

European interview

n°59

12th September 2011

“ Either the Europeans continue to suffer developments decided by others for the benefit of others, or they will decide to try and influence future world developments together ”

Nicole Gnesotto is Professor of European Union, Institution and Policy Studies at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM) and Deputy Chair of Notre Europe; she is the former director of the Institute for European Union Security Studies. A specialist of Europe and strategic issues she is notably the author of «La Politique de sécurité et de défense de l'EU - Les cinq premières années» (dir., IESUE, 2005) and *Le Monde en 2025* (co-written with Giovanni Grevi, Robert Laffont, 2007). She also wrote, together with Michel Rocard, *Notre Europe*, (Robert Laffont, 2008). Her most recent publication «L'Europe a-t-elle un avenir stratégique?» (Armand Colin, 2011).

1. What conclusions do you draw of the European Security and Defence Policy that has been developed since 1998?

This can be expressed in a few words: extraordinary success, extreme fragility. In spite of the Union's recent inertia in the international arena we should stress how positive this first decade has been for the common defence policy. The ESDP can indeed be described as a success story: in under ten years the Union has gained in terms of legitimacy, operational capability, to become a decision making network, and above all it now has real experience in terms of external management crisis: 23 civilian, military or mixed operations have indeed been undertaken since 2003, mobilising nearly 10,000 soldiers and 5000 European policemen, under the Union's decision making power and command in Africa, the Middle East, Europe and in Asia. During these interventions Europeans have shown they are able to undertake various types of mission – humanitarian (Sudan), military (operation Althea in Bosnia), disarmament (in Aceh in Indonesia), police training, or security sector reform (Congo, Palestine) and even aid missions to re-establish the rule of law

(Kosovo) or to counter piracy (Somalia) – which were always crowned with success. Alongside this policy that focused on crisis settlement, the ESDP was rapidly ameliorated in 2005 from a structural point of view, with a focus on the consolidation of the industrial base of European defence; the creation of the European Defence Agency brought the ESDP sustainably into a common military programme. If we look back and see that it took fifty years to create the single currency, the speed of the Union's achievements in the areas of security and defence are truly remarkable.

This new policy was not however without its weaknesses and setbacks: the lack of funding, real differences in Member States' world views', military capabilities that were reduced or poorly adapted to new post-Cold War missions,, serious political differences over the type of relationship to be developed between the EU and NATO, in short, there was a series of obstacles and shams that prevented the EU from becoming a major player in the international strategic arena. The ESDP worked well on a technical level but political Europe was absent. But the dynamism and development of strategic responsibility in the EU have especially been drowned over the last two or three years in the turbulence of the economic and finan-

“ Either the Europeans continue to suffer developments decided by others for the benefit of others, or they will decide to try and influence future world developments together ”

cial crisis. The common security and defence policy is now the last of the Member States' worries; the UK has resumed its negative attitude with regard to any type of strategic ambition on the part of the EU; NATO again seems, in everyone's opinion, to be the cheapest and most comfortable solution. When the accent is placed on restoring prosperity within the EU, contributing to the re-establishment of the Union's external security seems to come second in the eyes of many Member States. This disinterest in strategy is of course understandable given the seriousness of the economic crisis. We just have to hope that in the future it will not turn into a permanent opt-out.

2. You highlight the “revolution in coherence” that was part of the Lisbon Treaty. However post-Lisbon “European governance” is considered by many observers and players to be difficult to understand and potentially incoherent, notably with regard to foreign policy. How do you see the new institutions that have been set up?

The Lisbon Treaty has led to potentially formidable tools: the post of High Representative, Vice-President of the Commission, who would have the necessary political, military, financial and economic means for the credibility of the EU's external activities; a diplomatic service (EEAS) that is potentially the biggest in the world; revolutionary means in terms of defence (we should in fact remember that permanent structured cooperation breaks away from the dogma of unanimity for the very first time!). However when there is no political will, the best tools in the world are not of much use. Of course the Treaty itself is not contradiction free: there are now three leaders, which means it is conflict laden and unintelligible; a great number of internal contradictions have arisen, as if the Member States systematically take with one hand what they are giving with the other etc ... But the worst error would be to turn the weaknesses and incoherences in the Treaty into those of the EU in the international arena. In another time with another class of political leaders the Treaty could have produced or might still produce miracles! What makes Europe so invisible, so pathetic and sometimes even ridiculous in the international arena are not the new Lisbon institutions but

the inability or refusal of the Member States to agree on the EU's strategic role to extend beyond the basic level – it is their rigidity with regard to maintaining national sovereignty although this has been severely weakened by globalisation – it is their refusal to give the institutions, which they created with the Treaty, a chance.

3. Given the present crisis defence budgets are often a tempting adjustment variable in a bid to reduce deficits and European States' public debt. How do you think the defence capabilities necessary for a real Common Security and Defence Policy can be protected?

It is true that the whole world is arming or re-arming: notably Russia and China have significantly increased their military budget over the last decade. The Middle East and Africa are doing the same, however precarious the domestic situation is in these countries. In Europe the trend has been the opposite. First of all there was the post-Cold War “dividends of peace” myth. And since 2007 there has been the toll of the economic crisis. So many fear the structural disarmament of Europe which will simply be amplified by the reduction of public deficits.

However I have never believed that the GDP percentage devoted by each of the Member States to defence has been a decisive criterion for the success of European Defence. Of course, 27 times zero equals zero and there is a budgetary minimum required to maintain in order to have a credible crisis management capacity. But this minimum does exist in the Union. Together Europeans spend nearly one third of the American defence budget i.e. around 160 billion €, this is quite significant! The fact that some EU Member States devote more than others to defence is not scandalous either: Member States do not share either the same military history, or the same ambitions of power, nor the same geographic, demographic heritage, etc. Also in Europe those who spend the most on defence do not do so out of a belief in Europe but for their own national reasons: the UK for example, and Greece prior to the crisis. Finally the US itself bears witness to the relative nature of the criteria of military spending: since 2004 the US has accounted for half of the world's military spending but their successes and their

“ Either the Europeans continue to suffer developments decided by others for the benefit of others, or they will decide to try and influence future world developments together ”

ability to influence, in terms of stabilising crises remains uncertain to say the least. In other words the present weakness of European defence is due to many reasons other than the foreseeable scarcity of budgetary resources devoted to this area. Except that if there was the will to maintain the EU's strategic ambitions in lean times, why don't the Member States take advantage of the budgetary crisis now to put forward innovative ideas as regards the common funding of various defence activities and even greater military integration?

4. The uprisings in the Arab world have been a tough test for the EU and some observers have pinpointed a major paradox: although some Europeans have a high profile (notably the British and the French) the EU seems to be completely absent! How do you interpret these recent events and the action taken by the Europeans in this context?

I think we have to distinguish between three periods in analysing the European position. In the first stage of the Arab uprisings neither the Europeans nor the Americans understood the meaning or the magnitude of these events. Everyone was stuck in a relatively strategic mode of thought, born in post 9/11 US whereby there was no other political alternative in the Arab world but police authoritarianism or Islamic fundamentalism. It took time for both sides of the Atlantic to overcome this idea – but the Americans were the first to do so. The EU was happy to follow America. The intermediary phase involved the management of the crisis in Libya and the EU was quite simply not there. The fact that two countries, France and the UK, took the initiative of military action within NATO is a good point for both countries but there is nothing positive in this for the Union. France and the UK are simply representing themselves. They are not a substitute for European action, especially the UK which is, of all the Member States, the one most opposed to a rise in the EU's strategic power! The EU's absence in the management of the Libyan crisis is the result of everything we have previously discussed: a lack of ambition, a lack of military means (we should remember that the ESPD does not include any provision for an air force, which made NATO an obligatory option), economic priorities, political discord, the habit of relying on the

security provided by NATO. In the third, future phase, ie aid to rebuild the rule of law and support in the transition, we have to hope that the EU will recover its role as leader: these tasks are indeed the core of European know-how; the security and defence policy is simply an enormous consolidation enterprise of the rule of law in the world, and community budgets are significant for this type of activity. In other words, the post-crisis period may be the opportunity for the EU to play a driving role once more in the development of the Arab-Muslim world.

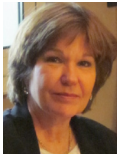
5. In your book you place great emphasis on globalisation. Of course the EU has to look outwards to the rapidly changing "globalised" world and adapt to evolving world governance. At the same time many players and observers note with concern that Europe is tending towards impotence. What would be necessary for Europe to become "a political power in this time of globalisation" if we are to coin one of your phrases?

Globalisation is ambivalent: there is a certain risk of decline and marginalisation as far as the EU is concerned. But it also certainly offers the EU a magnificent opportunity to assert its power. In other words, either the Europeans continue to suffer developments decided by others for the benefit of others, or they will decide to try and influence future world developments together. In my book I insist on the EU's advantages in this new international arena: a more subtle understanding of power which does not just come down to military power alone; considerable wealth of economic, financial, political, military means; a culture of negotiation and multilateralism that is adequately suited to the emergence of new players; a model of European governance – focused on solidarity and the sharing of responsibilities such as wealth – potentially useful for the reform of world governance etc But there are many conditions for a come-back by Europe into the world arena: the Transatlantic relationship has to be clarified, which does not just mean that Europe should follow blindly in the footsteps of another power. The political goal sought after by Europe has to be clarified in terms of international action: what kind of a world do we want? What kind of international

“ Either the Europeans continue to suffer developments decided by others for the benefit of others, or they will decide to try and influence future world developments together ”

system are we trying to consolidate via our various foreign policy actions or by ESDP interventions? Is it simply defence Western style or are we trying to establish a more complex model of power and responsibility sharing on a world level? In the big bazaar of ideas that shapes the world, the EU's voice has to make itself heard. Finally and above all Europeans should tidy up their backyards and apply the principles they preach in their speeches and external action themselves: that means solidarity, the quest for general interest, the implementation of shared solidarity. Nations are undoubtedly the condition for the very existence of the EU. But in an era of globalisation each European nation only weighs lightly in the

balance of the real world powers. It is the EU that is becoming and will increasingly become the true condition for the efficacy of nations.



Author : Nicole Gnesotto

Professor at the CNAM, author of *L'Europe a-t-elle un avenir stratégique?*
Paris, Armand Colin, 2011

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.