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“If it stays on that course, Europe will become geopolitically irrelevant”

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Europe is on geopolitical auto-pilot, playing sidekick to America, alienating its Muslim neighbours and subsidising its own citizens rather than its needier neighbours. And if it stays on that course, it will become geopolitically irrelevant. That's why I would propose three bold and, paradoxically, easy initiatives that Europe can take to ensure its geopolitical relevance in 25 years' time.

The first of these initiatives is to embrace Africa. In fact, Europe will find it has no choice on this. Even if Europe were to choose not to embrace Africa, Africa will embrace Europe because demographics will drive its embrace. In 1950, the population of the EU was 547m while that of Africa was 228m. By 2050, the EU's population will be 709m and that of Africa 2.4bn.

Since only a tiny pond called the Mediterranean Sea separates Europe from Africa, Africa's destiny will be Europe's destiny. It is therefore in Europe's interest to promote the economic and social development of Africa. Yet in an act of amazing geopolitical stupidity, Europe has done

little to promote the actual development of Africa, especially in North Africa, and its development aid there has been practically useless.

The story of Asia demonstrates that trade, not aid, promotes development. So why has there not been a free trade agreement (FTA) between, say, North Africa and the EU? Why promote silly symbolic initiatives like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership? It has proven to be a meaningless gesture that certainly hasn't made North Africa more stable and less dangerous. Europeans may shrug their shoulders and say: "What can we do? The North Africans just don't know how to develop. We cannot help them", but actually, Europe can help North Africa in three ways. First, instead of useless aid programmes, the EU should fly thousands of Africa's policymakers to Asia to see how countries like South Korea, which in 1960 had the same per capita income as Ghana, have become economic tigers. Second, kill two birds with one stone by using European employment subsidies to send young Spanish and Italians to work in relatively safe North African cities in return for their unemployment benefits. Third, kill the Common Agricultural Policy, which subsidises rich European farmers, and use the money to promote farming in Africa. Why? Because in 25 years' time, if Europe isn't importing African farm produce in abundance it will be importing unemployed African farmers. This, incidentally, was why America extended the North American NAFTA free trade zone southwards to Mexico.

The second initiative is to embrace India. Why India? Over the next 25 years, America will be geopolitically obsessed with China. India will be a distant number two. And for the next 25 years China will be obsessed with America. The EU will be a distant number two. Yet in economic terms the growth potential of Europe is equal to that of America, and India's is equal to that of China. Both these "number twos" have the potential to be "number ones" in 25 years from now.

It would therefore be a geopolitically shrewd move for the EU and India to leverage their respective number two positions and enhance their combined geopolitical heft in the world. An EU-India FTA will take a long time because trade negotiators tend to be bureaucrats who cannot see the larger geopolitical value of trade concessions. So instead of pushing for the impossible, EU and Indian leaders should look for simple pragmatic steps to enhance the quality of their relationship. A simple example of this is India's lack of a single world class university, so why doesn't the EU sponsor the first world class university there? As well as being comparatively cheap, it would tie the two continents together emotionally.

The third initiative would be to embrace the 10-nation ASEAN bloc of Asian states. The EU's main claim to fame is that it is the world's most successful regional organisation, while ASEAN

is the second most successful one. When the world's number one and number two co-operate, they can leverage one another and learn from each other. Europeans may ask "what can the EU learn from ASEAN?", and the simple answer is a lot. As we move from a mono-civilisational world of Western domination to a multi-civilisational one people all over the world will have to develop multi-civilisational skills to operate across civilisational boundaries.

For all its strengths, the EU remains a mono-civilisation club, and has yet to admit a single non-Christian country into its fold. ASEAN, by contrast, is the most multi-civilisational club as diverse Southeast Asia has 300m Muslims, 80m Christians, 150m Hinayana Buddhists, 80m Mahayana Buddhists, and 5m Hindus. It is a geopolitical miracle that ASEAN has developed extraordinary regional co-operation in this most unpromising of regions, so the EU could learn significant multi-civilisational skills from it.

Europe will need these more and more in the next 25 years because its future will no longer be determined inside Europe. Developments around the world will do much to determine Europe's future, which is why it needs to proactively protect its geopolitical relevance through the three initiatives of embracing Africa, India and ASEAN.

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