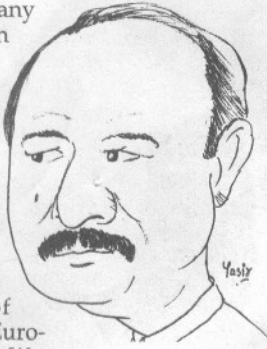


Europe's 'Look East'

BY MUSHAHID HUSSAIN

A recent visit to Germany was instructive in understanding Europe's political evolution in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, and growing tensions with the United States regarding its role in the world.

Germany, the largest state in Europe now, together with France and Belgium, headquarters of NATO, were leading the European opposition to the Iraq War.



Germany has had a long-standing interest and involvement in the Middle East and South Asia, through its well-established tradition of Oriental scholarship, and unlike European colonial powers, it has not been an extension of any colonial policy. Germany also hosted the Bonn Conference in December 2001 following the ouster of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and it was this landmark event that set the political roadmap for post-Taliban Afghanistan. And only last week, German peacekeepers were killed in Kabul in an apparent suicide bombing, the first such casualties among the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) stationed in Kabul, of which 2400 are Germans.

Last month, Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Germany and later this month, President Musharraf will have a brief visit to Berlin.

During a conference on Pakistan at Berlin and Munich, there was a useful opportunity to exchange views with German parliamentarians, academics and officials, with an insight into their worldview and policies. As Europe now moves closer towards political integration, there is a discomfort developing between an economically vibrant and politically cohesive Europe and its former protector, the United States.

With the European Union now expanded to 25 countries with a total population of 450 million, 15 million of which is Muslim, there are major challenges regarding its future role in the world and relationship with the United States.

There is a growing feeling among Europeans that the United States would prefer to conduct foreign policy with the individual states of Europe, rather than a unified Europe whose outlook could well be shaped by dissenters like France and Germany. In fact, some American scholars even hint at an American policy of fostering divisions within Europe. In a

June 9 media interview, Charles Kupchan, who served as Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council under President Clinton, said that 'to the extent we have a policy today, it is to foster divisions within Europe. We deliberately encouraged countries to break away from the Franco-German consensus on Iraq.'

It is not just Iraq that is a divider between the Atlantic allies. On Iran, EU policy is to engage at all levels, rejecting the notion of any 'axis of evil' and even on Hizbullah, the EU has refused to recognise the Lebanon Islamic movement as a 'terrorist group', similar to their not going along with the US on the Hizbul Mujahideen organization in Jammu and Kashmir, which Washington has placed on its 'terrorism watch list' for political reasons to appease India.

However, at the same time, the EU also has more stringent standards on democracy in Pakistan than the United States. For instance, the EU's Cooperation Agreement with Pakistan, which was arrived at in

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November 2001, basically as a political 'reward' for Islamabad's ditching of the Taliban and switching sides to support the US in the 'war on terror', has still not been approved by the European Parliament. They have made their approval conditional on 'progress on democratisation', a diplomatic codeword for reservations on the LFO, somewhat similar to those expressed by the Commonwealth.

The Germans also are concerned at recent measures taken by the MMA government in the Frontier Province, which they say could adversely affect their ongoing funding there since they have apparently strict provisions regarding women's rights, education and political pluralism.

Notwithstanding these reservations concerning Pakistan's domestic politics, the EU has been expressing concern over Kashmir being a potentially dangerous flashpoint between Pakistan and India. During his March 7 speech to the UN Security Council on Iraq, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin referred to the 'long-standing unresolved dispute in southern Asia', along with the Middle East and the Korean question, as being issues meriting the attention and involvement of the international community.

Members of the German Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee also said that Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer cited 'more pressing and serious problems than Iraq, like Kashmir' as one of the justifications for his government's opposition to the Iraq War, when he gave German MPs his briefing on the issue.

However, Germany, like other EU countries, is opposed to placing priority to Kashmir over all other issues and feels that normalisation of relations and dialogue between the two adversarial neighbours needs to proceed without Kashmir being an impediment, a position closer to India's than Pakistan's perspective.

In an official paper issued by the German Foreign Office in May 2002 on 'Tasks of German Foreign Policy' on South Asia, it is explicitly stated that 'in the process of developing our relations with South Asia, India has priority', adding that 'India now appears to be developing into another Asian superpower.'

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policy

Britain, making these societies multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. While accepting these new realities, there is also some fear and concern whether the Muslims in their midst will pose a 'threat' to their societies, be it from 'terrorism' or 'fundamentalism'. Some scholars have also talked of a 'Euro-Islam' where Europeans feel a 'secular and modern' Muslim population could coexist better with their European counterparts.

Another change visible is the praise for Turkey's neo-Islamist government, which the Europeans feel has done more for human rights and meeting EU criteria for membership than secular Turkish parties in the past. Turkey has abolished the death penalty, granted cultural rights to the Kurdish minority and talks on Turkey's membership of the EU are scheduled to begin at the end of 2004. In this respect, the Europeans are learning from the tragic blunder made in Algeria in 1992, when an Islamist political party winning a free election was denied office, banned and persecuted following the imposition of a Western-backed Martial Law. 11 years and 100,000 lives later, the situation there is still volatile and violent.

However, with the US-led 'war on terror' focusing on the Muslim World, an interesting but still unanswered question is what is the relevance and role of NATO, since its main enemy - Soviet Communism has ceased to exist. In the past NATO Secretaries General have hinted at 'radical Islam' being the 'new enemy' although this is still not the official line. In 1992, NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner, on his first visit to Moscow after the break-up of the Soviet Union, had expressed concern over the resurgence of Islam in the Central Asian Republics while concurrently welcoming the rise of Christianity in the former Soviet Union's European part. And in 1997 NATO Secretary General Willy Claes again raised the spectre of meeting an 'Islamic threat' as one of NATO's new role. Interestingly, in its quest for a new role beyond Europe, NATO is to take over command of ISAF in Kabul in August, the first time NATO will be operating outside its primary area of responsibility, namely, Europe.

In its quest to diversify its foreign policy, rather than relying entirely on one country - a mistake that Pakistan made in the past - Pakistan should try to engage Europe in South Asia, as it has somewhat successfully tried to do with Russia. But then in seeking European political and economic support, it will have to be more sensitive to European concerns on human rights and democracy if it wants meaningful and substantive cooperation.

The Germans, for instance, complained of lack of Pakistani interest and enthusiasm after a EU delegation had offered wide-ranging cooperation and support on such areas as law enforcement, money laundering and monitoring border crossings. Pakistan has had a problem of dichotomy in dealing with the West, pliable towards Washington's intrusive actions but treating similar attempts by the EU as bordering on 'interference in internal affairs', especially when it comes to issues of democracy.

Pakistan should learn from Turkey, which has won praise by meeting European concerns on human rights and democracy while, at the same time, promoting its political and economic interests. In order to get something, governments also have to give in return, an aspect in successful diplomacy that Pakistan needs to learn from its Turkish friends.

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