

A COMMON POLICY TOWARDS AFRICA?

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Some of the hardest lessons of history and the considerable cultural elaborations and reflections which followed upon them, have now become the implied premises of the process of European integration, culminating in the European Union. Europeans have re-learned that war between nations, as well as civil war and other intolerably wasteful forms of strife, are not necessarily the result of a clash of ideologies or the byproduct of dictatorship. Frequently, they have been the result of a clash of economic interests as well as of the temptation to translate military might or cultural sway into economic advantage. The outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) cannot be explained by ideology or dictatorship. That war involved European Powers which were mostly constitutional monarchies proclaiming belief in 'free trade' (albeit sometimes very jingoistically corrected) and 'progress'. In the decades preceding 1914, no dictator in the modern sense appeared on the continent and the mere suspicion of overweening ambition could spell the political demise of many a tribune of the people, as witnessed by the case of General Boulanger, in the France of 1885.

Lessons are learnt very slowly and the pedagogy of historical events is indeed puzzling, because the lesson was driven home by another world war purposely begun and pursued by dictators. Postwar it was realised that to remove the threat of war, Europe not only had to vanquish dictatorship and totalitarian ideologies, the immediate causes of the last world war, it had also to establish rules as well as level playing fields in trade and competition, so as to remove the temptation of attempting to achieve by force of arms, subversion or other violent means, what could not be gained by economic, even if fierce, competition. The success of the experiment in ensuring peace as well as quickening development during the last half century is to a large extent due to the patient negotiations which led to the common market and then the European Economic Community and now the Union. The Union has inherited an *acquis* of rules, directives, regulations, not unilaterally imposed but agreed to, and a Court of Law covering substantially most of its economic exchanges, internally and externally. Doubts are sometimes expressed about the wisdom of entering into the *minutiae*. However, that was the way of subtracting as much as possible from the areas of unfair competition, and

subjecting, again as much as possible, inter-European economic life to the rule of law. Few thought this could be possible, but it has not only come about but has also been accepted by public opinion in all European countries, as obviously necessary.

It has to be emphasised that together with the mass of written regulation there is a further shared *entente* about the proper relationship between the politics of member states and their pursuit of national economic interests. It is now assumed that member states should not and in fact do not flex their military muscle within the continent to obtain economic advantage. It is also taken for granted that this abstention from exploitation of military might, does not only favor the common interest, it also underpins the very nature of the Union, and relieves the larger member states from internal pressures which run counter to the spirit of the Union. A further very important implied premise would be that it is only market competition conducted by the exploitation of economic advantage, that really bestows benefits. The one-sided profits deriving from the exploitation of extra economic leverage, usually bring in train certain unwelcome political and economic consequences and wreak havoc on the very concept of a common market, let alone a Union.

Unfortunately what is now being taken for granted within our continent does not completely accompany the policy of the member states in Africa. Suspicions are harbored about the methods of competition in economic penetration and the support given to 'convenient' strongmen or dictators in some states of the southern continent. One wonders how long it will have to take before the member states of the Union realise that a common coordinated African policy is a necessary corollary to the general internal policy of the Union. Behind the civil wars and rebellions, the sham elections, the tribal strife and genocidal situations there lurk the unscrupulous machinations of some European and United States' economic interests. It is commonly asserted that corruption is rife in most countries in Africa. It is not always realised that the administrations and the governments are corrupted or bribed by outside, mostly 'western' interests. What is really in Europe's overall interest is that Africa should embark on development, which can only occur within stable political conditions. Some would still opt for the temporary stability provided by friendly or corrupted strongmen. Africa cannot achieve stability and development, cannot provide the 'natural' economic partner of Europe if it continues to be despoiled. When some of the endemic problems of that continent are further exacerbated, or directly fomented by outside interests, what temporary progress is achieved is soon lost.

The Union is, with some success, presently engaged in two very important tasks, prompted by acts of faith and hope in addition to surmised economic advantage: the enlargement and the adoption of a European Constitution. Another arduous task is that of the formulation of a common foreign policy and the prefiguring of a common defence policy. The formulation of a common foreign policy has encountered difficulties because of differences with United States policy, which had for some time been very close to that of many European countries. In fact the process of distinction from American foreign and, more so, defence policy is as fraught with dangers as the surgical separation of Siamese twins. The Middle East situation and the aftermath of the second gulf war are very divisive factors within the European Union. As of now it looks as if achieving agreement would be a Sisyphean task. Though the United States seems to have realised lately that the world has arrived at the stage where the United Nations organisation is indispensable for the solution of international disputes, there are so many unresolved matters of policy on both sides of the Atlantic.

The meeting at Cancun has focused attention on trade in agricultural goods, with pressure being put on both the European Union and the US to abandon farm subsidisation and the fixing of quotas for agricultural produce. However, as has been pointed out, most African countries cannot depend too heavily for their economic development on agricultural exports. African agriculture will have to feed Africa adequately in the first instance, which is not the case today. Non-food products of the land are in fact important, but the transport infrastructure does not help even inter-African trade, let alone profitable export. South Africa is, of course, not typical but even there, notwithstanding the financial and economic infrastructure long abuilding during the previous all-white regime, there are still very difficult problems for most agricultural exports except, perhaps, wine. However, it does not suit the European Union to be type-cast as the greedy obstacle to African development.

Perhaps the Union could attend to the matter of an *entente* between member States and thereafter common rules for the conduct of relations with Africa. The cultural rivalry between anglophone, francophone and lusophone Africa, influenced no doubt by the perceived advantage through language and political culture, when competing for contracts or concessions in the extraction of mineral resources, will no doubt remain but independent African nations have found ways of opting out of neo-colonialist confines. All of Africa looks naturally towards Europe in the first instance. Pascal Lamy's speech at Cancun was the one which attracted the most eager attention from African delegates, with disappointing results.

A more 'ethical' and coordinated African policy by the European Union could help tackle also the question of the choice between managed or wild immigration from Africa. The economic development of Africa is the only real solution to the pressure of clandestine immigration from the southern shores of Europe.

The success of the European Union can be explained not only through the opening up and regulation of a common market. The ethical image of an organisation founded on principle and on law, has contributed immensely to this advance made from a continent devastated by war and in the case of the hard core, humiliated by defeat, into a model of good governance and general well being for the whole world. That image should not be tarnished because in terms of the real situation in the member states themselves, and in parallel, with the achievements in the Council of Europe, it remains the best model for emerging continents.

Adopting a new common African Policy could lead towards a saner approach to Africa, more in keeping with the traditional far-sightedness of the founding fathers of the Communities.

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