

Summer School Renzo Imbeni Comune di Modena

Theme:

The European Union and global challenges - New International Scenarios

Topic:

EU foreign policy aspirations struggling to find self-expression between the national and the global

Pat Cox

President of the European Movement

Former President European Parliament

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Tribute to Renzo Imbeni

The European Parliament is a unique transnational democratically elected parliament without parallel in global affairs. It is multi-cultural, multilingual and politically diverse. Renzo Imbeni and I arrived there at the same time and served there over the same period of time. Through the ordinary work of the Parliament on committees and on parliamentary delegations I got to know him as a diligent and hardworking colleague. Though we belonged to different political groups we shared a common sense of European public purpose and vision. In the latter part of our respective mandates I had the pleasure to work closely with Renzo Imbeni on the Bureau of the European Parliament where I, as President, and he, as a long standing and respected Vice President, spent a very productive two and a half years on this key management committee.

Today for me is not just another meeting. I am pleased to have been invited to address this summer school and am pleased to be here to have this personal opportunity to honour Renzo Imbeni's memory and his European contribution, to honour a colleague and friend and to honour a deceased comrade. Many of his colleagues, I among them, felt that Renzo had more to give. Life and politics are both unpredictable. Fate both political and personal intervened. I was surprised to learn that he was not returning to the European Parliament after the 2004 elections and shocked to learn of his death the following year. For those of us who knew and respected him Renzo Imbeni was a man who may have been one of the best Presidents that the European Parliament never had but who in his time certainly was one of its best servants.

Theme

Your theme this afternoon is: 'The European Union and global challenges - New International Scenarios'. My topic is: 'EU foreign policy aspirations struggling to find self-expression between the national and the global'.

Events cannot be predicted

Let me start with a quotation from Nils Bohr a Danish Nobel Prize winner for Physics: 'Prediction', he said, 'is very difficult especially if it is about the future'. Permit me to illustrate why this is so with some brief observations. We each could suggest significant events that impacted our world in the past. Almost without exception those that had a major impact were difficult or impossible to foresee. For example in our imaginations let us quickly re-visit the past fifty years. Fifty years ago John Fitzgerald Kennedy had not yet been elected, the Berlin Wall was not yet built, and the Cuban missile crisis was not

then foreseen. Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution had not yet happened. In the late sixties and seventies the six day Arab-Israeli war and the Yom Kippur war had not yet been fought. OPEC the oil cartel had not been established. The Shah of Iran had not been toppled by an Islamic revolution. In the early eighties Gorbachev, glasnost and perestroika were unknown. Who could have predicted the staggering consequences of Deng Jao Ping's Chinese shift to state capitalism? Who then could clearly predict the collapse of Soviet communism in Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union or the smooth reunification of Germany? In the past decade as the new millennium dawned none could imagine 9/11 2001 and the devastating effects of the terrorist attacks on the USA and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Who in mid-decade believed that we were only years away from a global financial and banking crisis that would be one of the worst in the history of capitalism?

In short we cannot predict events, what Donald Rumsfeld, the former US Secretary of Defence under President George W. Bush, referred to as the 'unknown unknowns'. We are confined to planning for what we know and to what we think we can predict about what we do not know.

21st Century Context

We know that the context for making foreign policy in the 21st century has changed radically particularly from the second half of the 20th century. The bipolar certainties of the frozen geopolitical landscape of the Cold War yielded to a period of US unipolarity which in its turn is now transforming into some form of new and evolving multipolarity. Old threats such as the nuclear doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) have been replaced by new fears about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We are challenged by financial instability, environmental degradation, climate change and resource depletion. Poverty, instability and failed states are and will be breeding grounds for crime and terror. In summary what we are likely to face will be more diverse, less visible, more asymmetric and less predictable.

Globalisation has simultaneously aroused our sense of opportunity and vulnerability. Boundaries between the internal and the external in our politics and society are dissolving. There are new winners and losers within and outside our traditional boundaries. This is the context within which our new European Union polity is emerging.

A Multipolar Future?

Foreign policy has been described as the pursuit of enlightened self-interest. This is a mix of vision, values, interests, capacity and political willingness to act based on realpolitik. A dominant theme of EU foreign policy debates is that we increasingly live in a multipolar world, one where the EU should and will be one of the main poles of the new order. A commitment to effective multilateralism through the use of soft power and enhanced by a renewed transatlantic partnership is seen as key to ensuring this end, namely that of the EU being a significant pole of influence in future. To assume or to assert this multipolar influence is not obviously or necessarily a guarantee of such an outcome. Multipolarity is not new in the history either of European or world affairs. It can be cooperative and consensual like the EU model itself or it could be competitive or at the limit even conflictual as past European history reveals. Its form and shape cannot be known in advance. The 21st century through the rise of the rest will see a relative decline of the West. The balance of influence is shifting to the East and perhaps in time also to the South. While the past fifty years were dominated by the transatlantic relationship perhaps the next fifty may be transpacific. In such a configuration the new world order could well be dominated by a one plus one US/Chinese hegemony whose tendencies to cooperate or to compete still await their hour of self-expression.

Punching Below Our Weight

The European Union's vision and values are more developed than our capacity and will to act. A place at the top table is not assured. It has to be earned. It cannot be presumed. Together we Europeans currently boast the largest market in the world amounting to 28% of global GDP. We account for a quarter of world trade. Our Union and member states between them provide almost two thirds of global development aid. We are the world's biggest donor of humanitarian food aid. Yet we consistently punch below our weight.

This is due in part to a gap between our aspirations and our capacity to act but significantly also because of an absence of shared political will and perspective on the part of member states. For example, as regards capacity, the EU 27 member states spend annually 50% of the US equivalent on defence expenditure. They have 1.5 million personnel in the military; half a million more than the US, yet their combined force projection capacity amounts to only between 10-15% of the US equivalent. 70% of member state land forces are

unfit to serve abroad. Less than 50% of member state EU civilian commitments are deployed. The EU remains the prisoner of member state voluntary contributions, financial and otherwise, and is constrained by the limited willingness of member state to share intelligence with each other.

Treaty Change – a Necessary but Not a Sufficient Condition

In the period since the Maastricht Treaty we have made progress. We established a military committee charged with early warning and strategic planning functions. We initiated the European Defence Agency to enhance research, innovation, greater interoperability and economies of scale in public procurement. We developed our capacity for civilian deployment. Together we have conducted 22 joint EU missions in peace keeping, stabilisation or observation, two thirds of them civilian missions. We have managed these in cooperation with the UN and sometimes with NATO. We have been a good neighbour.

The Lisbon Treaty, whose ratification by referendum I was fighting for this time last year as Campaign Director of a large once off civil society organisation called Ireland for Europe, confers new institutional possibilities to act on the European Union and potentially enhances its ability to speak with one voice on the global stage. The European Council now an institution of the EU, for the first time has a permanent President. The High Representative for Foreign Policy now is a Vice President of the European Commission as well as chairing the Council of foreign ministers. In security and defence the Lisbon Treaty permits permanent structured cooperation, the establishment of pioneer groups and the concept of constructive abstention by non-participating member states. It recognises and validates in Treaty terms the role of the military committee and the European Defence Agency. It permits the establishment of an initial Common Security and Defence fund. Significantly it provides for the launching of the European External Action Service, now at an advanced stage of preparation. These institutional Treaty-based innovations are a necessary but not a sufficient precondition for the emergence of a dynamic EU foreign policy.

Trying to Speak with One Voice

The old story was of Henry Kissinger asking who does one phone in Europe if there is a crisis. The new version jokingly has the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, giving the telephone number to her US opposite, Hilary Clinton, but advising press 1 for French foreign policy, press 2 for British

foreign policy and so on. The EU is struggling to find coherent self-expression, its so-called single voice. The problem is less one of institutional design and more one of member state political will or more accurately of the absence of such will. Who does what produces institutional and political tensions between Brussels and its member states and results in confusion over the EU's role in a rapidly changing global environment. The birth of the new External Action Service has been more marked by inter-institutional and inter-state turf war and rivalry and diplomatic careerism than by the emergence of a coherent and purposeful common vision and programme for action.

The marginalisation of the EU at the critical final stages of the Copenhagen discussions on climate change last December and the failure in recent days to win a vital United Nations resolution to enhance the EU's role in that organisation point to the need for doing much more homework in advance. Speaking with one voice on the world stage is a worthy policy objective but it is by no means assured as an outcome, especially when member states continue to insist on their traditional foreign policy prerogatives.

Corrosion from Below – National Sovereignty-National Preference

The Finnish Foreign Minister, Alexander Stubb, has remarked recently that the member states like to outsource the tricky issues of foreign policy to the EU but 'do the sweet deals themselves'. This greatly complicates and diminishes the EU's credibility and capacity when negotiating with powers such as Russia or China. A truly common energy policy will never emerge if every member state with the opportunity to do so cuts preferential bilateral or limited partnership deals for itself and its neighbours. A truly global role for the EU on climate change cannot emerge if national capitals prefer to peddle their own wares and not a common EU strategy at key global meetings. In today's dynamic global environment every EU state is relatively small and getting smaller. Playing their bilateral cards is the sovereign right of all member states but every time a national capital chooses to prefer bilateral interests over common EU interests effective multilateral preference is diminished. It is an invitation to third party powers to divide and so in effect to rule the EU. For an EU polity it is a form of corrosion from below, the residual effect of lingering national sovereignties that remain powerful mobilisers of national public opinion and that show little appetite to change whatever the shared European rhetoric.

Globally- Who Does What- Corrosion From Above?

Viewed from above Europe is no less challenged. The EU at the level of its member states is overrepresented on most post World War 2 international forums, such as the UN Security Council, the IMF, the World Bank, the G8 or G20 while simultaneously the EU itself is underrepresented as it struggles to find its place, let alone its voice. Perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon is found on the Executive Board of the World Bank where the EU does not even have observer status despite its weighty role in global development funding. This issue of representation doubly undermines the EU's potential influence. Outside Europe emerging powers resent the extent of European overrepresentation and question why the EU should have a greater say without reform and rationalisation of the bodies concerned. Inside Europe when it comes to reform of international institutions member states themselves may countenance an enhanced role for the EU but generally not at their own expense. Moreover, Europe's multilateral and geopolitical vision needs to extend to something more sophisticated and coherent than the question of seats and voting rights. The choice is between relevance and redundancy. As new global players and tensions emerge we urgently need to get our act together or, if not, to risk a form of corrosion from above for the emerging EU polity.

Fusion or Diffusion?

Between these national and global forces the potential role of the EU as a powerful mediator for common EU values and interests is real but is not guaranteed. We do not yet know whether our collective wisdom will drive us towards the politics of fusion, where EU member states use their collective EU weight, vision and capacity to advance shared and common interests and values; or whether our residual sovereignties and national preferences will drive us towards the politics of diffusion, where, in effect, divided as Europeans we will fail. This is a very political task requiring determined and committed leadership. One wonders in the current climate whether the necessary appetite for change will be forthcoming at either the European or member state level. The growing propensity towards intergovernmentalism over the community method of decision making in EU affairs further erodes the definition and refinement of the common European interest.

Mini-lateralism or True Multilateralism?

Even as the EU professes a belief in multilateralism it is forging ahead with bilateral strategic partnerships with Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, the USA, the African Union and NATO. This reveals an absence of geopolitical content and vision consistent with a genuinely multilateral strategy. It mirrors the weakness of bilateral alliance building by member states themselves. It is a process of serial bilateralism that risks becoming a kind of mini-lateralism as opposed to a coherent form of global multilateralism. This too is threatened by corrosion from above and below - from above, when these partner states or institutions at global level seek to define their own place in any new multipolar order - from below, with the parallel profusion of member state bilaterals with the same target group. This could result in Europe ending up as a 21st century policy taker rather than as a policy shaper, contrary to its professed self-image as a multilateralist.

A Sense of Urgency

Sorting all these challenges out post Lisbon Treaty requires the EU and its member states to undertake a comprehensive strategic review of how and by which means it and they intend to position us as Europeans in the new multilateralism which we claim to seek to champion and from which we hope to benefit. This is both politically and legally dense territory for which so far we have shown modest taste. Ours is a work in progress in Europe but it needs a sense of urgency and renewal. The world will not stand still awaiting our answer. China's growing involvement in Africa, Russia's muscle flexing on energy supply as an energy superpower including new relations with China, Turkey's enhanced credibility in its own region and the increasingly transpacific gaze of US foreign policy are not waiting for the EU to make up its mind. Global political and economic changes are marked today not only by their scale but by their pace. If it is to be an effective 21st century multilateralist EU decision making needs to be more agile, adaptable and accelerated, qualities that to date have been for the EU elusive and more the exception than the rule.

Concluding Remark

Let me return to where I began. Jean Monnet remarked that nothing is possible without people and nothing is sustainable without institutions. We are slowly, perhaps too slowly, building our institutions. When it comes to our leaders this is not the most inspirational generation of Europeans. From Malmo, to Manchester and from Munich to Modena Europe needs people of vision,

capacity, values and strong beliefs if its true possibilities are to be realised. People matter. Renzo Imbeni was one such person. I am pleased to have had this opportunity to celebrate his memory with you, his family and his friends in his native place.

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