

EU foreign policy

The EU claims it bases its foreign policy on the wish to promote democracy and the freedoms of countries and people living near it. If they mean this it should be good news for us as one of their neighbours. Under the Treaties the EU is required to be both friendly and to promote trade with neighbours.

They pursue something called a European Neighbourhood policy towards the countries to the east of the EU, and the Middle Eastern countries to the south. For these groups of states they encourage political association, economic integration and increased mobility of people. The Eastern Partnership of the EU with Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Georgia has proved fraught. Russia is worried by aspects of it, and the EU's intervention in Ukraine has not proved well judged.

To the south the EU intervenes in Syria and Libya, both troubled countries. It seeks peace between Israel and Palestine based on a two state solution. It is concerned about the Iranian nuclear programme.

The EU sees itself as giant as it has a large collective economy, but it is not of course a military giant. It has two battle groups available to intervene on a small scale when it wishes, but relies for its bigger force on contributions from member states. In practice the EU cannot defend itself against a serious enemy without NATO support and the security guarantee provided by the USA.

So far EU foreign policy has not been successful in either the east of our continent nor to the south in the Middle East. The EU borders some very troubled states. Its proximity to Turkey and the Association Agreement it signed with Turkey has also caused difficulties, leading to Mrs Merkel's recent harsh words about Turkey. She is now seeking to stop Turkey's application for EU membership proceeding, after years of the EU encouraging Turkey and signing an Agreement for close relations.