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Energy and the Economy to enhance Cultural Diplomacy in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean

In explaining the rationale of awarding the Nobel peace prize to the European Union, the Norwegian Nobel Committee indicated that “The Union and its forerunners have over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe .” and that “this shows how, through well-aimed efforts and by building up mutual confidence, historical enemies can become close partners. The rationale of the decision also refers to “fraternity between nations” and to the resolution of “many ethnically-based national conflicts”.

The European Union has proven to be a most successful peace project where cultural and economic diplomacy have achieved and entrenched peace. Current difficulties may be a result of insufficient and delayed integration –in terms of sufficient and unified supervision but also in terms of political unification.

The European project of bringing together many countries and many cultures is based on multiculturalism, not only through respect of the many different cultures but also through the approach of complementarity and enrichment in the sense that cooperation between different cultures of diverse approaches can yield a composition of outcomes that can potentially be much stronger than what would arise if each country or culture remained isolated.

In the absence of a conscientious target to achieve peace, cultural differences can easily be exploited by the enemies of peace in their pursuit of other interests, usually economic in nature. Nationalism or religious fanaticism are powerful instruments in the hands of the enemies of peace and of human rights. And they can easily be nourished to thrive in times of economic and social hardship. Hence at these perilous times of economic recession in Europe and beyond the permanence of the success of the European project should not be taken for granted, while efforts should be made to spread the awareness

that a peaceful synthesis of cultural difference can yield more benefits than conflict.

The area of the Eastern Mediterranean itself rich in cultural diversity and history, as it is situated at the cross roads of civilizations, has so far failed to follow the example of its European Union partners of using cultural and economic diplomacy to move away from conflict towards permanent peace.

On the basis of its own successful experience and within its neighborhood policy, Europe needs to encourage the area of the Eastern Mediterranean to concentrate on what can unite it rather than on what brings conflict and division. Economic cooperation with a view to mutual benefits is a well tested and successful vehicle of attaining peace.

Furthermore, the recent emergence of the area of the Eastern Mediterranean as a new source of Energy for Europe can serve as an awakening trigger to all countries in the area to think outside their narrow national borders and problems and consider how this new variable in the equation of the area – energy- can be jointly addressed in a way that it will yield growth and prosperity for all, including our European Union partners. It is a time of joint responsibility towards both the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as towards the people of Europe. This is the time for Turkey, Cyprus and Greece to resolve their problems of the past, as is also the time for Israel and the Arab countries to do the same.

Given that the Union is currently moving away from nuclear energy – following the nuclear accident in Japan- and until renewables can fully respond to Europe’s energy needs, natural gas can serve as a bridging solution to the future. And the area of the Eastern Mediterranean has now proven to be sitting on such a treasure: a treasure which can be used as a vehicle of peace making or which can be left to go astray and lead to new warfare that will create new ruins and destruction. The Southern gas corridor envisaged by the proposed regulation on Trans-European Energy Infrastructures is but a case in point. Europe needs to actively encourage the countries in the area to move towards cooperation for the attainment of the common goal of peace and prosperity for all.

There is a Leadership challenge also for Turkey:

Turkey has a real opportunity to become a true leader and peace maker in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Government of Prime Minister Erdogan can prove that it is transforming Turkey to a country of true European outlook. Internally it can prove that it is governing on the basis of European values, primarily of freedom, democracy and respect of human rights, while in its external policies it can prove that respect can be gained not only on the basis of military strength but also on the basis of peaceful cooperation creating mutual benefit, in areas that address the future of the area, rather than to persevere on anachronistic problems of the past. For History gives opportunities once or twice. And if the Greek Cypriots missed the chance in 2004, Turkey must not lose the chance of today.

And of course our European Union partners can be most conducive by indicating that once Turkey internalizes all the required characteristics of a European Union country it will be welcome as a full member of the Union. This is an incentive that Europe needs to give to Turkey, so as to enable leadership there to reinitiate progress.

Not to mention the huge savings on military expenditure that will be made when countries in the area resolve their longstanding differences. If I just take the example of the Cyprus problem, there will be savings on military expenditure made by Turkey in maintaining occupation troops in Cyprus; savings by both Turkey and Greece through a reduction of the need of armaments lined against each other at the borders between them and in the Aegean; and savings on military expenditure made by the Republic of Cyprus to defend the demarcation line dividing Cyprus.

Reduction on armaments will certainly be conducive to the efforts currently made by the European Union family to bailout the Greek economy and keep it in the Eurozone.

Demilitarisation will also relieve the public finances of Cyprus from the burden of defence expenditures and will contribute to the efforts which have started by our EU partners to bailout the Cypriot economy, following primarily its huge exposure to the Greek economy.

A quantification of the huge financial benefits to accrue to Turkey, Greece and Cyprus once the Cyprus problem is solved was done in a trilogy of studies titled ‘‘The Day After’’ and authored by the ‘‘Three Ladies’’. The views of the speaker on the particular issue of Cyprus can also be found in a recent publication in the Journal of Social Justice, under the title ‘‘ A Matter of Leadership’’.

That peaceful cooperation will yield higher and longer benefits for all is a message we need to spread around the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean and this is where inspired, visionary and forward looking leadership is needed.

Our European Union family needs to lucidly bring home the message that there can be no other way to the future than through compromise and that the much needed prosperity can only be regained through peace and cooperation.

At this time of political and economic crisis in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean, collective European Leadership could, on the basis of its own successful history, guide the area to its salvaging transformation towards peace, cooperation, economic development and political maturity. It is an important constructive step that Europe could take towards spreading the word beyond its own borders to the neighborhood, a step which will also ensure the sustainability of the internal European peace project .

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