

DEBATE

Renaud Girard, Senior Reporter and International Columnist at *Le Figaro*

Are there any questions?

Daniel Shek, Former Ambassador of Israel to France

I have a sort of question and a bit of a remark. As an Israeli diplomat whose career was mostly focused on Europe I have easily 40 to 45 years of European frustrations and complaints about its absence in our affairs. Some of them are understandable and to be honest, some of them are well deserved. The only significant event concerning the Israeli-Palestinian issue that happened in Europe was in a country that is not part of the EU, which is the Oslo process. Joking apart, it is understandable, if at any given moment it takes the EU three months to elaborate a policy or position, and even then, it does not necessarily represent all the countries, then you cannot be surprised that things happen, and the trains leave the station. On the other hand, and I say this in all honesty, there is no shame in being a second-tier player, you can contribute a lot, and I will give you an example from an area I know very well over the last year, which is the hostage situation. There were some European countries, including France to a great degree and Germany, and a few others, who have contributed to that issue significantly without actually sitting at the negotiating table. They contributed on a humanitarian front but also diplomatic. Really, there is no shame, sometimes that is what you can do. On the other hand, here we are discussing a situation where we are talking about something that is about to happen. Maybe this is the moment for the Europeans to think about how they can weigh in, for example, on the Iran-Israel issue, both in Iran and Washington, to make sure that in the choice between a weak Iran that is easy prey for an American-Israeli attack, or a weak Iran that is a negotiation partner of choice, the weight goes towards the second option.

Renaud Girard

A very good remark.

Nicolas Piau, CEO and Co-Founder of Tilt Capital

It is actually an extension to this remark and a question from a diplomatically uneducated eye. It is striking to see how the European Commission is totally absent from your discussion, and you just mentioned the High Representative towards the end. In the end, is it not just an issue of the European states still trying to defend their own national influence rather than building a genuine European influence? I would really like to understand from the UAE what the European Commission represents as an actor or whether it is one at all?

Mohammed Baharoon, Director General of the Dubai Public Policy Research Center (b'huth)

Definitely an actor if they want to be. This is an act of will, if you want to be part of this and what happens in the region is going to affect Europe, then you will have to act. If you think that Europe is insulated from all of this and will not be affected, though history teaches us otherwise, then that is what you do. Honestly, it is a matter of will and whether or not they want to do this. The previous High Representative was involved in a lot of things, Europe has got an issue with getting its act together but that is not a lack of will, I am not quite sure about the new High Representative.

Volker Perthes, Non-Resident Senior Fellow and Senior Advisor to the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)

I think that both Marc and I as Europeans, were rather clear on where the inhibitions are for Europe, not the inhibitions for France to play a French role, Germany a German role, etc. However, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict we do have our national idiosyncrasies that we will not easily overcome. For example, it is impossible for Germany to do some things that are very easy for Ireland or Spain, not for good historical reasons but for bad historical reasons. We have this special relationship with Israel, which is not only a foreign policy obligation but also very much part of our domestic politics. This needs to be understood if we want to understand divergencies in the approaches of European states with regard to the Middle East. Europeans are in fact united with regard to our strategic goals there. We all want a two-state solution, and no European would diverge from that, but we are not united on the tactics, like how to vote in the General Assembly or the Security Council, if we happen to be in it.

On the other hand, I am also grateful for the question about whether Europe is more than just the High Representative. Of course, it is the economic and financial weight of Europe. And of course, the Commission represents that much more than the High Representative. Let us speak about the issues for the future that are coming up, regional integration. Renaud, at some point you asked if we had missed the train, but I do not think we should wait for trains, we should build railways. That is what we can do and have done in the past and there are partners for that in the region. We did not speak about Iraq for example. Yesterday, we spoke about IMEC, which is a very interesting project to link India to Europe through the Gulf. European companies, the European Commission and the European Global Gateway Project will have a role in that. There is also a Baghdad, Iraqi Development Corridor project which also would link Europe to the Gulf, or the Gulf to Europe through Iraq and Turkey. As the Germans have some experience in building railways to Baghdad, we can start here again, modernize these ideas, and establish these corridors. That is where the European Commission's weight will and should come in.

Renaud Girard

The conclusion is yours now.

Marc Hecker, Deputy Director of Ifri, Editor-in-Chief of *Politique Étrangère*, and Research Fellow at the Security Studies Center, Ifri

We have run out of time, so I just want to say that I was in Israel a few days ago and I mentioned the five points that Josep Borrell, the High Representative used in one of his latest speeches before leaving his job. He said that first we have to support peace camps on each side; second, confront spoilers; third, stick to facts and fight disinformation; fourth, protect international law and institutions, including the International Criminal Court; and five, we have to make the EU relevant. When I said that, it was basically like raising a red flag. Borrell was described as biased and pro-Palestinian. These five points have even become divisive within the EU. If European countries cannot agree on things like supporting peace camps, confronting spoilers, supporting international law, etc., I do not know where we are heading.

Renaud Girard

Thank you very much. Thank you, Ambassador Daniel Shek, for your very good remark. Europe is not yet a body that can react to crises very quickly, this was a very interesting point. Thank you very much to the speakers.