

Speech given by Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis on enlargement, the Southern Neighbourhood, development policy and humanitarian aid (Nicosia, 12 June 2012)

Caption: On 12 June 2012, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, gives a speech at the meeting of Heads of EU representations held in Nicosia in which she projects the role that the Cypriot Presidency is to play, especially regarding the EU's enlargement process and the country's contribution to the EU's Southern Neighbourhood.

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Speeches & Interviews

Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, at the Meeting of Heads of EU Representations: "Main issues of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union that are part of the competencies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Enlargement, Southern Neighbourhood, Development policy and Humanitarian aid", Nicosia - 12/06/2012

The Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union starts in 18 days. This Presidency is a challenge and an opportunity - and we are ready to take it on. We have been preparing for this Presidency for years, and we have all worked very hard.

We have ensured the venues and the logistical arrangements for the meetings here, in Cyprus, and in Brussels, are ready; we have dealt with staffing needs and we have made sure all the personnel are adequately trained; and we have set goals and priorities, prepared policy papers and "dossier management fiches". The 6-month Programme of the Presidency is ready and will be made public at the very beginning of the Presidency.

We have also prepared for the crises that might come our way during this next semester – crises that are expected, and those that are unexpected. For the unexpected crises, we set up the necessary mechanisms to be ready and equipped to address them. As for the ongoing and expected crisis, the economic crisis that Europe is facing, we are in close co-operation and coordination with all the member states, and also with the President of the European Council, Mr Van Rompuy, and the President of the Eurogroup, to take any collective decisions necessary to overcome difficulties, and help the citizens of Europe deal with the consequences of the economic crisis that they face every day.

Understandably, the response to the economic crisis, and also the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU, will be two of the main priorities of our Presidency.

However, one thing is very clear: the economic crisis we are facing must not lead to an introvert European Union. Yes, we must address the issues that affect the lives and livelihoods of our citizens, and this is our main concern. But we cannot do this by looking only inwards. Part of the solution to the problems and challenges we face, is an active and effective EU policy towards the rest of the world.

Enlargement

The process of the enlargement of the European Union is widely acknowledged as one of our most successful policies, showcasing the Union's indisputable strengths in advancing and solidifying conditions of peace, democracy, stability and prosperity throughout the continent.

It is precisely on this basis that a decision was made on our part to include the enlargement dossier in the priorities of our Presidency program. Our clear aim will be to exert every effort in achieving tangible progress on all issues pertaining to this particular policy area.

Our overall approach in the handling of the enlargement dossier will not deviate from previous practice during other Presidencies. Our actions vis-à-vis each and every candidate country will be guided exclusively by the principles of "own merits" and strict conditionality and a spirit of objectivity.

On Croatia, I wish firstly to express satisfaction as regards the findings of the Commission's Monitoring Report of 24 April, since they make it absolutely clear that Croatia's preparations for formally acceding on 1 July 2013 are moving in the right direction. Nonetheless, we are duty bound to take note of a very limited number of issues identified in the Commission's report, which require further efforts. I am confident that Croatia will carry out all that is needed to address these issues.

We do indeed intend to keep a very close eye on all relevant developments during our Presidency,

particularly in view of the Comprehensive Monitoring Report which will be presented by the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council in autumn.

As regards the ratification process of Croatia's Treaty of Accession by the national parliaments of the 27 member states, I am pleased to inform that Cyprus completed its internal procedures and has forwarded a copy of the ratification document to the Treaty depository in Rome.

Obviously, the enlargement policy of the EU as regards the Western Balkans region does not end with Croatia. Quite the contrary, it is our strong contention that the prospect of accession for the other Western Balkan states is of critical importance and therefore as President of the Council we intend to work hard in promoting this very prospect.

Concerning Montenegro, we are heartened by the positive findings of the Commission's Report of 22 May and the reiteration of its recommendation to the Council for the commencement of accession negotiations. We are all quite cognizant of the fact that there is still a great deal of work to be done by Montenegro, yet I cannot but look forward to a Council decision in June which will heed the Commission's recommendation.

I assure you that the Cyprus Presidency will be fully ready to move decisively with the implementation of such a decision, should it be adopted.

We also welcome the recent decision by the European Council to grant candidate status to Serbia, an extremely important development as it creates momentum for the further advancement of its European perspective. It must be recalled that this decision was taken having considered the significant progress achieved by the Serbian authorities in the field of internal reforms and on the issue of full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

We hope that the right conditions will emerge for a decision to be taken in the December Council for the opening of accession negotiations, provided, of course, that the Commission's prior evaluation will be in the same vein. It is a formidable task, and an ambitious objective, but achievable nonetheless.

On the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, it is everyone's wish, I believe, that appropriate steps on the name issue will be taken in order to allow for a decision on the opening of accession negotiations.

As regards Albania, we are pleased by the encouraging developments over the last few months towards attaining political stability and look forward to the fulfillment by Tirana of the 12 key priorities.

Concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina, we also look forward to the continuation of the reform process. Undoubtedly, progress on this front could potentially pave the way for Bosnia-Herzegovina submitting a credible application for membership during the Cypriot Presidency.

On Kosovo, despite our well-known position of not recognizing Kosovo's Unilateral Declaration of Independence, allow me to stress that the Cyprus Presidency will employ a balanced approach, taking into full consideration the views of all the member states of the EU.

As regards Iceland, the country's accession negotiations are moving into a critical stage as we begin to examine negotiating chapters with a more pronounced degree of difficulty than what has been the case thus far. The Cyprus Presidency is absolutely committed to carrying out the traditional role of the President as an honest broker in seeking to strike the right balance on a number of issues which are of crucial significance for both a substantial number of partners as well as Iceland.

The ultimate aim, of course, cannot but be to progress decisively with Iceland's accession negotiations, in close consultation with the Commission's services.

On Turkey, allow me first to reiterate in the strongest possible terms Cyprus' national position of unequivocal support towards the objective of Turkey's full accession, on the proviso that Turkey respects and fulfills without exception all its obligations vis-à-vis the EU. I want to stress that our policy on this issue has not wavered in the slightest since we ourselves joined formally in May of 2004.

At the same time, we are obviously very disappointed by the fact that in spite of our constructive approach, Turkey's stance towards Cyprus as a member of the EU leaves quite a lot to be desired, to put it mildly, an assessment which is clearly echoed by our partners as evidenced by the European Council conclusions of

December 2011, stating that “ .. with regard to the Turkish statements and threats, the European Council expresses serious concern and calls for full respect of the role of the Presidency of the Council, which is a fundamental institutional feature of the EU provided for in the Treaty.”

Nonetheless, and despite the oft repeated and crudely expressed intention by Turkey to freeze its relations with the Council during our Presidency, we will continue to monitor Turkey’s progress in its accession negotiations and to promote their advancement, objectively reviewing its state-of-play and the possible opening of available chapters. Our approach will be predicated, as is the norm, on established EU practices and processes.

Let me make one thing clear: Cyprus will not take advantage of its position as President of the Council of the European Union to advance its national agenda. At the same time, we will not accept Turkey using our Presidency to bypass Cyprus, or to attempt to infringe upon our rights as sovereign state, and member of the EU. Cyprus will lead an impartial Presidency, and we will not be guided, in our policies, either by threats, or by fear.

As stated in the December 2011 General Affairs Council conclusions, it is also our contention that if Turkey implemented its obligations as a candidate country and co-operated with the EU in line with the Negotiating Framework and the relevant European Council and Council conclusions, a significant boost to its negotiation process would unfold.

It is therefore especially regrettable that Turkey continues to reject the Union’s calls for full implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement while also recording zero progress in the normalisation of its relations with the Republic of Cyprus and steadfastly holding on to its counter-productive position of not extending diplomatic recognition towards the Republic of Cyprus.

In carrying out the functions of the Presidency, we will also be called upon to lead the discussion in the Council on the Enlargement Package of the Commission for 2012 in the autumn. Our goal will be to reach consensus on the adoption of the relevant Conclusions, which will be balanced and objective, reflecting on the views of all 27 member states. The Commission’s contribution in successfully tackling this task will be of significant value, through its Strategy Paper and Progress Reports.

I would like to underline again that we attach a great deal of importance in the promotion the EU’s enlargement policy. We are fully aware that this will be one of our most demanding challenges and, as such, we will seek to co-operate and co-ordinate as closely as possible with the Commission, the Council Secretariat, the High Representative and the European Parliament.

Southern Neighbourhood

Another area that merits our attention is our Southern Neighborhood, where historical changes are taking place. The “Arab Spring” brings hope for a better future for the people of the Middle East – it also brings new challenges. The EU must have a role in the transformation of the region – and this cannot be a secondary role. The Union must be a leader in the international efforts to ensure that the transformation of the southern Mediterranean countries is a transformation for the better.

Collectively, we are in a better position to understand what is happening in these countries, what is at stake, and the importance of the EU having a significant input in developments. What goes on in the Arab world has a direct impact on the European Union – on our security, our economies, our societies, even on our natural habitat.

Even though, after the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, the High Representative, Baroness Ashton, and the EEAS has the responsibility and the duty to represent the European Union in the world, it is in cooperation with all the member states that the EU foreign policy is formulated.

And Cyprus, due to its geographic position and the historically excellent relations with the Arab countries and Israel, is in a position to contribute significantly to the formulation of a sound, effective and comprehensive EU approach to developments in the region.

Let me share with you, by way of example, some recent experiences I have had with these countries.

I have visited Libya two times after the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime – the first time soon after the

collapse of the regime and the second time as part of a group of Cypriot Ministers, exploring the needs of the country with regards to rebuilding infrastructure and reviving the economy and the institutions. There, I realized how important the presence of the EU is, and how high the expectations of the people of Libya lie when they think of the Union.

We need to be there through investments and funding; we need to be there to promote democracy and institution building on the basis of principles; and we need to be there to support the people. I took the initiative, after the visit to Libya, to arrange for a group of children who had been affected and traumatized from hostilities, to come to Cyprus to “decompress”.

Just one important detail, which shows the extent of the trauma they suffered: some of the children did not even speak – their shock was so great that they refused to utter even one word. It was only a few days into the visit, after they had met with Cypriot children their age, that they felt safe enough to start speaking again.

As regards Egypt, I also visited the country soon after the uprising. Egypt is the test case for the future of the Arab Spring. It is considered the “centre of the world” (“Umm el Dunia”), and is the key player in the Arab world and the Middle East Peace. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that the EU engage with Egypt, and provide assistance, both economic and political.

Tunisia and Jordan are progressing well. The efforts undertaken by the Kings of Morocco and Jordan must not remain unnoticed.

So what more should the EU do, as a response to the Arab Spring and with regard to its relations with the countries of the Arab World in general?

(a) I believe that we should first look at each country individually. The regional approach is definitely extremely important, but there is not a “one size fits all” model. We must look at the particularities of each country, and respond to these particularities.

(b) We should not dictate – it is only through cooperation on the basis of a partnership among equals that we can help the region, and ultimately ourselves.

(c) At the same time we must insist on principles. Respect for human rights, women’s rights, minority rights, religious freedoms, must be at the core of the transition of these countries to democracy.

(d) We should, even in these difficult times, “put our money where our mouth is.” The new European Neighbourhood instrument (ENI), for example, must take into consideration the special interests and needs of the “Arab Spring” countries. We must also promote private investments.

(e) Finally, we must focus on the people. We can promote educational and cultural exchanges, people to people contacts, development of civil society. Education is the key in most of these countries in promoting the transformation process forward.

A word on Syria. The situation in Syria is extremely worrisome. Cyprus condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent atrocities and the loss of life in the country.

Along with the EU and the international community, Cyprus fully supports the six point plan of the UN – Arab League Special Envoy Kofi Annan. We need to act fast, in order to avoid an escalation of violence; but at the same time, we must decide on our actions wisely, and engage with the international community, including Russia and China. Syria could easily become the match that sets off a huge explosion in the region.

Foreign military intervention must be avoided, and we should seek a political solution, in order to avoid a major regional crisis, which would affect Lebanon first and foremost, and would spread more widely in the region. Cyprus is offering emergency medical help to members of the UN mission in Syria, and has set up a contingency plan for emergency civilian evacuation (of foreign citizens), if the need arises.

As regards the regional approach, it is, as I mentioned earlier, extremely important, and should form part of our policy towards the regions. At the same time it needs to be allowed to function. Cyprus proposed to reactivate the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) through a number of Ministerial meetings, for example on

the issues of Education and Research as well as Tourism. Unfortunately, Turkey decided to block all such proposals by Cyprus to the detriment both of the EU and our southern neighbours. We will continue to strive for a renewed momentum within the UfM, despite obstacles.

We are, on the other hand, very pleased that, following a Cyprus initiative, the second EU-Arab League Ministerial meeting is now scheduled to take place during our Presidency, in Cairo. Dialogue with the Arab League is an essential part of the EU policy, and it is important that such a meeting will be organized for the first time after 2008.

Ending this part of my presentation, I would be remiss not to refer to the Middle East Peace Process. We do believe that the historical changes in our southern neighbourhood will certainly show in the very near future that the resolution of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict is necessary, now more than ever.

Cyprus believes wholeheartedly that Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, both leaders of peace, will seize this historical opportunity and proceed towards a two state solution, where both Palestinians and Israelis will leave in peace, security and economic prosperity.

Food Security and improved Nutrition in EU Development Policy and Humanitarian aid

One of the goals of the Cyprus EU Presidency is to further strengthen EU Development Policy and Humanitarian Aid. An area which will receive special emphasis during our Presidency is the fight against hunger, food security and nutrition.

The resilience of local communities and the poorest of the poor will also figure among the essential aspects of the Presidency's efforts.

Why do we focus on nutrition? Improving the nutrition of mothers and children is the key to fighting hunger. Almost one-third of children in developing countries are malnourished – 150 million are underweight for their age. This has a cost and none of the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved if we don't tackle hunger, food security and nutrition first.

Right food at the right time. This is our key message. The Presidency will aim at strengthening EU efforts to seriously reduce child under-nutrition and to emphasize prevention, especially among children under two years of age. Solving malnutrition builds the brains and bodies of the next generation. Children will only reach their full adult potential if they receive proper nutrition in the first 1000 days of life. The Cyprus Presidency will strengthen these aspects within the EU's humanitarian aid, as well as within the EU development cooperation.

Another key aspect of our Presidency efforts is the "best-buy and buy-local approaches". The EU, and especially some developing countries, face tough economic times. There is a need to deliver better with less. Boosting nutrition is cost effective and requires no scientific breakthrough to achieve. It's a real win-win for all.

Why do we focus on resilience? We should stop the cycle of food crisis. Hunger is primarily an issue of lack of access to productive resource and of insufficient safety net to support the poor. The EU's latest response to the food crisis in the Horn of Africa (i.e. SHARE) follows this logic. Cyprus strongly promotes integrated approaches to prevent recurring food crisis. The latest EU efforts (Horn of Africa/SAHEL) go in this direction. That's why Cyprus has decided to co-finance SHARE in the Horn of Africa.

The objective geared towards strengthening resilience is to improve or restore access to food, drastically reduce environmental hardships, build up and protect natural resources, contribute to withstanding and managing weather and other shocks, putting in place local and national strategies to ensure that the poor have access to food.

The EU should increasingly support resilience activities with community-centered, country-led interventions of scale that are significantly more affordable than food aid in the short and long run. Resilient communities seldom need food assistance, or occasionally may need very little.

Improved nutrition can drive economic growth. Equitable economic growth, which benefits the poorest, can, in turn, significantly help improve nutrition.

The aim of the Cyprus Presidency is to work Towards a Better Europe. Our aim is to make a difference in the lives of our citizens, but also to contribute to the role of the EU as a global player. In a world of globalisation, the European Union cannot turn its sights only inwards. A strong EU presence in the world, as a force of democratisation, stability and peace, will help not just our partners, but also ourselves. Through a sound policy on enlargement, through the improvement of our relations with our neighbours, and through an effective and targeted development and humanitarian aid policy, we can achieve a lot.

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