

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2015

Members present

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Baroness Coussins
Lord Dubs
Lord Horam
Earl of Oxford and Asquith
Lord Risby
Baroness Suttie
Lord Tugendhat (Chairman)

Examination of Witness

Mr Marc Pierini, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Europe and former European Union Ambassador to Turkey, Tunisia and Libya, Syria, Morocco

Q46 The Chairman: Mr Pierini, thank you very much for agreeing to come before us. As I think you know, we are a Sub-Committee of the European Union Committee of the House of Lords. Our role is to look at EU external affairs. The last report we produced was on the relationship between the EU and Russia in relation to Ukraine, and this time we are doing the European security strategy. My colleagues are drawn from all the political parties and we are not, of course, part of the United Kingdom Government. We have sent you a list of questions. They are being recorded, but if at any time you want to say something that is off the record, please make that clear and we will treat it as such.

I will ask the first question and then my colleagues will all come in. It is a very general point. Do you think there is genuine political will among the Member States to pause and undertake an exercise of this kind? My impression is that not all Member States were equally enthusiastic about starting it. What do you think are the key divisions between Member States in their approach to the exercise?

Mr Marc Pierini: If I may, I will start with the end of your question. Of course, historically we have had a north-south divide between Member States, as we saw with the fall of the Soviet empire in 1989-90, the beginning of the EU programmes with Poland and Hungary, and then the rest of central Europe. At that time the southern Member States—the Latin Member States, if you will—were quite dismayed, and pressed for several years for a rebalancing, which happened in November 1995 with the Barcelona process, the

Euro-Mediterranean partnership. That has been there for quite a long time. Today, of course, the different perceptions might still be there but we are confronted with such a flurry of uncontrolled events in the east and in the south that the European Union has tended to be reactive more than organised. We are basically, at least in this city, running after the events. We see that, of course, with the refugee issue, but we have seen it for nearly five years—four and a half years—with Syria and with Libya.

Going back to the more strategic level, of course a strategic review is a good thing, but in my perception—I spent 35 years in the system, from 1976 until 2012, so I am a kind of dinosaur—the key turning point within, not outside, the Union was the Lisbon Treaty and the impulse at the time that foreign policy was too important to be left to institutions and should be repatriated to capitals. At the time that meant the three large capitals—yours, Berlin and Paris. That had some basis. In the meantime, I do not think that the transition to the new foreign policy set-up in the EU institutions has been very successful. Of course we created the European External Action Service, which is next door, as you know. It had its infancy problems. Obviously, when you pool a group of people outside an institution and add to it a number of people from foreign ministries in 25 Member States at the time, 28 now, it makes for a difficult start. Right now, if we look at the past five or six weeks and the way the refugee emergency is being handled, I do not think we are very consistent as Europeans. Four or five weeks ago, Donald Tusk went to Ankara without bringing the external service with him. A week later, three Ministers—Mr Steinmeier, Mr Kurz and Mr Asselborn—were trampling on each other in Ankara on virtually the same day. The following week a high level, high official mission went, last week Mr Timmermans went, together with two other Commissioners, and this afternoon another high official mission is going. Everybody is running around. The refugee emergency is perhaps the worst-case scenario that could happen to institutions, but the expertise is here. We know how refugee patterns work. I did that myself 20 years ago and 10 years ago. We know all this and we are perfectly knowledgeable about how it works, how the traffickers' networks operate and so on, but because there is such intense pressure on Member States—in different ways, of course; Germany has its own set-up, the rest of western Europe perhaps has a different perception of means and central Europe is altogether a different story—and because of the weakness of the institutions here, we are probably not giving a very consistent answer. In that sense, yes, a strategic review is needed, but it will also call for willingness on the part of Member States to put some order into it.

Q47 Lord Horam: You said that we have the experience here, and you personally have had a lot of experience with refugee situations in the past and so forth. This is on a bigger scale. What do you see as the right kind of co-ordinated European Union approach?

Mr Marc Pierini: First of all, what strikes me at the moment—I am still taking the example of the refugee crisis—is that the impulse has come from Berlin and Paris first and foremost, or rather from Berlin, with Paris trailing, because the numbers they can handle are completely different, as are their budgetary means. In a way, what we have is foreign policy-making at the level of the European Council, which is a very small number of people, together with Heads of State and Government, and a sort of disconnect with the expertise. Because foreign policy is made more at European Council level than at Foreign Affairs Council level, we have the impression that there is never the time nor the presence of people to put all the expertise together. That is perhaps also the price of having created the new set-up and therefore, in a way, divided the responsibilities. In the first five years of the Lisbon Treaty implementation, the Barroso Commission basically never said anything of substance on foreign policy. Now it is a bit different, because Mrs Mogherini has moved her office to the other building and is playing a role as Vice-President of the Commission, and you have the other function of Vice-President Timmermans. I do not know whether it simplifies matters, because there are a

lot of people at the top level—Juncker, Tusk, Timmermans, Mogherini and a few other Commissioners—but I would see it as putting an end to the dispersion of responsibilities. Perhaps that is too much to ask because people have portfolios and so on, but I do not see anybody saying, “Now the policy proposal is going to be this. Let’s ask the European Council”. Everybody goes for something. If you remember, we are now talking of €3 billion. It remains to be seen how that is going to be done, but never mind. At one point, two and a half or three weeks ago, one Commissioner suddenly came out of a room and said €1 billion without asking anybody. That was €1 billion that he had calculated from the pre-accession funds for Turkey, which of course the Turks would not accept being diverted to refugee issues. Maybe it is the effect of the political panic around the refugee issue, but there is no consistency in the system at the moment.

Q48 Lord Dubs: I would like to ask two questions, if I may. Are you saying that the difficulties you have described are a function of the newness of the whole idea and that it is early days, or do you think there are permanent difficulties in what we have set up?

Mr Marc Pierini: The permanent difficulty is that you have many cooks in the kitchen. That is obvious. That is not the case in any of the Member State Governments. My last posting was Turkey and I still travel to Turkey, including this afternoon, very often. I know them well and they are rejoicing at this complete mess. They have seen six, seven or eight top officials coming to ask for a solution and none of them has actually dealt with the Turks as you should deal with the Turks, which is in a rather firm way. Everybody has gone there begging. I think the dispersion of responsibilities is the first problem. We knew that the first five years of the Lisbon Treaty would be difficult because you were mixing together national diplomats and people from the institutions, so it was not going to be easy.

Lord Dubs: Do you think it is going to get better, or is this a problem inherent in having 28 countries trying to do it?

Mr Marc Pierini: To a large extent it is inherent in having 28 countries, but in fact the vast majority of the 28 countries, not having the means for their own autonomous diplomacy other than at regional level, would be pretty happy to see the system functioning on their behalf. The problem is rather, in my view, the way in which the larger Member States, especially the big three, let the system operate or not.

Mr Marc Pierini continued off the record.

Germany is a bit different. Germany is such an economic power and has such specific problems to handle that they just go forward.

Q49 Baroness Coussins: You referred to the need for better co-ordination to deal with the refugee crisis, but looking at the other side of the coin, at the causes of it, do you think there are any specific useful steps that the EU collectively could be taking to address the causes of that crisis, looking at the countries of origin of the refugees?

Mr Marc Pierini: Yes, of course, but if we look at the current crisis, the main issue is Syria, and there Europe does not have the means to operate independently of the United States. As long as President Obama was reluctant to do anything for his own reasons—in 2012-13—which are all linked to Iraq and Afghanistan, as we know, and to his personal approach to foreign policy and risk-taking, we were not autonomous. Now it is even more complicated, with the Russian intervention over the past month. We can hope for a more consistent approach, and that the approach with Syria, which obviously still has to be resolved, is the diplomatic one of trying to convince the Russians that new meetings of the Geneva process should be held, and so on and so forth. It is typically the kind of problem where collectively

Member States do not have strong military means, so they are complementary to the US, but on the diplomatic side they have more means, and perhaps a set-up such as we used for Iran, the P5+1, will give Europe its role in this.

Q50 Lord Risby: You very tellingly put forward the difficulties of having a co-ordinated approach, because in the European Council you have dominant countries and all that sort of thing, but at least what they are trying to identify in the process that is under way is some strategic vision. You are an expert on Turkey. This is something that for years has been completely ignored. Some people have had a slightly different view, that it was a bridge, but the opportunities to give some sort of role to Turkey have been ignored. We have a situation where, yes, there is a sudden dramatic reaction because of the refugee crisis, but it has been obvious for years that there was going to be some difficulty. The absence of any strategic thinking, which I think is what this process is at least trying to address, however haltingly, is something the crisis underlines dramatically. What do you think, particularly in the context of Turkey?

Mr Marc Pierini: I would say that with Turkey, for years, if not decades, we have been trapped into accession or the rest, and the Turks themselves were trapped. Since the late 1960s, when Turkey and Greece were in the same category in the annex to the Rome treaty, we have all struggled with whether Turkey is really going to be a Member State. That was the main approach for both the EU, in its successive versions, and for the Turks, and it was detrimental to a strategic approach. I remember, even at the beginning of my time in Turkey in 2006, that you could not discuss certain subjects because they said, “Oh, no, if we discuss this, it is going to be used as an excuse by the EU not to go forward with the accession process”. Then came the time of President Sarkozy in France, who for his own domestic political reasons was harshly against Turkey’s accession. The lack of pragmatism there did a lot of damage, because I consider the accession negotiation a very safe negotiation in the sense that you have conditionality in the negotiation itself, political criteria, all the “chapters”, and then you have ratification. Ratification today with Turkey is 30 ratifications—28 Member States, the European Parliament and the Turkish Parliament—so we are quite safe there. I am not even convinced that the Turks would vote yes in the end if they got everything they wanted. It is not totally clear. In the meantime, if we had been conducting those negotiations, in fairness we would have had an influence on the shape of Turkish reforms, both economic and political. I will give you an anecdote.

Mr Marc Pierini continued off the record.

Q51 The Chairman: Could I come back to something you said earlier? You were talking about the lack of cohesion and the general chaos of the situation, and then you drew attention to the Iran negotiations. Would I be right in assuming that you believe that the only way one is going to find any coherent policy is through small ad hoc groups who share an objective? In the case of Iran it was the big three countries, and they all had the same objective: they did not want Iran to have nuclear weapons. But basically the external policy is going to be conducted by ad hoc groups of countries.

Mr Marc Pierini: I do not know if there have to be unique methods, but certainly on the very acute cases where we are confronted with a very stern Russian and Chinese position—such as Russia and China in the Security Council about supporting Assad—it is a vehicle of choice. It may be entirely different for a country like Tunisia, where the problems are rather smaller and where you have the very strong interest of Italy and Spain and other countries, but certainly in the case of Syria, and perhaps Libya again, it is a methodology that I think is beneficial.

The Chairman: This is a question, not a statement. Would you feel that, whatever the composition of an ad hoc group, Germany has to be a member?

Mr Marc Pierini: They certainly feel so. I would say it is almost unavoidable, at least when we consider the financial implications of any action, because we have certain budget rules for the EU budget and that is going to remain so. I do not need to explain that to you. Therefore, you need ad hoc solutions. Right now we are talking of €3 billion for the refugees in Turkey. There is no way you can find €3 billion over three years in the EU budget. You are going to find three times €300 million maximum, and the rest is à la carte. You are not going to get that from central Europe, so it is going to be Germany and a couple of other Member States. Certainly the German Chancellor will insist that we have a sort of balance, and that everybody chips in.

Going back to the case of Tunisia, which is one of your questions—I am sorry to jump the gun—you have a fairly simple set of issues, economic reform and security sector reform. Everybody knows what is to be done. The Tunisians are in deadlock because they have still not digested their revolution four and a half years later. They have not yet found the methodology, except for their constitution, but they will come to it. Basically, they need a very strong financial impulse, because their economy is deadlocked because of terrorism; 70 or 100 hotels have closed and it is a complete disaster. If they do not have that impulse in the form of a large financial package—large for Tunisia is not large for the EU, obviously—they will not get off the ground. That can only be in the form of an EU trust fund where you have a certain amount of money from the EU budget, which is not too difficult because at the moment we just do not know where to spend the money allocated to the Mediterranean because it is such a chaotic region; and from interested Member States. There you do not need a P5+1 methodology. You just need a concerted ad hoc EU effort, and that is it, which I am not sure is going to happen, because it is so small and looks so peaceful that perhaps we will leave it for tomorrow, except that it is not, potentially, going to resolve itself by a miracle.

Q52 Earl of Oxford and Asquith: Carrying on with the same theme of strategic engagement and the P5+1, the EU3+3, or whatever, and your remarks on inconsistency and mess, would you say that there are areas, as in Tunisia or in trade agreements, where EU institutions can operate very strongly but where there is a requirement for really quite fundamental strategic negotiation, where EU institutions are weak and therefore the kind of models that were used for Iran are going to be progressively more useful? After all, Turkey is not just refugees; it is Syria and borders and a whole lot of change. Radical policies have to be changed there. It is the same with Russia. Russia traditionally dislikes dealing with EU institutions, and prefers dealing with national capitals or a combination of national capitals. Do you see that as a model that will be taken forward, and, if so, is it the European Council more than the EEAS that would determine the composition of those groupings?

Mr Marc Pierini: Maybe the dividing line is whether an issue is being dealt with at the Security Council or not, because there you need to confront Russia and China. That is going to be the case with Syria, and with Libya if we come back to the issue at some point, which is not clear at this stage. If we take the Iran deal, everybody knew that, although the steering was done by Lady Ashton, at one point the core negotiation would be between the US and Iran. We knew that from the beginning, but at least she was able to keep consistency in the Member States' positions by chairing the Foreign Affairs Council and sort of managing it all, and that is what Mrs Mogherini does now—the implementation phase. That is a rather good methodology, but it does not need to apply everywhere. Certainly it is not the case in Tunisia and in most of the other Mediterranean countries. We do not know where Turkey is going. We will see on 1 November, because it could be a huge catastrophe if Mr Erdogan—or his

party under his impulsion—steals the election. That would be a real disaster. In any case, if they do not and they have a repeat election and a repeat result, we are in a crisis anyway. We do not know what he is going to do, but we should at least find a way, as Europeans, to deal with Turkey more strategically, and that has not been done at all. Right now quite a number of Member States are unhappy with the accession process, and of course for the past two years the rule of law in Turkey has been going down so severely that it is a miracle—not a miracle; it is understood—that the yearly progress report of the Commission will not say that Turkey does not sufficiently fulfil the political conditions, because we have other interests, but actually they do not. If you look at freedom of the press, independence of the judiciary and even the role of the President, which is now outside the constitution, none of it is what we believe in. The whole thing about whether we are going to accelerate the accession negotiations—we understand the tactical game there and the way the German Chancellor stretched that position a couple of days ago—just does not work, so we need to find another way to approach Turkey.

Lord Dubs: What would that be?

Mr Marc Pierini: We wrote a paper on this almost 10 months ago. A host of issues need to be dealt with, like modernising the customs union. Turkey is the only country with which the EU has a customs union, which is very beneficial for both sides but is limited to industry. When our automotive industry, for example, produces in Turkey, it is exactly like producing in the EU, which is very good, but it needs to be extended to services. If you go down the streets of any large Turkish city, to give only British names you have Vodafone, HSBC and everybody else—Marks & Spencer and so on—so it is a big market for our service industries, and we are now handling it properly. Turkish Airlines, for example, has undue advantages because services are not included in the customs union. That is one issue. Counterterrorism is another one, and now the refugees, but there are many more: energy and so on. The Turks, as I said earlier, traditionally always want to say, “No, we are not discussing this separately because of the accession negotiations”, and of course the customs union, as initially conceived, was an intermediate step towards accession. It makes less sense today if you do not have accession, so you need to revise it in certain aspects.

Q53 Lord Horam: Turning to Syria and your experience there as a former ambassador and so forth, do you think there is a role for the European Union or the Member States, or the High Representative in the Syrian conflict?

Mr Marc Pierini: There is no role today, quite obviously, but there has to be a role because we cannot leave the US and the Russians to handle it on their own. We have a major divide between Russia and the West. Russia intervened to rescue Assad on the cliff really, because the regime was about to lose key intermediate positions between Latakia and Damascus. They did not want to see that because they had a bad memory of Libya. Then they did it in a pretty efficient way; they are now enlarging their bases, air force and navy. Tartus was never a naval base; it was a maintenance facility for their navy. They are going to enlarge it. They are extending the airport with a large runway, and it will be their strong military foothold in the Middle East. That is not just for the sake of Assad; it is for the sake of Russia in the region.

The third reason, as we saw at the General Assembly when Putin made his speech, is the willingness of the Russian President to say, “As of now, the world order is managed with me in the room”. That is the Libyan syndrome, if I may say so. The Russians will tell you better than me that they were abused in the Security Council with the resolution on Libya, because they said that it was to save the Libyan people and then it turned out to be a NATO operation and it ended in disaster. I am not sure that the Russians are totally fond of Mr Assad, but they do not want him to go down like Mr Gaddafi did.

Lord Horam: How do you see the way forward, if there is a way forward?

Mr Marc Pierini: One, you have a fait accompli, which is that Russia transforms what I call Assad-land, the western part of Syria, into a Russian protectorate. You are not going to change that any time soon. But that is not Syria as we knew it. The rest of Syria is divided into so many pieces—Syrian Kurds, Islamic State, al-Nusra and other groups. At some point, if we are still intent on stopping the hostilities, we have to get around a table the Russians, the West, the regime and the opponents, which is not going to be easy because Russia has a view of the opposition that is a bit different from ours. Then the fundamental flaw is that they are saying that you cannot dispose of the Syrian President just in the Security Council or anywhere; it has to be an election for the Syrian people. Mind you, in contemporary Syria under the Assads they have never had a free election. I myself attended one of their referendums. I went to a polling station next to the delegation. It was very simple: you entered the room, you had all the assessors there and the box, but the bulletin—the ballot paper—had a huge circle for yes and a tiny, tiny circle for no. There was a policeman standing next to the stack of bulletins and there was no booth. Simple. But that is not all. You do not even have a voters' register. You give your identity card and the main thing is that if the policeman nods you can put your paper in the box. I knew somebody—an opponent—who started the day in Aleppo and had voted eight times by the time he arrived in Damascus, because there is no register. That gives you an idea. The Russians are clinging on to an entire fantasy, and it makes no sense, but you have to remember that this is the Middle East and that therefore they can survive with Assad-land in the west and all sorts of different chiefdoms elsewhere and it will work. It worked during the Lebanese civil war for 15 years. Every checkpoint was a money machine. That is what we may end up with.

Q54 Baroness Suttie: If I could turn to the strategic review, we have heard from other witnesses that they believe that an ideal outcome would involve a list of practical political priorities as well as it being an operational document. With all your experience over many years, what do you believe to be the current administrative and other blocks to having an effective EU strategy? Do you think they can be resolved in an EU of 28?

Mr Marc Pierini: I hope so. The main flaw today is that the Lisbon Treaty was crafted in a way that assumes foreign policy is a novel thing happening in quiet rooms between specialists. That was the idea when it was crafted: "Let's do away with all these Commissioners and things. They don't know very much". The problem is that if you look at the crisis that we have gone through since the beginning of the Lisbon Treaty—the Arab Spring and Ukraine—many of our foreign policy instruments are managed here in institutions. One is trade and sanctions and another is development assistance. Another is humanitarian assistance. You name it, they are all in there. The disconnect between "foreign policy proper" and the instruments is the main flaw for me. It has partially been fixed now by Federica Mogherini working both in the External Action Service and in the Commission. That is okay—it is an improvement—but I was hoping for more than that, as I wrote last year. The triangle is: Tusk, President of the European Council; Juncker, President of the Commission; and Mogherini, because she has a position which is both in the Commission and outside. That triangle does not always work in harmony. To me, it was totally flabbergasting that a month ago Donald Tusk should go to Ankara to discuss the whole thing, without one single person, let alone Mogherini, from the External Action Service. It makes no sense, in my opinion. Of course it serves the purposes of Erdogan, because if you have somebody who handles only part of the issue you can tell him stories.

The Chairman: I have the impression from what you are saying that you are not very hopeful that this exercise of the European security strategy is going to change very much in that regard.

Mr Marc Pierini: I would say it is a question of political will from a number of personalities in the system here, in the institutions and in the capitals. I do not have this dream of a consistent EU foreign policy as a neat piece of legislation on foreign policy. That is not going to happen, because, one, we have many traditions and, two, we have a flurry of crises on our hands. Remember that the month the Lisbon Treaty started to be implemented was the start of the Arab Spring. That is very telling. Not only do you start a new thing, which is difficult in itself, but then you have a major upheaval at your door diversifying into many different crises. The strategic review could bring the benefit of showing a more consistent and clearer view of where we are going, but if it is not accompanied by a move to make the three parts of the triangle work better together, it is just going to be a piece of paper.

The Chairman: The three parts of the triangle are three individuals and, again, I have the impression that you feel that the relationship is driven by personalities rather than by institutional rules.

Mr Marc Pierini: Yes. That is my fear. The other fear is that this institutional set-up is often ignored by Member States. I am not really talking about the United Kingdom now, because in the past year we have not heard much, if I may say so, from the United Kingdom in the foreign policy arena, but certainly Berlin would go ahead happily. They have, of course, lots of money, big ambitions and very brilliant people, but that is not a reason. Take again the example of the refugees. In the spring, the Juncker Commission issued a paper on refugees and asylum policy that for the first time in many years was a comprehensive paper; everything was there. I am not saying everything had to be adopted, but it covered the whole ground. It was brushed off the table by the Council. Then in the summer there was this massive emergency, as if we had not seen it coming, and Germany and France saying, “We have a proposal”. What is the proposal? It is just a rehash of the Commission paper in a smaller version. Then everybody ran like headless chickens to extract an agreement from Turkey. This is madness, frankly. We look like fools to the Turkish liberals. In Turkey now you have a whole debate about why in the world all these Europeans, including Merkel, are getting down on their knees to convince Erdogan.

Q55 The Chairman: One of the things we are interested in, of course, is the position of the United Kingdom. You were saying that you had not heard very much in this area from the United Kingdom in the last year. Let me ask you two questions. First, is it your impression that the shadow of the negotiations and the referendum is hanging very heavily over the United Kingdom in terms of its participation in this exercise? Secondly, what about the United Kingdom’s contribution in terms of the Iran negotiations and the sanctions on Russia? Did you feel that the United Kingdom played a role commensurate with its stature in those areas or that it was less than its stature?

Mr Marc Pierini: I would say that it is at least coincidental that we have heard a lot less from the United Kingdom in the foreign policy area in the EU since the debate on the referendum started. Who am I to establish a link there? I am not sure. Foreign policy is linked, to a large extent, to public statements, and there were a lot of public statements and media presence from William Hague and a lot less from his successor. I would not make a judgment on whether that is linked to the internal debate, but there is a lot less. On Iran, I think they were present all the way, perhaps with a willingness not to appear too much in the discussions, contrary to France. You heard Mr Fabius at odds with the US a number of times. The UK was more discreet, but I think it played a role.

The Chairman: What about the whole sanctions operation with Russia?

Mr Marc Pierini: I am not really an expert on Russia, so I would not make a judgment. That is off limits.

Q56 Lord Risby: Could I take you back to the Middle East for a moment? Just south of Syria we have quite a difficult situation, to say the least, developing between the Palestinians and the Israelis. I do not want to get into a discussion about the merits or demerits of it, but I am curious as to your assessment of any European influence at all in the sense that Israel trades substantially with the European single market and a lot of money is given to the Palestinians, and so on. But there is sometimes an impression in editorials, if you read them, asking where the Europeans are in trying to move the process on: that, to the extent that there is any possible influence, it is exclusively America. In general terms, what is your view as to whether there is any role at all or any credibility within Israel for a European strategy that is part of the Mediterranean strategy? I am curious as to your view.

Mr Marc Pierini: I would say first that Israel does not have an interest in seeing the EU, as such, intervening. It is much more convenient for them to deal with Member States individually and play the differences. They have always done that. They are extremely well equipped, diplomatically speaking, to handle the differences between Member States and extremely well co-ordinated with their missions to the EU. That has been their strategy from the beginning. Obviously there is another factor, which is peace process fatigue. A lot of people are so desperate to achieve anything that they do not even try. The third factor is simply that for the past four and a half years we have had so many other crises that this one has been left alone in its corner, with all the dangers of leaving it where it is because it is disintegrating by the day.

Q57 The Chairman: We are nearing the end, but could I put a question to you that has arisen from other conversations we have had? When you look back to the Solana period, there was a very strong message inherent in his paper and in the mood of the time that one of the objects of the European Union was to spread democracy and human rights and so forth, that we were, in the jargon, a transformational power and we were seeking to create a better world. Now the emphasis is much more transactional, that we are seeking *modi vivendi* with our neighbouring states; we are concerned with establishing workable relationships, but we are not so concerned with altering their internal arrangements or setting an example. Indeed, Turkey is a very good example of that.

Mr Marc Pierini: I, too, remember the good old days of Solana. When he visited Syria you felt that even Hafez al-Assad listened. They did not do much with it, but at least they were listening intently to him. Maybe that kind of personal influence has vanished, but at the same time we are in completely different times. If we look south, the transformation has been, first, 9/11 and, secondly, the Arab Spring, and in between the rise of political Islam all along. I am one of three people who wrote the Barcelona process initially, early in 1995. If you read it again, everything is there in terms of the transformational aspect of the European Union, and this was a document from 20 years ago, minus one month, that was shared and adopted by consensus by all the southern countries except Libya. We felt it was there, but when 9/11 happened we started co-operating with the Mubaraks, the Ben Alis, the Gaddafis and the Assads on anti-terrorism. I will give you one example. This is not even off the record, because it is in many articles and books. I arrived in Tunisia to take up my post one year after 9/11, at the end of September 2002. At that time I noticed, when doing my visits, that the French ambassador, who became a friend later, was very busy with a French anti-terrorist judge who was making repeated visits, so I asked him what was going on. If you remember, in the spring

of 2002 there was a massive bombing in the Djerba synagogue. The Tunisians were struggling with the inquiry, and the terrorist, who was obviously an amateur, had left his satellite telephone at home, which you do not do if you are a bright guy. The Tunisians were unable to decipher the SIM card on his satellite telephone, so the French did it for them. They found that an hour before the bombing there was a call from Islamabad. Who was that? It was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. That name is familiar to you. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was No. 4 for al-Qaeda in those days and was arrested a few months later. You probably remember that image, the guy in the T-shirt who was arrested by US and Pakistani forces early one morning. The man is still in Guantanamo and who is he? He is the engineer who planned 9/11. To pedal back to Ben Ali, what did Ben Ali use that for? He said, “Well, you have the No. 4 in al-Qaeda. Now you leave me alone with his human rights”. We did the same with all the others. In terms of projecting values, that was the effect of 9/11. In a visit to Tunisia, the French President at the time, Chirac, said this memorable sentence: “Human rights are first and foremost the right to housing, food and healthcare.” And that is it. The projects I was running for the EU with civil society and the Human Rights League were all fine on paper—everybody would applaud and so on—and then the bank account would not work or the lease of the NGO would be cancelled at the last minute, and all sorts of things. I was nearly kicked out of Tunisia after three years—if it had not been for the British ambassador—because I was talking too much to the Tunisian Human Rights League. That was a huge turning point. Meanwhile, of course, under the surface political Islam kept rising, and there the values are entirely different. Remember the debate in Tunisia three years ago about the article in the constitution dealing with women. Suddenly Ennahda proposed an article saying that the woman is the complement of the man. Thank God we have a very strong civil society in Tunisia and strong women’s organisations, and they reversed that. We are not in an era where people will readily accept EU values. If you talk to civil society in Egypt or in Tunisia, let alone Syria, they will tell you, “Yes, EU values are all fine. This is what we want, but where were you when we were tortured?” We have to avoid the false impression that we had at the beginning of the Arab Spring—take Tahrir Square and Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis: if people were chanting in the streets, we would say, “My God, they are reading the Barcelona declaration”. Yes, fine, they all want accountability, independent justice, freedom of the media and so on—of course they do—but they do not necessarily see us as the pioneers, because we were co-operating with their oppressors.

The Chairman: Mr Pierini, thank you very much indeed. It has been most helpful and the length of your memory is very helpful in these matters.

Mr Marc Pierini: It is my pleasure. I am only a recycled ambassador.

The Chairman: But a real ambassador. Thank you.