

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST¹

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My aim in this presentation will be to review the political problems and prospects for enhancing bi-lateral and multi-lateral cooperation in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean; and in the Middle East area:

Let me draw your attention to the fact that the region in traditionally accepted geographic definitions may extend, from Italy to Central Asia. But for the purposes of our debate I will limit myself to Eastern Mediterranean and cover part of the Mashrik region.

First let me refer to the basic burning interstate problems: These are the Israeli, Palestinian conflict and the Turkish-Greek dispute over Cyprus and the Aegean.

It is clear that in Palestine, the quest of the Palestinians to establish their boundaries and independent state, faces an ambitious and sometimes aggressive interpretation of Zionism. As it stands in traditional Zionism, Zion's borders cover a large area and are utopic, under the current international conditions or for the means available to the state of Israel. Depending on which political system is in power the desire in Israel to reach an understanding with the Arabs ebbs and tides.

It becomes therefore necessary to ask the question that has hitherto been left unanswered by Israeli body-politics: What are the ultimate boundaries of the state of Israel? To whom the occupied territories belong? Don't Arabs have a right over Jerusalem? From Camp David to Oslo and other negotiations and agreements, these questions have remained unanswered or blurred temporary solutions offered.

It is true that the limited habitable regions of Palestine are difficult to share. Already the map of West Bank is full of spots indicating ever increasing Israeli settlements.

Naturally, this situation makes it very difficult to define and agree on two separate state boundaries. Run by politicians devoted to the conservative interpretation of Zionism and Palestinians who would like to obtain their legitimate right for statehood and safe borders, and with asymmetric power factors it would be extremely difficult to see how can a fair solution be

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achieved. (From the word fair, I mean equitable.) Any cease-fire imposed from outside or arrived at as a result of mutual exhaustion may be shortlived unless, of course, people's of Palestine and Israel convince themselves on the fact that they are condemned by fate to live together. Since, this modern age can not tolerate apartheid anymore; any modus vivendi to be established will have to be based, given the current demographic geography, on equality and close cooperation. What Germany, EU, or Turkey can do in this respect, is I am afraid fairly limited. But one could keep demonstrating to Israel which holds the power to destroy and to build, that conciliation, peace and cooperation is the ultimate means for the security and acceptance of Israel as partner by its neighbours in its homeland. Needless to say that we must also continue to provide whatever economic relief we can to Palestinians great proportion of whom are refugees in poverty in their homeland or in neighbouring countries.

The second dispute in Eastern Mediterranean is the Greek-Turkish one over the Aegean Sea rights and the future of the Island of Cyprus. The latter dispute has gradually been turning into an EU-Turkish issue thanks to the skillful Greek maneuvering in EU using the means at their disposal as a member of the organization.

In this respect, I have brought copies of one of my articles which should complement this statement. The détente or second track cooperation between Turkey and Greece, has greatly dissipated the atmosphere of gloom and the lack of confidence and may eventually create an environment feasible for tackling the main issues of dispute in the Aegean. For the time being both Greece and Turkey are maintaining their own positions with regard to multiple issues disputed in the Aegean and yet both sides are trying not to aggravate the situation.

I do not want to get involved in Arab-Arab issues; but let me refer to Turkey's bi-lateral political relations with the countries of the region.

Our relations with Egypt are continuing satisfactorily and there is a general similarity of our views. With Israel, since 1995 we have been having a military cooperation and increased economic exchanges. However, the recent increased tension between Palestinian & Jewish people and the bloodshed have very much disturbed Turkish public opinion which insist on the continuation of dialogue between the two parties.

Since the Öcalan debacle, Turkey's relations with Syria is gradually improving and a neighbourly atmosphere is returning to our relations. We hope that this trend will continue.

Iraq presents a significant problem in our foreign policy. While our approach towards Baghdad shows little difference from European countries in general, the developments in Northern Iraq where the creation of a Kurdish State, condoned by many Western countries, is considered as a threat against the unity of Turkey itself and against the unity of Iraq within its recognized borders.

Having referred to some of the salient points of dispute I must go back to the burning issue of terrorism in Eastern Mediterranean and see if we can develop cooperative atmosphere in this dangerous field. Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in Eastern Mediterranean region. If we only go back as far as the end of the Second World War, we have witnessed first the Jewish terrorism against British targets by such secret organizations as Ingern Zvei Leumi, Haganah and many others. Once Israel became a state we saw the rise of Palestinian terrorism aircraft hijacking, Behaa Valley becoming an international center for training terrorists. In 1950's we saw the Greek Cypriot terrorism of EOKA led by Archbishop Makarios.

Today with the demise of the Soviet Union particularly in the Arab countries and other areas where Arab Islamic cultural influence is high, we observe the dominant socialist philosophy hiding itself behind Islamism. Islamism has furthermore become an ideology resisting or challenging the current globalisation, democracy and increasing value of the individual and protection of his rights against the state and the society. In Arab-Israeli conflict where the Arabs have been the losers in several wars they had against Israel, strongly supported by the US. The asymmetric capabilities and power have lead some factions and states to resort to terrorism, not as an instrument of victory but of vengeance and moral satisfaction.

Naturally it would be desirable to eliminate the root causes of terrorism by assuring everyone equal rights and provide all the measures of protection. But this does not give the right to protect and give material or moral support to people who have committed act of terrorism or who have become members of terrorist organisations that may claim that their aim is to advance their nationalism or to fight for their freedom.

This brings us face to face with a moral problem. Can we condone or abate or even support an act of terrorism if it is done to advance a cause which we might consider as lofty. In other words, do we have the luxury of subscribing to the Machiavellian dictum that "The aim legitimizes the means used for its attainment." Unfortunately, the democratic countries of the West have been unable to get out of this dilemma when terrorism have hurt, not themselves but others. This brings up the necessity of developing asylum criteria that should be universally accepted. The people who have been involved in terrorism by committing the act or by being members of a terrorist organisation should not be granted asylum as political refugees. In other words, the acts of terrorism reaching grotesque proportions as we observe, must deter the entire civilized world from considering another country's terrorist as freedom fighters. This is not only a criticism of West European countries, as it is a universal phenomenon.

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