

CAN THE EU BECOME A GLOBAL PLAYER?

Gheorghe Prisacaru*

Abstract

The birth of the European Economic Community and the EURATOM represented the materialization of a new and brave idea about the role which the economical integration could play in insuring the peace, stability and prosperity of the people in member states. Nobody can make today abstraction of the presence and the role of the EU: an area of great economic, geographic, demographic and political power. Europe should also act as an important player in finding solutions to major problems such as: terrorism, climacteric changes due to global warming, ensuring energy supplies, diminishing social and economical disparities between and inside states.

I would also like to greet the organization of this symposium, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. The birth of the European Economic Community and the EURATOM represented the materialization of a new and brave idea about the role which the economical integration could play in insuring the peace, stability and prosperity of the people in member states.

The treaties were signed only by six western european states. The historical conditions put Romania on the eastern side of the “iron curtain” and made it unable to participate at the west european projects. We are, now, amongst the righteous members of the EU and it is appropriate to celebrate the event that gave birth to the most complex economical an political structure on the European continent. And this symposium is most adequate as it is organized by the Faculty of European Studies.

I would like to briefly debate a subject of major interest, can the EU become a global player? This question is most welcome after the sever crisis caused by the failure of the referendums in France and Holland about the European Constitution, which made some analysts, like Werner Weidenfeld from The Institute of Security Studies of the EU, ask themselves if it is still possible to talk about the role of a “global player” of the EU. Personally, I am not amongst the euro-scepticals who doubt about the capacity of the EU to play an important role in the world.

There are positive premises that the Union could play such a part, and also a number of conditions that should be fulfilled by the EU for reaching this objective.

Next, I will try to enumerate a few factors which contradict with a simple, pessimistic approach.

First of all, the EU has gained in time an important role in the international relations.

We are not anymore in the early `70s when during the Cyprus crisis, being asked by a journalist “why doesn’t US associates Europe in solving this problem?”, the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger also responded with a question: “who do I call in Europe?”. This answer ment that as long as he didn’t have a credible interlocutor, the voice of the EU couldn’t matter in the world.

* Gheorghe Prisacaru is Professor of History and Policies of European Union at the Romanian American University in Bucharest.

Since then, the evolution in the components, nature and politics promoted by the EU, and also the political changes in the Central and Eastern Europe brought changes in the role of the Union in the world.

Nobody can make today abstraction of the presence and the role of the EU: an area of great economic, geographic, demographic and political power. The Union is the greatest internal market in the world, and the Euro – as common currency – gained a global importance. The gross income of the EU is similar to that of the US and its part in the world economy is over 20%. The most important economic partners are the US, Japan, China and Russia. Next to the economical reasons must be mentioned the cooperation between other countries promoted by the Union, like the human rights and the independent state. Finally, the Union is also a demographic power. If countries like Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey will join the existing 27 countries in the Union, the total population will be over 550 million, double the population of the US. If we add to this the fact that the Union changed from an economic structure to an economical and political structure, and also the fact that the Union is willing to negotiate, it's obvious that the EU has a major potential that qualifies it to play an important role in the world.

Secondly, the EU must face some great challenges, from the inside and also from the outside, and as a world player.

The constitutional referendums in France and Holland showed that the power of convincing is missing to the political elite of some european countries. Supporting the integration process will not be obtain automatically, through non critical positions, since the ambitious objectives must be explained widely to the public. Although, the population will not support the european projects, no matter how generous these would be. In the same time, we must remember that other projects failed: the creation of an European Defence Comission, the Fouchet Plan, the European Constitution elaborated by the European Parliament in the 80's. Although, in the end, these failures were overpassed through cooperation, tenacity and political compromises. That's why, the problem of the Constitutional Treaty should not be so dramatized. There can be found solutions for relaunching the Constitution, especially that nobody denies the necessity of growing the cohesion and efficiency of the Union. From this point of view, the Declaration from Berlin says that the time limit for reforming the european institutions in June 2009, the date of European Parliament elections.

In the world, Europe must face a new shaping of the relations with the US. After 50 years of relatively stable relations, they entered in a phase of incertitude. And if, in a specific period, at the beginning, and in the conditions of the Cold War the process of european integration enjoyed the support of the US, the events after September 11 showed that today, the US need the support of the EU which is one of the few suppliers of stability and security in the world. In these conditions, the EU doesn't comply anymore with the statute of "junior partner" of the US, trying to find answers of its own at the challenges put up by the world and to be considered an equal partner, whose opinion should be listen to. I don't see an Europe opposed to the US, but an equal and respected partner. The last position the US administration had on the nuclear politics of Iran and North Korea, the UN reforms or the climate changes seems to point to a change of attitude towards Europe, pointing to a rethinking and consolidation of transatlantic relations.

In these conditions, a new question appears: Is, today, the EU a global power? I

think the answer is, for now, negative. But, someday it can be.

It is necessary, first of all, a coherent external and security policy. The Iraqi crisis clearly showed that, without such policy, the US promotes “post-factum” consultations of an action in force, following its own interests in the light of unilateralism, or it uses its relations with some EU countries. If the EU had a common, coherent position in the Iraqi problem, before the hostilities begun, we can presume that the importance of its opinion would have been different.

That’s why, the famous phrase told by French president Jacques Chirac, “La Roumanie a perdu un bon moment pour se taire” for accusing its pro-american position was lacking the fundament. I think if the EU had a common position in this matter, elaborated in time and publicly exposed, Romania would have – in that period – supported the EU point of view.

From this point of view, the creation, by the Constitutional Treaty, of the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, assisted by a professional diplomatic service, could be the solution to the problem.

It is also needed to consider the responsibility of the EU as a security factor, purpose in which a good balanced strategy for improving the performance of the EU is much needed. This means that for becoming an important player in the world, the EU must elaborate a strategy to respond to the internal and international challenges. Only if the EU will reform and will show more political initiative, it will be able to act, in the actual global conditions, as a global player.

Following its enlargement towards east, the EU is heading to regions with great conflict risk, like the Balkans, Caucasus and the Northern Africa. Another strategic region for the EU is Asia, where it intends to establish strategic partnerships with China, India and Japan. Because the number of global players, in the future multi-polar world, is constantly growing, and the sources of conflict also grow in numbers, the EU needs its own strategy for strengthening its influence in the world.

Finally, “the leadership” is an essential component which needs to be taken into account in an extended EU. The european power should also be efficiently organized to be able to play an important role in the world politics. We need to add the fact that, an Union of 27 countries will be able to act together as an world player in the Foreign Affairs, security and defense matters if this concept will be associated with a continuous improvement of its civilian and military capabilities, and aslo its capacity of reaction in crisis situation. To be a good security provider, in the region and worldwide, the EU needs to develop its strategic profile. According to some analysts, the lack of a strategic thinking could be the “Achilles heel” in the foreign affairs and security politics and in becoming a global player.

In these conditions another question is rising correspondingly: *Is UE today a global power?* For now, I think the answer is negative. But she might become one.

Heretofore, a EU coherent security and foreign policy is needed. The Iraqi crisis has shown clearly, that in the absence of this policy the United States either promotes negotiations after taking action pursuing their interests in an unilateral way, either selectively using its privileged relations with certain EU member states. If EU had shared a common and coherent position in the Iraqi problem, before launching the hot war, predictably the weight of its word would have been different.

Therefore, Jacques Chirac’s famous sentence saying that “La Roumanie a perdu un

bon moment pour se taire” when condemning its pro-American position was made without foundation. I think that if the EU had a common position in this matter, elaborated in time and expressed in public, Romania would have upheld the Union’s point of view.

From this point of view, setting up through the Constitutional Treaty the EU Foreign Ministry supported by a professional diplomatic service, might represent a solution.

Concomitantly, we need to take into consideration the EU responsibility, as a security provider means by which a well articulated strategy for improving the Union’s performances in this area is absolutely necessary and up-to-date.

This means that being an important worldwide actor, the EU must draw up and put into practice a strategy that should answer to all internal and international challenges. Only if the EU reforms itself and prove more political initiative, it will succeed in playing its part as a global actor.

As a result of its enlargement to the East, the EU is heading for regions with a high crisis potential such as: the West Balkans, Caucasian and North African countries. Asia is another EU strategic region, where it wishes to set up strategic partnerships with China, India and Japan. Taking into consideration the facts that the actors’ level on the international stage in a future multiple pole world is continuously rising and that the sources of conflict are ceaselessly dividing, the EU needs it’s own strategy in order to multiply its world influence.

Lastly, the leadership represents an essential component, which must be considered in an enlarged EU. The European power must also be well and efficiently organized in order to play an important role in the world politics. It should be mentioned that a Union with 27 member states will be capable to act as a global actor in the foreign policy and security and defense area only if this concept is accompanied by a continuously improvement of its civil and military capacities and also its capabilities of response in a crisis situation. To become a good regional and worldwide security provider, the EU must develop its strategic profile. To some analysts, the lack of a strategic thinking might represent the Achilles’ heel of the EU’s security and foreign policy and implicitly in its development as a worldwide player.

Europe should also act as an important player in finding solutions to major problems such as: terrorism, climacteric changes due to global warming, ensuring energy supplies, diminishing social and economical disparities between and inside states etc.