



Speeches & Interviews

Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, at the Berlin Security Conference – 11th Congress on European Security and Defence, entitled “Europe and its Neighbours – Common Responsibility for a Stable Continent”, Berlin, 27-28 November - 27/11/2012

Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address the opening session of the Berlin Security Conference, and, at the outset, I would like to congratulate and thank the organizers of this important international event, for giving us this opportunity to discuss some significant strategic issues, notably those related to European security and defence. Events like the Berlin Security Conference provide a venue for the much needed political dialogue, through which we can synthesize ideas in order to practically address the issues facing the current global reality.

I would especially like to underline the timely nature of the general subject of this congress - “Europe and its neighbours – common responsibility for a stable continent” - which reflects the current reality and the security situation both in Europe and its neighbourhood. This reality constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity for each and every member of the Union and the international community to work in a collaborative manner towards creating a stable, secure and peaceful environment.

I would like to begin my intervention, which will attempt to assess the ways the EU can address the emerging regional and global security challenges and better define its role in the international system as a global actor, by focusing on the Southern Neighbourhood of the European Union and particularly on the area of the Mediterranean. During the past two years we have witnessed dramatic upheavals in the form of events which have come to be known as the “Arab Spring”. Whether one agrees or not with the description that these events were indeed historic, the fact remains that they have created new challenges and conditions in the area bordering the European Union.

What is certain is that the Arab Spring has also come to embody the hopes, the dreams and aspirations of peoples for greater freedom, for dignity, and for better and fairer distribution of economic opportunities and resources. As such, these events have created a pressing need for the European Union to work hand-in-hand with its partners in managing the emerging geopolitical challenges facing a region of immense development potential that still remains to be realized.

In this context, I would like to specifically mention Egypt, where two weeks ago a meeting of EU and League of Arab States Foreign Ministers took place in an effort to address together the various problems, crises and challenges which Europe and the Arab world face together. In parallel, and in recognition of the importance that development and economics play in all efforts to both stabilize and move forward with the kinds of social, political and rule of law changes that we in Europe would like to see take root in the countries of the Arab Spring, a broad gathering of business people, civil society and other organizations came together under the auspices of an EU-Egypt Task Force, precisely to seek ways of actively and practically improving conditions on the ground. We very much hope that these two gatherings have served both a symbolic and a practical purpose: that they have indicated the seriousness and importance with which the EU is approaching and engaging its Southern Neighbourhood, but also the EU's commitment to persevere in tackling the difficulties ahead, even in the midst of its own economic, and at times, existential difficulties.

Of course, Syria was also very much on the agenda, as well as the Middle East Peace Process, both proving explosive in their own right, and posing their own set of challenges to the stability of the Mediterranean region.

Cyprus, due to its proximity to the area, is highly concerned by the events in the region. The Arab world in

general, and the Middle East in particular, has been our geographic neighbour and historic partner and everything that happens there has direct consequences for us. There is no other choice for us than to work towards the stability, peace, security and economic development of these key partners. In this respect, the Cyprus Presidency has designated “Europe in the World-Closer to its neighbours” as one of its four priorities and has placed special emphasis on the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, in order to enhance the relations with Mediterranean partners. Towards that end, we have repeatedly granted our full support for the High Representative’s efforts, where the EU has committed to supporting the democratic transformation of our southern partners.

Meanwhile, we have also prepared, in cooperation with our partners in the EU, but also other countries, contingencies for dealing with the possibility of a humanitarian crisis which requires the evacuation of thousands of foreign citizens. Cyprus, due to its proximity to the area, has time and again had to undertake this role, most recently in the 2006 crisis in Lebanon. In parallel we are also active in delivering humanitarian aid to the thousands of refugees from the Syrian conflict, in our case mostly to the camps in Jordan.

But I also want to touch on something else that is happening in our immediate neighbourhood, which I believe highlights proactive ways in which stability and security can be built, and cooperation and development fostered. I am referring to the recent, offshore finds in the Eastern Mediterranean of substantial deposits of hydrocarbons. Obviously competition over sources of fuel deposits has on a number of occasions been the cause of conflict and crises during the 20th century.

The Cypriot experience has been different. In nearly every case, with the single exception of one, all our neighbours have recognized the developments to be positive, and are cooperating with us on all levels. We believe that this is the result of the way we have approached the very sensitive issue of energy resources and sovereign rights. From the onset we have worked in line with international law and conventions, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and embarked on an open and honest dialogue with our neighbours. It appears that this is an approach that is both appreciated and, more importantly, which works.

It is obvious to all our interlocutors that Cyprus has much to offer in a region where conflict and friction is the norm. Being a member state of the EU is obviously an important consideration. It not only adds to Cyprus’ commitment to international law, but because the EU in general is perceived to be a stabilizing factor in the area, by extension, Cyprus is perceived to be one of the conduits of this EU effect. Second, Cyprus is both small, and therefore not a threat, but also has a history of good relations with its neighbours. These elements, the adherence to law, the stability effect and the history of good neighbourly relations is helping us foster the kind of regional cooperation that is necessary for the enormous investment that is needed for the eventual productive exploitation of the natural wealth off our shore.

We are genuinely hopeful that all our neighbours will come to appreciate the positive aspects of this process. It will generate the kind of development and economic activity that will ensure prosperity for future generations for all the countries in the area, and will also attract specialized labour from other European countries as well.

Since July 2012, Cyprus has been presiding over the Council of the European Union. The Presidency has been a great challenge for us, not only because we are one of the smallest member states of the Union, but also because this is a particularly difficult time for Europe.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU set itself a new level of ambition. Despite the fact that the provisions of the Treaty have reduced the role of the rotating Presidency in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), we have, nevertheless, missed no opportunity to assist the European External Action Service in carrying out its initiatives and activities, thus contributing to the efforts of the European Union to provide a more coherent voice in the international scene.

Cyprus supports the enhancement of the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union because it increases the autonomy of the Union, solidifies the ties between its member states and provides a platform on which further integration and alignment of interests can be based for the purposes of exporting peace and stability internationally.

Within the broader framework of its support for the autonomous development of the CSDP, Cyprus has aimed at actively participating in CSDP missions and operations. Despite the grave national security challenges and threats facing Cyprus since 1974, we have participated and will continue to participate in

EU-led missions.

In times of severely constrained national budgets, Cyprus - much like everyone else present here - attempts to bridge security and economic needs. In doing so, Cyprus actively takes part in the unfolding debate regarding military capability development, with the aim of contributing to the discussion on how to address the need for more affordable and deployable capabilities, relevant to the CSDP missions and operations.

Also, through the appropriate actions, the CSDP can be a driving force in the area of economic development through the better management of our technological resources and know-how. In this context, Cyprus supports the increasing of the cooperation with the Task Force on Defence Industries and Markets set up by the European Commission and supports the identification of ways through which all member states could fit into this process.

The nature of this delegate discussion calls for transparency which can come about through trust and confidence between the member states, which in turn require political courage and leadership. In short, there is a need to match available and envisaged capabilities with the Union's strategic objectives with the aim at serving the Union's own interests, as these are shaped and adjusted from the developments regionally and internationally.

Furthermore, Cyprus supports the work of the European Defence Agency in this field, and in particular in the area of pooling and sharing which should aim not at reducing defence expenditure and weakening the ability of the European Union to operate autonomously, but to make better use of available resources for the benefit of security export. Coupled with the vast experience of the European Union and its individual member states in the domain of humanitarian and development assistance, defence capabilities tie the "security mix" together thus adding context to the comprehensive approach that we all advocate.

It has been said, more than once, that nothing comprehensive is comprehensive if it is subject to interpretation since the very meaning of the comprehensive approach is to bring under one banner all tools and means available for the purpose of implementing effectively each strategy we frame for each particular challenge we face. As a result, if the CSDP is to remain a pivotal policy instrument for the Union, it requires the collaboration of all its interlocutors for the benefit, first and foremost, of the Union itself.

The December 2013 European Council discussion on defence and military capabilities can provide specific strategic orientation to the development of the CSDP, identify trends and threats, define objectives and add value to our joint human and material investments in the area of security and defence in order to ensure that the European Union remains capable, competitive, coherent, cooperative and credible actor on the international scene.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my congratulations to the organizers and to welcome an open and fruitful discussion among the participants.

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