants.

Looking at our history, you will learn that Luxembourg developed over the centuries into a strategically crucial fortress. This did not only bring us prosperity, but successive political, economic and cultural domination by foreign powers. Our strategic position in the heart of Europe brought us much suffering in the past as it helped bring prosperity in the second half of the 20th century.

When the fortress of Luxembourg was destroyed in 1867 and the country declared neutral, Luxembourgers thought that they would be able to concentrate on their economic and political development. But neutrality was a mere illusion. It was violated in the first and in the second world war.

Wary of foreign occupation and instability, wary of being the constant theatre of military actions, Luxembourgers no longer wanted to be witnesses and victims. They seized the opportunity to become actors in the extraordinary adventure of European unification.

The post-war Luxembourg government was convinced that it was only by enshrining the country firmly into a whole network of organizations, that Luxembourg could guarantee its sovereignty and security and not to forget, its access to larger markets.

Luxembourg also has the reputation of being an honest broker and active compromise-builder between partners. Being small and embedded in a multicultural and multilingual environment (- in fact, Luxembourgish a language of German origin, is the national language, French the language mainly used in administration while German is the third commonly spoken language-) you are more open and thus more sensitive to others. This openness implies that you can better understand the point of view of your partners and come up with solutions, which are acceptable for all sides concerned.

These specific features of Luxembourg, as well as our European commitment explain why my country was grateful for the Iranian initiative to launch the project of Dialogue among civilizations.

To put things right : we do not see the dialogue between cultures as a dialogue between two distinct poles, with, on one side the European Union, part of the Western world with a mainly Christian heritage and on the other side the Islamic world. This cliché overlooks the complexity of the situation.

The developing culture in Europe encompasses all civilizations. We have, in the European Union, millions of citizens or residents who recognize in themselves both the values of Europe and those of Islam.

We should therefore try to avoid presenting the dialogue amongst civilizations as a dialogue between North and South or as mainly a dialogue between religions. This dialogue has to be established within societies as well. It calls for the participation of all, particularly women and young people and of all forces of civil society. The basic aim is a better understanding and the promotion of tolerance on the basis of universally held values and of international law.

European and Islamic countries have shared a great deal of history, much of it turbulent. We have learnt much from one another and our respective civilizations bear the imprint of our cultural interaction.

I am convinced that we can make dialogue a key factor in calming tensions in our globalizing world. The tragic events that took place in New York on September 11, reinforce the relevance of my conviction.

But let us not deceive ourselves. This dialogue of civilizations entails responsibilities and the observance of certain rules, not only at the personal level but also in the public domain and in political life. It must be based on the voluntary commitment of individuals and societies to respect a set of essential principles and rights. It is therefore a democratic and pluralist process that presupposes a respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The dialogue of civilizations requires that we reconcile the universality of rights and the diversity of the human condition.

I am deeply convinced that learning to know the cultures of other people, and listening to what they have to say, is a way of dispelling hatred, ignorance and mutual distrust and helps to build peace. We should therefore learn what each culture owes to the others. We should at the same time recognize that civilizations are not immutable, that they continuously change and redefine themselves according to circumstances and new interactions. The need for the dialogue of civilizations results from the fact that people and cultures cannot exist in isolation. Without dialogue, cultures and civilizations decline and are condemned to disappear. They have a vital need of contact, innovation, interaction, exchange. We need a dialogue founded on equality, on dignity and above all on tolerance.

None of us are qualified to give a truly impartial view of our own or of the other cultures. Our systems of thought are conditioned by past and present experiences as well as by the faith of past and present ages. All this risks to distort our vision.

The real challenge as rational people is to acknowledge that our view is partial and to do what we can to avoid prejudice and misconception.

Especially the events of September 11 and the international fight against terror, have brought back many of the old distorted images.

Some in the West link the atrocities in the United States, with suicide bombings in Israel, abuse of women and minorities in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and the calls to arms of extremist Muslims.

Meanwhile, a similar process is in operation in parts of the Islamic world, with some people ready to describe Western culture as subversive and Godless. Some link anti-Jewish rhetoric with memories of every conflict in which Christians and Muslims have fought on opposing sides, right back to the Crusades, to produce fantasies of a Western conspiracy against Muslims everywhere.

When speaking about dialogue and a better understanding between cultures and religions, we should therefore begin by promoting a closer knowledge of our shared history, made up of a mixture of positive exchanges as well as conflicts. Dialogue as I understand it, means seeking a common understanding of those values that will guide us through the twenty-first century.

In Western countries we praise ourselves sometimes on the tolerance of our societies today. Some people tend to attribute this to the rise of a secular society or the absence (at least the minor role) of religion in contrast to the apparently dominant role of religion in Islamic countries.

A closer look reveals that our western societies are by far not as secular as we sometimes like to think. Our laws and ways of thinking have deep roots in the Christian tradition.

On the other hand we should never forget that western societies have given birth, at different moments, to such intolerant ideologies as communism, colonialism or nazism.

It is important that we all question the commonly held perception. It's the only way to understand the dangers of generalizations which lead to that sort of common prejudices on which builds Samuel Huntington's book : "The Clash of Civilizations".

Still, it is legitimate to try and identify points of difference between different faiths, as well as points of similarity, because understanding what people believe in, is of help while trying to understand how people behave.

Extremist fanaticism, which denies the humanity of other human beings, can never be accepted in a world built on diversity.

Extremism can appear in many forms, and has over time. None of our civilizations, countries or religions has been immune.

The great challenge in the years to come is simple: it is that of "humanizing globalization". We must recognize that the cultural, spiritual and linguistic diversity of humanity, far from constituting an obstacle to dialogue, is a guarantee of its richness.

How to succeed in this important task? What can we do to make the dialogue between and within cultures and civilizations a success?

I see four conditions to it.

First, we have to strengthen the importance of justice and solidarity in international relations. Without a strong commitment to justice and solidarity, to the real needs of people, to improving their daily situation, the concept of dialogue will remain an empty shell.

Secondly

The dialogue of people and cultures asks for the respect of the other and a clear understanding of ourselves. To respect other persons is to know them, not to perceive them as radically different without any possibility of identification.

Third

Dialogue between cultures needs humility. Every nation, every civilization has the right to be proud of what it has given to humanity. But each and every culture has experienced at one moment or another the darker sides of our human nature. We all have succumbed to intolerance, hatred

Therefore we all have to look at ourselves from a new and different angle, we have to find the force to confront our past to enable a better future.

Finally

We shouldn't be afraid to acknowledge universal ethical values.

No nation, no religion, no achievements can be built on the denial of humanity and human rights. To stand up for the rights of each and every man, woman or child is to emphasize the link of solidarity that unites all mankind.

I thank you for your attention.