

EU's Nobel Prize

by **Guido Lenzi**

The award of the Nobel Prize to the EU has drawn criticism, even scorn, from many a commentator, even among Europeans. Awarding the prize to the UN in 2001 (and to Obama in 2009) elicited a similar response, for the very same reasons: not having (yet) lived up to their own proclaimed lofty aims. Recognition and encouragement in the present uncertain international environment, rather than reward, seems to have been the underlying motive of the Norwegian committee (ironically in a country that has kept aloof from the common continental project).

Criticism of the European Union draws on its present economic troubles and on its inability to come up with a coherent foreign and security policy of its own. Disregarding its achievements in keeping the lengthening continental bandwagon together, and the stabilizing potential it still holds for neighbouring areas, both Eastwards and Southwards. Surprisingly, even the Nobel award's motivation stands shy of the underlying political significance of EU's integration, both as the critical mass of a work still in progress and as a possible model for the much needed reintegration of the international system as a whole. A process driven on and off, it has been said, by memory, fear and hope.

Equally baffling is the comment just posted on "Transworld" by Stephen Walt of the Harvard Kennedy School, arguing that the US and Europe "do no longer have compelling reasons for close strategic cooperation", all the more so since "Europeans question the faulty (American) judgment" and "Americans no longer feel strong attachment to their old (European) country". They "shouldn't therefore try to preserve intimate institutional relationships that no longer reflect underlying political realities".

In fact, there is enough blame to go around for the present anemic state of "the West". And enough work to be done together for it to adapt to the transitional state of international affairs worldwide. What needs urgent attention is not only the economic state of Europe and the resumption of its integration process, but also, concurrently, the political shape of the trans-Atlantic relationship.

If, after the fall of the Wall, Europe has been deprived of the convenient protection of NATO, the Atlantic Alliance has not thereby lost its enduring relevance as a political covenant. The Euro-Atlantic community must evolve beyond its hard security aspects: having moved "out of area", from territorial defence to force (and influence) projection, it must recover its original strategic task as the backbone for the much-needed resumption of the liberal-international fabric twice woven and twice stopped in its tracks during the past century. The mixture of hard and soft security, the stick and carrot approach, that circumstances nowadays require would very much benefit from a more harmonious and adaptable relationship between "Mars and Venus" (with Minerva and Mercury in waiting).

The enlargement of the EU was a remarkable political achievement that went largely unrecorded, taken for granted as it was after NATO's own, albeit quite different in intention and scope, and resented by some in Europe when the cost-benefit ratio became heavier than expected. The fact is that the kinetic movement that Monnet relied upon has run its course, having reached its utmost economic potential, just as full institutional enlargement has reached its outermost limit. The moment has therefore come for the political capping-up. It's not only the inner logic of the integration process that requires it now, but also intervening international circumstances that have similarly evolved. Indisputably, Europe must finally come of age, stand taller internationally and change gears internally, move from the static domestic space it has so far been to a more active and influential role. Provided that the bar is not raised too high.

The Union and its member States need each other in order to reach their respective and not contradictory aims. No supranational utopia (the “single phone number” called for by Kissinger) should be expected, but instead a novel combination of national and common policies that correspond to what present circumstances require. The relevant composition and structure will however never turn the EU into an assertive power in foreign and security matters, given that from its inception the European integration process has adopted a ‘consumer-driven’ attitude, relying on the responsiveness of its intended partners, be they Russia, the Arab neighbours or America. Its declaredly “effective multilateralism” approach is not much different from the one adopted by President Obama himself. Agenda planning with more strategic and focused informal consultations, and an improved narrative (including a review of its decade-old Security Strategy document) is what the Westerwelle-led “Future of Europe Group” has just called for.

It’s the political “spread”, more than the economic one, that needs to concentrate the minds on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, for the whole wider world to benefit from it. Security relies on predictability, foresight. A Euro-American consultative process should be established as far upstream as possible from the flow of events, not in order to draw up contingency plans, but aiming instead at joint analyses, common assessments and convergent responses to possible future international developments. Relieved as it is by the end of the Cold War, Washington rightly turns its attention from Europe (that should by now be able to fend off for itself) to the Pacific rim to which it also belongs. Europe should attend to its own rim, Eastern and Mediterranean. While both should diversify their contribution to the securisation and stabilization of the Middle East. A revised (not new!) Atlantic partnership would benefit the operational effectiveness and political credibility of both.

In the end, paraphrasing and reversing what Churchill had to say about the Americans, Europeans are the only Europeans we have. So we’d better make do with them, for our own

interests, and for the sake of a better ordered world. Instead of looking in the rear-view mirror, an improved narrative about the road that needs to be taken, fighting back against complacency or indifference, is what the widening world public opinion is in need of. Belittling Europe’s contribution to post-war history does not take into account that a much different international environment has emerged from it, that awaits a more articulate Euro-American relationship. The EU-US relationship remains the core for the further aggregation of “like-minded” countries, in coping with the many intervening conflicts in time of peace. The world’s afflictions, nowadays, can be attributed to omissions of the international community, more than to deliberate offences to the common good. Pointing them out could constitute opportune new rallying calls. Trading accusations about each other’s inadequacies is nothing more than escapism.

The Nobel committee has traditionally recognized life-long achievements. Occasionally, like it did last year and the year before, it encourages a road well taken. This year, I feel, by singling out the European Union, it did both.

***Guido Lenzi.**

Tra gli altri, ha ricoperto l'incarico di Consigliere Diplomatico del Ministro dell'Interno. Capo della Rappresentanza permanente d'Italia presso l' OSCE a Vienna