

44 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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It is clear that today's world is less secure than it was 25 years ago; traditional threats are now accompanied by new ones, which are relatively more dangerous. In particular, radicalism and terrorism, fuelled by wars in the Middle East, have transcended domestic borders and become internationalised. Millions of refugees have fled their countries of origin in pursuit of safety, and they, too, can pose challenges to the new states they settle in.

Despite a plethora of threats ranging from a resurgent Russia to a nuclear-armed North Korea and transnational epidemics such as Ebola, it is the Middle East region which continues to produce the most serious dangers to world security. This is so for a number of reasons.

Middle Eastern priorities

First, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to be one of the most controversial issues that not only hinders cooperation between the EU and Middle Eastern states, but also triggers and fuels tensions within Europe between Muslim/Arab mi-

norities and their fellow citizens.

Second, the failure of the Arab Spring to transform authoritarian countries into democracies has also exacerbated the fragility of these states, pushing some of them into civil war. As a result, there is little room for civil society and free media to operate, while human rights violations have increased. Also, large portions of state budgets have been re-allocated to fight terrorism rather than being invested into human development. The failure of a peaceful transitional process from dictatorship to democracy of some countries has also discouraged others from embracing the democratisation process.

Third, the growing influence of religion (especially among the youth) in shaping politics and the flow of refugees to Europe and other areas is increasing tensions within and between societies.

The ongoing conflicts in the region have led to unprecedented atrocities and caused great damage to social fabrics and infrastructure. Ending these conflicts is key for global security: most importantly,

the EU needs to work closely with Russia, Turkey, the US and the Arab League to achieve a long-term truce between opposition groups and the regime in Syria.

Although the EU has been active in the Middle East since the 1970s and it continues to be involved in efforts to find a just and fair solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the lack of progress in the peace process between the Arabs and Israelis was and is the biggest obstacle to any EU-Middle East partnership. While some accuse the EU for failing to align its political role with the financial support it provides, some of the blame should also fall on the other actors involved, namely the Arabs, Israelis and the US for not coordinating their efforts and creating an environment conducive to reaching a permanent peace.

To address this, the EU position towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should avoid being reluctant, responsive and incident-centred. EU policy should seek to be proactive and increase coherence between the financial and technical support of its political agenda. The EU should consolidate its coordination with the US, the country which has controlled the peace process since the Oslo Accords in 1993. The EU should not be taking a back seat while the US dominates the process. Finally, the EU should make clear the link between its financial support to the Palestinian authority and the progress made in advancing democratic good governance.

Democracy and dialogues

One of the EU's obligations is to spread democracy and human rights to areas which lack these values. This is no easy task, as democratic transition should be an organic process initiated and driven by local societies themselves, not one which is

exported or imposed by outsiders. Nonetheless, communities in the Middle East are in dire need of the support, experience and knowledge of others – in particular the EU.

The EU should avoid being perceived by the Arab world as a supporter of dictatorships (tacitly or otherwise), or as 'a teacher of democracy'. For this to be achieved, its policies should be based on the principles of partnership. Moreover, the EU should make a significant effort to convey the message that it not works with the region's leaders, but also with its peoples.

Local problems now transcend domestic borders, and the EU's responses must reflect this reality. In particular, the EU should attempt to reach out and solve problems abroad through educational programmes and economic empowerment – which will ensure prosperity in the long run.

Back home, the EU needs to work on implementing policies of integration for those who have recently become Europeans. But this also requires European populations to follow the principles of acceptance. Showcasing successful stories of coexistence and highlighting the positive contribution of immigrants to European society in a number of fields (economy, sport, education, art and culture etc.) would accelerate and assist this process.

Any effective EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) should clarify the shared responsibilities of all actors for creating a secure world. Europe has its role to play, but other countries must be asked to realise and act upon their duties as well.

