

BARNIER: "FOUR CHALLENGES FOR OUR COMMON HOME"

06-03-2007



The Vice President of the European People's Party (EPP) **Michel Barnier** has outlined in a recent article in the French press "Four Challenges for our Common Home" the foreign policy priorities of **Nicolas Sarkozy** if elected as the new President of France. Here is the full text of Mr Barnier's article:

In Washington and Beijing, Beirut and Bamako, they ask us: will there be continuity or a break in France's external action after next May?

As I see it, the answer is not to be found in Paris, in the bargaining of French domestic politics, but by looking at the world as it is. And it is precisely the presidential campaign that should be a moment of truth. First of all, truth about today's world, which is unstable, dangerous, fragile and unjust. It is in that world that France and our new President will need to defend our interests and make ourselves heard.

The world is more a place of breaks and crises than of continuity and serenity. Indeed French diplomacy shows its true colours in initiative, audacity and adaptation. And it will have work to do in 2007, in the new age that is beginning. Without denying or forgetting our past, but also without nostalgia or taboos. In order to meet four challenges and avoid a funeral, the death of the European project.

Climate change is the most serious and most global of the challenges for our external action. The clear voices of Al Gore and, in France, Nicolas Hulot, have raised the alarm. Our response so far has been inadequate. And yet these accelerating climatic upheavals will perturb every economy and every policy. Even the American hyperpower was shaken by Hurricane Katrina.

During my recent work on the proposed "European civil protection force", I identified some 38 natural or human disasters in the last 15 years, of which 18 directly affected Europe and European citizens. At the request of Tony Blair, the economist Sir Nicholas Stern has estimated the cost of climate change at 5.5 trillion euros. There will be tens of millions of "climate refugees" escaping from floods. All our habits, every single one, will be changed: how we produce, consume, farm, travel, and build. Yes, "our home is on fire!" As a matter of urgency we must research further into new energies, base European taxes on the real ecological cost of products and services, support rather than lecture the emerging countries, and create a world environment organisation on the model of the WHO.

The second challenge is peace in the Middle East, and primarily peace between Israelis and Palestinians. In that region, so near and yet so far from us, all the indicators are flashing red. All the ingredients for a general conflagration are present in a region where every element is fragile and connected, sending out shock waves we feel within our own country: the hearts of our Jewish and Muslim compatriots beat in time with the anguish of the Israelis and Palestinians.

The mistake the Americans made was to seek to wage war in Iraq alone, and not think of the way towards peace. And to forget that democracy cannot be imposed on the Middle East without the Arab and Muslim peoples, and even less despite them. This is a region where democracy cannot be reduced to universal suffrage alone. It takes a long process to produce democrats.

I remain hopeful that in the year ahead George Bush will finally change his line and listen to the advice of the Baker report. I remain hopeful that 2007 will see a Palestinian state proclaimed even within provisional borders. I remain hopeful that the Europeans, at an extraordinary European Council, will make a significant, comprehensive offer of political, economic and military cooperation to contribute to the stability of the region, and in particular, the security of Israel and Palestine. The new UNIFIL force in Lebanon proves that this is possible, and within such an offer there is room for a firm, clear-sighted dialogue with Syria and Iran.

The third challenge comes to us from the whole of Africa, the continent of every sort of opportunity and risk. In 1950, there were two Europeans for every African. By 2050, there will be two Africans for every European. Half of those Africans will be under twenty, and two-thirds will have less than one dollar a day to live on. Every month, AIDS alone is killing as many men, women and children as a tsunami, and Africa is the greatest victim. The whole of Europe, not just the Canary Islands, is concerned. 2007 must be the start of a new French and European policy with Africa. With those countries who wish it, those who share a language with us, and the others too, we must work towards a "partnership contract" that is debated, evaluated and renewable. The partnership needs to be both respectful of the other and rigorous.

Wherever we can, we must encourage and help the African Union and other regional organisations to further the views and initiatives of Africans themselves. Because of its size and needs, Africa requires Europeans to pool their development cooperation policies and peacekeeping endeavours,

rather than pursue them separately. Indeed that is what Commissioner Louis Michel has proposed. Is it unrealistic for France's permanent military bases in Africa to open up to this European dimension?

And the fourth challenge for our external action is the organisation and stability of our own continent, Europe. The very heart of Europe, the Balkans, presents the first test of the credibility of France's and the Union's foreign policy. In the scattered mosaic of former Yugoslavia, the final piece to be loosened as from the spring is conditional independence for Kosovo. Keep a close eye on the Balkans! Evil winds from the past are beginning to blow again. It is there that the European ideal and the Union, yet again, must contain nationalism while respecting nations, even the smallest. All the peoples of the Balkans are entitled to the promise to join the European family, if they behave themselves, want to and make the necessary preparations.

Beyond the Balkans, the question arises of the European Union's borders and an answer must be found. Ordinary people's feeling of an unstoppable momentum, a project without limits or borders, was certainly one of the causes for their rejection of the European Constitution, particularly since the major enlargement in 2004 involving ten new countries from Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic had not been explained or justified.

Since 29 May 2005, I have decided it is necessary to speak frankly and amicably with Turkey, to assert that the European project is a project for the continent of Europe, and to offer our neighbours, not least the great nation of Turkey, an attractive partnership involving them in our key policies, but not integrating them entirely in our institutions.

To meet these four great challenges, and no doubt others, such as our alliance with the United States and our ability to dialogue—on every topic—with Asia and Latin America, France will need to choose between solidarity and solitude.

It seems clear that our country is moving from one age to another. From a closed, fenced in, regulated world, that some still hanker for, to a world open to exchange and competition. Let us face this reality, not to take fright but to prepare for it.

Voices can be heard in this new world, from London and elsewhere, saying that the economy is now global and that the European Union only makes sense and has any use as a free trade area, as large and as open as possible. Let us be wary! These voices are loud and effective, louder than ours has been since 29 May.

In the next three months, if France, and particularly the men and women who seek to lead the country, stay silent or remain in the background, choose caution rather than commitment on the question of Europe, then it is to be feared that the European political project, this French ambition, will slowly but surely unravel. None of them—not Nicolas Sarkozy, who has spoken out in favour of a political Europe and is well aware that De Gaulle, if he were with us, would now be talking of the independence of Europe rather than of France; not Ségolène Royal, who cannot sacrifice our country's European future as desired by Mitterrand and Delors; not François Bayrou, who speaks as the heir to the audacity and vision of Schuman and Monnet; nor any other responsible politician—none of them has the right to agree to bury the "European dream".

But this "common home", as Eric Le Boucher wrote here on 16 December, is fragile. The Union is under threat. From populism of one sort or another, national, even nationalistic, reactions, "every man for himself", distrust of others to the south or east. Under threat from the cowardice of too many politicians who do not live up to their country's choice of Europe, do not explain, speak out or lead by example. Under threat from outmoded institutions that cannot work with so many representatives. Under threat from the rest of the world, where they are hoping for Europe but are not prepared to wait.

The European Union is not an option for France. It is a vital necessity. It is the key to meeting the challenges that exist, including those in our own country. By welcoming the views, experience and criticisms of our neighbours. With that key in our hands, we must not hesitate. There are enough of us—right-wing, left-wing and centre—to refuse fatalism and pessimism, and it is possible to design the agenda for a new European project, and discuss it among ourselves and with others:

- *a simplified treaty, operational in 2007-2008, to save those parts of the Constitution needed to allow the Union to function;*
- *joint work, with all 27 if possible, otherwise within the Eurogroup, towards proper economic governance, an autonomous European budget and international taxation on social and ecological dumping;*
- *support for practical projects, to give the Union the humanist and citizen-friendly dimension it often lacks, such as energy independence, as recently proposed by José Manuel Barroso, more ambitious European research, properly managed immigration policy, and a common commitment to such matters as culture, demography, civil protection and transport;*
- *and above all, a political Europe and the tools it needs to have for credible external action and defence. I am thinking of the creation of a European Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

There has never been and never will be a major power in this world that does not possess at the

same time a single economy, a single currency and a single policy. Finally, let me repeat my conviction that France is never at its greatest when we are arrogant, that we cannot be strong if we are solitary. Ecology, peace, development, and growth: our country's voice will be the stronger for being more European.

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