

ELIAMEP Annual Lecture
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Keynote Speaker: Lord Patten of Barnes

SPEECH

Ambassadors, Professor, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, can I say what a privilege it is to be invited to give this lecture for your distinguished foundation. As the Chancellor of a University which has long prided itself on its scholarship concerning the great civilization of which this country was the heart, I am now very keen that we should develop a similar reputation in the social sciences, concerning Greece today and the region today. So, it's a particular pleasure for me to be with you.

When I was a young British Minister, the civil servant who was head of my department was a poet and a translator. I can remember him, one day, showing me, rather shyly, some of the translations, which he had done of Cavafy.

Ever since, I've read and re-read translations of Cavafy, in the editions added by Professor George Seferis. I believe - and it is not a very original remark - that Cavafy is one of the great poets of public affairs, who has invariably useful insights into political activities.

When I was Governor of Hong Kong, I read more than once, Cavafy's great poem on the Greek Colony and I think that many of us, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, read and re-read again his magnificent poem, "Waiting for the Barbarians".

Well, here is an example of serendipity. It was in 2003 with the Danish Presidency of the European Union and I went with the Danish Foreign Minister to Washington to discuss the so called Road Map for Peace in the Middle East.

It was a European initiative, not an American initiative. In particular, it had been drafted mainly in the Danish Foreign Ministry. We were received enthusiastically by Colin Powell at the State Department.

We were received perfectly politely, though more coolly, by President Bush in the White House. And we were received rather more opaquely by Vice President Cheney.

The Americans insisted on making some amendments to the Road Map, perfectly reasonably, as in due course did the Russians and the UN, the other members of the so called "quartet" which since it covered the European Union, was actually made up of six people.

I recall my suspicion, when the President at our meeting in the White House said that he enthusiastically accepted a Road Map for the Middle East. I wondered whether I was a little too prickly about the use of the indefinite, rather than the definite article.

Anyway, I set off home and on the plane, I took out of my briefcase the Hogarth press copy of Cavafy. And here is the serendipity. I read, I couldn't remember having read it before, his poem "Trojans":

"Our efforts are those of men prone to disaster.

Our efforts are like those of the Trojans [...]

We think we will change our luck, by being resolute and daring

So we move outside, ready to fight.

But when the big crisis comes

Our boldness and resolution vanish.

Our spirit falters, paralysed.

And we sanny around the walls.

Trying to save ourselves, by running away".

Would it be unfair to caricature European policy on the Middle East like that? Well, perhaps, just a little. It isn't of course easy to corral 15, let alone, 25 or 27 European Union member states, in a common approach to the problems of the Middle East, not least since our policy, our proposals and approach is understandably still shadowed by a sense of guilt, of our own awful contribution in Europe to the creation of the state of Israel.

Bragging about enlightened European values, doesn't bare much comparison with European behaviour, in the first half of the last century.

Certainly, there was no subject during my five and a bit years, as European Commissioner, that we discussed more than the relationship between Israel and Palestine. We discussed it literally for breakfast, for lunch and for dinner, and during the gaps in-between.

Visits to the region were made, to the point of exhaustion. Insults were endured. I remember Amr Moussa's, previous lecturer here, referring on one occasion to the 'quartet trois" and it was pretty clear who the "trois" were. Communiqués were drafted, hands were wrung. Certainly Palestine and Israel didn't want for attention.

Other issues in the region received rather less attention, though the path to peace in Jerusalem was said in 2002 and 2003 to lie through Baghdad, a prediction as dangerously dim-witted as any made about the invasion of Iraq.

We didn't actually like to mention Iraq much in polite discussions in Brussels, apart as I recall, from one meeting of this Council called during the Greek Presidency. But on the whole, Iraq in 2003 and 2004 was like an elephant in the Council Chamber. We used to tip toe around it, pretending it wasn't there.

I want to start with two questions. Why should there have been, ideally, a distinctive European policy on the Middle East and especially on Palestine and Israel? And secondly why was there never an effective policy and why is there none today?

Attempts to create a common foreign and security policy rather than simply a method for promoting political cooperation, and for drafting communiqués full of strong nouns and weak verbs, on everything under the sun go back to our humiliations in the Balkans, during the course of which, over 220.000 men, women and children in Bosnia, lost their lives.

Europe at the time couldn't make up its mind whether we wanted to prevent the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, whether we wanted to promote the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, or whether we wanted to pretend that nothing much was happening there.

So, humiliatingly, what America refused to do (recall Secretary Baker's memorable phrase about not "having a dog in that fight") was far more significant, than what Europe was prepared to do.

That we argued in the run up to the Amsterdam treaty, shouldn't never happen again. Our resolve was strengthened by the sense that the new world that seemed to be emerging after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and of Russia's Central European and Central Asian Empire, required Europe to play a more prominent role.

We should shoulder, it was argued, some of the responsibilities, largely carried on its own by the United States. We identified ourselves, not in my judgment wholly correctly, as economic giants but political pygmies.

So, we established in the treaty the common foreign and security policy, not the single policy. We have a single market, supported by a single European Act, some of you have a single currency, but no one ever suggested a single foreign and security policy.

Foreign policy, security policy, goes right to the heart of what it means to be a nation state. And even though we have accepted quite properly a large amount of supranationalism, in the environment and trade for example, we are still individual nation states, ceding sovereignty in

particular areas, we are not units of a European super-state, to whom sovereignty is ceded by a federal, supranational body.

In some areas, our common foreign and security policy worked very well. I believe that enlargement was the most effective foreign policy that Europe has pursued.

The prospect of membership of the European Union underpinned democratic and economic reforms after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It helped to give us a stable neighborhood. It's not a task which in my judgment is completed, as all those of us who support eventual Turkish membership (after appropriate and inevitably long-running negotiations) would argue.

Elsewhere, getting governments to work together on the international stage was a good deal more difficult. The problem wasn't just created by having two member states which are permanent members of the Security Council and which are nuclear powers.

I think the problem went much more widely than that, even though all member states in my judgment would accept that we make more impact in political matters when we can work together. And I think that France and Britain, in their more enlightened moments, would accept that too.

So we should have a common policy on the Middle East. But it needs to be a common policy that doesn't just produce the lowest common denominator, a rather fragile staging post on a way to a real policy.

The Road Map was a very good starting point. We agreed with what the wisest of kings wrote, thousands of years ago "there is a time for slaying and a time for healing, a time for war and a time for peace".

If there was to be "healing", if there was to be "peace", it was essential to move on from an espousal of confidence building measures, with no final declared position, and with progress dependent on one step by one side being necessary before the other side would take a step itself.

Confidence-building tended to produce more bloodshed than confidence. The Road Map to Peace was different. There were precise steps for each side to take. They were to be time-tabled. But the principal breakthrough was the proposal that the steps taken by one side, should not have to wait for the steps taken by the other. The process depended on both sides leaping together. We called it parallelism, not sequentialism.

Now, the Road Map, (and I repeat, it was principally a European and Danish creation), was not perfect. Parts of it I disagreed with myself.

The second stage of the process, to be reached within a year, included Palestinian acceptance of a state with temporary borders. I never thought that sensible.

I don't believe it's ever going to be possible (and I doubt whether it's desirable) to get the Palestinians to accept a quasi-state with quasi-borders, but with final borders still to be determined.

However, even if it was not perfect, the Road Map was better than anything else. But it never stood a chance.

The week that we first arrived to Washington to discuss it, the President announced the appointment of Elliot Abrams, as his Chief Advisor in the National Security Council on Palestine and Israel. And ever since then, it seems to me that Mr. Abrams has seen the American national interest, although through the prism of an inhabitant of one of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank.

Perhaps one of those suburbs of East Jerusalem, now marching across the West Bank with barriers, fences, and roads that can't be used by Arabs, all the way sooner or later to the Dead Sea.

The Road Map is, to borrow from a famous British comedy sketch, a "dead parrot". There is no peace process. There is simply a process. The Quartet comes, the Quartet goes. Sometimes it seems to me that European policy in the Middle East is simply to have another meeting of the Quartet. I guess that somebody, sometime, will have to wonder whether we shouldn't save on the air-fares, save the carbon footprint.

Now, you may think this is a little too critical, too pessimistic. But just add up the bodies, since this peace process began. The victims in Israel of the terrible suicide bombings, the victims in Israel of the unforgivable rocket attacks. The victims of the targeted assassinations of Arabs. Is it no longer murder, if the state does it? Do we make up the rule of law and western values, as we go along? How would it have been if during the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland and in Britain in the 1970's and 1980's, the British Armed Forces had gone down to Dublin and shot a few IRA leaders? If we had snuffed-out Jerry Adams and Martin McGuinness? If we had bombed border towns in the Republic because they harboured those who launched rockets and set the fuses for road-side bombs and bombs in pubs and railway stations. Don't forget that a former Irish Prime Minister faced charges of running guns to terrorists in Northern Ireland. Would the rest of the world have said "tush, tush" and looked the other way? And how many innocent people, how many men, women and

children, have died, when the IDF has too often used excessive force in response to unpardonable violence on the West Bank or in Gaza?

How many more lives have to be lost? How many more wars, like the Lebanon War, memorably described by Condoleezza Rice as the birth pang of a new Middle East?

How much more sustenance has to be given to Islamic extremists, if or perhaps when more terrorism oozes out of the Middle East, with Europe likely to be affected first?

Building on a remark once made by Shlomo Ben Ami, Israel's former Foreign Minister, and a man who has bravely and intelligently advocated more sensible policies in the region than those pursued, the Middle East is a cemetery of lost opportunities. So what exactly is Europe's policy? To whistle as we tip toe past that cemetery? Doing our best, we can't do any more, we mean well. I'm sure that we "mean well", but what a terrible gulf between what we say about our role in the world, between our rhetoric and what we actually do. So why the "meaning well", rather than the "doing well"?

I once found myself at a European Council meeting, at a lunch, during the French Presidency, having an argument with the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. President Chirac was visibly surprised that a British Commissioner was daring to disagree with his own Prime Minister. Whatever next? He was obviously concerned that the contagion shouldn't spread.

The point of the disagreement was this. I argued that we shouldn't always calibrate European foreign policy to American and Israeli positions. We should not, I argued, exaggerating the point a little, in effect give the National Security Council in Washington, and the Israeli Foreign Ministry, a veto over our policy.

For his part, Tony Blair argued - and argued with his usual eloquence - that unless we remained close to America and Israel, we wouldn't be able to play any role in the Middle East, at all. We would make ourselves irrelevant. It's a fundamental point and I want to deal with it, head on.

I don't do so, as anybody who feels any anti-American sentiment. I have plenty of criticisms of the conduct of American policy in the last seven years, but no trace of anti-Americanism and no hostility to Israel. I believe that America is the only super power in the world, and that much of the good that has happened in the last 50 years is because of America.

I believe that America will remain the only military super power in the world. I think we need the USA to give a lead to effective

multilateralism and I think there is virtually no problem that we face as Europeans which we can easily or successfully tackle, unless we work, whenever we can, with America.

I deplore the fact that in my own country the impression that we are simply America's most loyal and least critical spear carrier has actually increased anti-Americanism.

Equally, I want to see Israel a free democratic society under the rule of law, living at peace with its Arab neighbours. But how does largely uncritical acceptance of American and Israeli positions help them or help us?

Occasionally, to be fair, a cigarette paper, a sliver of light, does appear between us and American and Israeli positions. That happened over the security barrier, or fence, call it as you will. It did so when we asserted that any change to the 1967's borders could take place, acceptably, only as a result of a negotiated settlement.

It happened when European Foreign Ministers, continued to visit Damascus, despite State Department disapproval. It happened, when after the Israeli government cut off payments of their tax entitlements to the Palestinian Authority, we stepped in as Europeans with carefully monitored budgetary support.

It caused a great deal of criticism at the time. We had, as you may recall, debate, after debate in the European Parliament. But we stuck to our position.

I was in the slightly tiresome position myself, of being attacked publicly for making the payments, while being encouraged privately, by some American and Israeli officials, to go on signing the cheques. After all, no one sensible wanted to see the complete collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

So we have on occasion, allowed ourselves a little freedom of manoeuvre, but not very much. This reticence is not because the outlines of a settlement are hidden. We all know what a settlement, if it is ever to come, will look like. It is what my children would call "a no brainer". It's a mixture of Camp David, of Taba and of the Geneva and Saudi peace initiatives.

There will be a Palestinian state, living within borders based on the '67 frontiers, adjusted by negotiation. The addition of Jewish suburbs in East Jerusalem to Israel will for example be balanced by land transfers from Israel to Palestine, elsewhere.

Palestine will need to be a viable state with contiguous parts. It's certainly can't be like a Swiss cheese. Jews and Arabs will have to share Jerusalem, as their capital. There will need to be international sovereignty to cover the Holy Places or some similar deal.

Scrapping the absolute right of return for Palestinians will need to be negotiated and paid for, not least I imagine by the Europeans. Palestine and the other Arab states in the region will have to give guarantees to Israel that they will accept her in peace, as a neighbour.

There will have to be a settlement of water claims, on the aquifers in the West Bank, and on the withdrawal of water from the river Jordan.

Any solution is bound to contain something like those main ingredients. Settlement activity will have to end; military occupation will have to end. Violence will have to end. There will need to be a permanent ceasefire.

The Palestinians, as I've suggested, will have to give up the wholly unrealistic prospect of returning in hundreds of thousands or even more to the land that admittedly they once inhabited or owned in Israel.

That is where we will have to be, so what is the process for getting there? First, you can't have a policy in the Middle East if like President Bush's administration today, you don't talk, at least don't talk very much to Iran, don't talk to Syria, don't talk to Hamas.

What sort of diplomacy is that? How sensible is it to base diplomacy on the proposition that you won't talk to other people, unless they agree first on what you want them to do?

You recall that President Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire". He still negotiated with it.

Equally, there will be no overall settlement, unless there is a settlement on the Golan Heights with Syria. Without that, Syria will simply use its contacts in Palestine and Lebanon to prevent any overall agreement.

There will be no settlement on the West Bank, or in Gaza, without Hamas. It's going to be difficult in any event to sell the compromises, inevitably involved in any settlement, to the Palestinian people. Without Hamas, there is no chance of doing that whatsoever.

There will be no settlement in Lebanon, unless politicians there see a settlement with Syria and a settlement with the Palestinians.

Any meaningful peace process will have to involve all those who are fighting or are likely to fight.

Let me turn briefly to a few specifics. First, Hamas. You must forgive the fact that I draw once again on my own experience. I spent

several years, working on the problems of Northern Ireland, and after the Peace agreement, trying to re-organize the police and security services in Northern Ireland. I found myself dealing with people who had killed several of my friends and had previously tried to kill me.

To anyone with even a grain of sensitivity, dealing with people who have fudged the distinction between talking and killing is pretty offensive, but there it is.

For years, terrorist groups - embracing those who used, endorsed, or refused to condemn violence for political ends have fetched up in government. Their access to respectability has been part of political settlements, from Israel itself, to Kenya, to South Africa, to Ireland.

Why is Palestine different? Hamas began life as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim brotherhood. It began by focusing on politics and welfare.

It was radicalized and turned to appalling acts of terrorism, including suicide bombing, by the occupation of Palestine, by the uprising and also by its competition with Fatah.

One reason why America and a number of European countries were so keen on democratic elections in Palestine in 2006 was that we believed that these elections would show how little support for Hamas there was.

We did nothing to help Fatah in those elections. Jim Wolfenson, who was Tony Blair's predecessor as the representative of the international community, went to the Middle East, as Mr. Blair has recently done, to help build the Palestinian institutions and to improve the welfare of the Palestinians.

He produced a six point plan, facilitating traffic within and to Gaza and opening the port and the airport which we built originally with European Union money.

Each point was blocked by Washington and Mr. Abrams. And the result? Hamas stormed to victory in the elections and, as happens in democracies, since they won, they tried to form a government. But we wouldn't talk to them. We wouldn't deal with them unless they met conditions, which are not even met by some of our closest allies in the Arab world.

Eventually, the Saudis stepped in and brokered the deal between Hamas and Fatah. They established last spring a national unity government. Even though that was a proposal pushed through by our moderate supporters in the Arab world, we still wouldn't deal with Hamas.

Were we being foolish, out of misplaced loyalty in Europe to America, or were we merely being foolish under our own steam?

A number of reasonable demands could have been made of Hamas. We could have insisted on a ceasefire, and that Hamas should do all it could, to stop rocket attacks on Israel by Islamic Jihad.

We could have insisted that Hamas should work to secure the release of the captured Israeli soldier, Corporal Shalit. We could have insisted that Hamas should make it clear that it was not intent on turning Palestine into an Islamic fundamentalist state.

And we could have insisted that Hamas should accept that any final deal with Israel, negotiated by their President, including of course the acceptance of Israel's right to exist in peace, would be accepted by them, if it was agreed in a national Palestinian referendum.

Those demands would have made perfectly good sense. I think they would have probably been accepted by Hamas. I believe we would have had in the national unity government a real and credible negotiating partner, if we wanted one.

But I think that some people in Washington and some people in Tel Aviv simply don't want to see that happen. If you don't encourage people to give up violence, if you don't encourage them to embrace democratic politics, then it isn't very surprising if they go on behaving violently.

I repeat, that is what the USA had pressed on the British Government for a number of years. In those years, for example, there was a Congress that declined to take any action to interrupt fund-raising for the IRA in America. Those were the years, as well, when Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness, would be invited to the White House for tea.

Without politics, violence will continue. We've seen that recently in Gaza, unpardonable violence, but violence that was neither unpredictable, nor (it should be added) wholly unprovoked.

President Bush has now called for a conference on Palestine and Israel in November. No one yet knows what the terms of reference will be, nor who will be invited, nor who will come. There is some skepticism in the Arab world about the intentions behind it.

What should Europe be urging? First, that all the national parties to the dispute should be invited, including of course, the Saudis, Syria, Iran, all of them.

The only stipulation should be that they should all accept the terms of the Saudi Peace initiative: Peace with Israel within borders negotiated

on the basis of 1967. And the Saudi Peace initiative should be accepted as well in its broad terms by Israel.

Third, we should work to restore a national unity government, before or after that conference, whatever the difficulties. And we should deal with it on the basis of the sorted conditions that I've already mentioned, plus the agreement of Hamas and Fatah to establish joint security forces.

Meanwhile, Europe should give humanitarian assistance to those who are suffering on the Gaza strip.

Mr. Blair will continue, I am sure, with his work to build Palestinian institutions, though I must say I'm puzzled about how he will do that, if he doesn't talk to Hamas.

Fourth, we should be clear that we need to jump-start negotiations on Palestinian statehood. The conference shouldn't go back to confidence-building measures that go nowhere. It should focus on changing the parameters of debate, not tinkering with those parameters.

If European Foreign Ministers would say all that, would it necessarily happen? Probably not. But it would achieve several things.

First of all, it would restore European credibility in the Arab world. Secondly, it would make it more difficult for America and Israel to do nothing. Thirdly, it would help edging a little nearer to the restoration of a real peace process and in doing that, I think we would be helping both America and Israel.

America is not necessarily going to help itself simply by changing its administration. Congress, you may recall voted by 410 to 8 to support the war in Lebanon. American politicians fell over one another to egg Israel in an enterprise which greatly damaged Israel as well as Lebanon.

In order to help to save American policy-making from itself, we should, in Europe, set out a more honest and coherent position that may begin to shift the diplomatic furniture around.

There is for America and for the rest of us another dimension to all this. I mentioned earlier what used to be said, that the road to peace in Jerusalem lay through Baghdad. That was in the days when the benefits of the war in Iraq were measured in terms of winning. Now the argument is about the consequences of losing.

What are the consequences of losing? Can we still shape a settlement without Iraq falling apart as Yugoslavia, another part of the Ottoman Empire fell apart? At best, I suppose we need to look to the sort of loose federal structure that we see in Bosnia today, a point that Carl Bildt would doubtless have made, had he been here this evening?

Whatever happens, the rest of us, whether we were for or against the war, will have to pay a high price in increased terrorism and tension in the region, unless we manage to fashion a reasonable way through these difficult minefields.

Peace in Palestine would certainly help to limit the fallout from Iraq. So today, reversing what was said by the Neocons, peace in Jerusalem could help to avoid complete disaster in Iraq.

Not only can Europe best help America by being candid and forceful, but we can best help Israel that way too. We can help Israel form a stronger link between popular support for a permanent peace and the inability of its political structure to deliver it.

We are not going to achieve that if we continue to give Israeli politicians the impression that they don't have to take any political risks or make any political concessions for peace.

I don't want to sound too gloomy. But I do have two great anxieties. First, that the bloodshed in Israel and Palestine will continue, that the spiral will continue down, that every time we say "things couldn't possibly get any worse", they will.

Secondly, I worry that the conflict in the Middle East will help to feed something much more dangerous and damaging that will poison even more the relationship between Europe and America and the Islamic world.

But I began with Cavafy and I end with some from another of his poems;

"Poisoned by fear and suspicion
Mind agitated, eyes alarmed
We desperately invent ways out
Plan how to avoid the inevitable
Another disaster, one we never imagined
Suddenly, violently descends upon us
And finding us unprepared, there's no time left now
Sweeps us away".

Cavafy was wise, but are we?