

Keynote speech by Foreign Minister Timo Soini:

There is no denying that Europe is faced with multiple crises.

The security of Europe and even the very future of the European Union hangs in the balance. Things that many people took for granted for many years have taken a significant turn for the worse.

The paradox is that growing external challenges facing the EU should make Europe matter more for individual nation states. But people are losing trust in "the European Project". The overall situation makes the EU's internal challenges quite problematic - even dangerous. Almost wherever you look you see failing achievements, new problems and suboptimal solutions.

In addition to the migration crisis and possible Brexit, Europe is still plagued by persistent economic problems and lagging competitiveness. The euro crisis is not over and it will not be with the current policies. Bailout policies are not the answer, they create moral hazard. Although growth is gradually taking off, important challenges remain – including ageing populations, slowdown in the EU's export markets such as China, and the economic cost of the migrant crisis.

The migration crisis revealed problems in our Schengen and related systems while showing internal EU solidarity to be partly an empty shell. The result is loss of vision, loss of legitimacy and loss of solidarity.

So it is no wonder that we see increasing unease and criticism, in many parts of Europe, with the idea of European integration and the current functioning of the EU.

This is due to the fact that we are unable to tackle issues effectively at the source. Instead of a 'ring of friends' the EU is surrounded by a 'ring of fire' with very little real influence in pacifying the developments in any direction.

To understand why we are in this situation, I suggest we look a bit deeper to the basic character of the different crises in Europe.

The global balance of power – and the global political system – is in a major transition. This transition is reflected in a weakening of the main pillars and institutions of the post-Cold War multilateral order and a more assertive Russia. In Europe this means that the norms and principles of the system of cooperative security are increasingly challenged.

I believe that crises such as the war in Syria would be extremely difficult to resolve under any circumstances. And now the ability of the international community to prevent such crises or to steer them into a peaceful solution is seriously weakened by global competition on norms and values.

The state of play could be seen already from reactions of the big powers towards the Arab spring. It culminated in the total inability to find a common course of action in order to stop the war and end human suffering in Syria.

At the same time the core tendencies remain. Globalization continues. All the interdependencies that were discovered during the 20th century are still with us. The benefits and risks of modern technology continue to challenge and surprise us.

The crisis in relations between Russia and the West has thrown European security off balance. Russia wants to reinstate its influence in the former Soviet space, cement the illegal annexation of Crimea, curb further integration of former Soviet states with the EU and put a halt to NATO enlargement.

I am no fan of the EU, but I take no pleasure in the situation.
We need now common responses from the EU towards Russia.

In terms of security, Russia's actions are a cause for concern. Russia is signaling readiness to use all available means, including military, to achieve its goals. Unpredictability and at times even loose nuclear talk are among the tools Russia uses.

Russia's deteriorating human rights situation and increased state control, weak institutions are worrying. Corruption is systemic. Decisions are made by a small circle. This facilitates unpredictable moves that are not possible for democracies.

For Finland Russia is an important neighbor. It has high economic and security policy relevance. It is in nobody's interest to deepen tensions with Russia. Improvement of relations must be our eventual goal. And this improvement greatly depends on Russia.

Three approaches are needed in going forward with Russia.

Firstly, we have to defend the core principles of European security and international law. This is what the EU has sought to do through sanctions and the denunciation of the illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine. As long as Russia's actions remain in breach of the core principles of European security, we must maintain the sanctions.

Second, we have to take better care of our own security, both individually and collectively. These days Finland is congratulated for holding on to its territorial defence concept throughout the post-Cold War period. There is no room for complacency in the future either.

Finland sees the EU as a security community that must be strengthened. It is also in a certain sense a more 'comprehensive' actor than NATO, especially in the age of hybrid threats. It has a wider set of tools in its disposal. Also our collective responses must be strengthened. Finland is not a member of NATO so I only speak from the viewpoint of a close partner.

Finally, we must also keep up constructive engagement with Russia when it suits our interests as well as those of Russia.

The Iran nuclear deal is a good example of this. Our continued co-operation in the Arctic is another encouraging sign.

But we should not be under any illusions. We have entered a rough patch in our relations with Russia. This is most probably not just a temporary phase but an enduring phenomenon.

The current migration crisis has several root causes originating in the history and political problems of the countries of origin in the Middle East region and Africa at large. But the inefficiency of the international community and its inability to prevent the violent conflicts or seriously limit their consequences has led to a massive irregular migration that human traffickers abuse.

The EU could have been better prepared for the situation. This kind of a "worst-case scenario" had in fact appeared for years in the Union's policy planning papers. But - it stayed in the papers.

The unpreparedness meant for example that over 32 000 asylum-seekers arrived in Finland last year. This made Finland proportionally the fourth-largest receiver of asylum seekers in Europe.

One could say that once again EU is doing "crises management" when its own gates are already burning. Problems arise if the EU members fail to obey mutually agreed norms. We saw this during the economic and financial crisis. And this is what we are facing now while trying to agree on the principles of burden-sharing and reforms of the Dublin regulation. Relocation and resettlement must be carried out on voluntary basis as is stated in our government's program.

What does the mass migration mean for Europe?

First of all, people fleeing war or persecution are entitled to protection. But mass movements are complex issues. There are those who are fleeing war or persecution. But not everyone is.

Europe is and should continue to be a place where life gets better for many immigrants. But mass emigration is not a solution to the economic and social problems in Africa and the Middle East. Uncontrolled migration is not in anyone's interest.

The migration crisis ultimately implies very tough balancing between the EU's two goals and values: How to promote human rights and safeguard the Schengen system and the free movement of the citizens. In order to have an immigration policy that respects human rights and the plight of the most vulnerable people, we need to restore order.

One of the EU's fundamental principles is free movement of people. This principle is now under serious pressure. Free movement inside Europe is possible only if we have solid control of our external borders.

The intensified cooperation between the EU and Turkey has successfully curbed the uncontrolled refugee flow via Turkey to Greece. It is of utmost importance that both parties of the deal fulfill their commitments, as agreed. Recent changes in Turkish leadership must not change the situation.

More importantly we have to deepen our understanding of the root causes of migration. On-going conflicts are a major push factor in today's mass movement. We have to address urgently the conflict in Syria and Iraq and support the mediation efforts in Libya.

We also need comprehensive policies that cover inter alia trade, environment and agricultural policies, development co-operation and promotion democratic institutions and human rights. We also need to address the pull-factors in Europe.

According to a World Bank report, a large-scale migration of people from poor countries to richer ones will reshape economic development for decades. The report suggests that if countries with ageing populations can create a path for refugees and migrants to participate in the economy, everyone benefits. The report stresses that the migration must be carefully managed. In Europe we are a long way from that situation.

The UK June referendum is attracting a lot of attention – and concern - all over Europe as well as in the United States. Brexit- referendum is in a way a result of the increasing mistrust in the EU. So whatever the result will be, we need to take a deep breath and a serious look on what the EU really means for its citizens.

There are a lot of people in the UK who would like to see the country leave the European Union. We cannot rule out that possibility. The decision to remain or to leave is a British decision alone. I do not have a vote on the issue, and I will not interfere in the British campaign. And I wouldn't encourage my European colleagues to do so either.

But I do want and need to say this. For Finland Britain is an essential part of Europe and often a like-minded partner.

What should the EU do to overcome the crises?

It is clear that the EU's ability to respond is inadequate. The systemic nature of challenges together with the mounting internal problems in the EU is clearly a cause for concern.

And this time - time will not take care of these problems. Policy based entirely on reactive measures or just trying managing the effects of the crises can prove disastrous for the EU.

In fact- of all the major international actors it is the EU that is suffering most in the current era of power politics since the EU lacks the proper instruments and political willingness to engage in this kind of politics.

The EU's power is based on its soft power instruments, on its economic and diplomatic means and on its own example of peaceful resolution of conflicts. And on these fronts we have not much to show at the moment.

The aggravation of European security situation implies therefore a big risk for the EU in many ways. And not least by making it look ineffective in the eyes of its own citizens, which diminishes its acceptability as an authority. This we are now seeing in many EU countries: in domestic policies, elections and internal developments. People are confused about EU's role and the situation in Europe. Even if the EU has done a lot for consolidating peace in Europe, in the eyes of many the EU has now lost its ability to carry out this very task: to consolidate peace and stability in Europe.

How then could the EU win back the trust of the citizens and play a role in ensuring prosperity and security in Europe?

A starting point for the EU is to take a hard look in the mirror. The EU needs to listen carefully to what the taxpayers are saying. It needs to "walk the talk" and implement reforms that have been demanded by the people for a long time.

Like President Paasikivi said: Acknowledging the facts is the beginning of the wisdom. So the EU should acknowledge where it has failed and fix what's not working.

I have been branded a Eurosceptic. And I am in many issues. I remain critical to the current functioning of the EU. The Union is not perfect, far from it.

But in fact I also stand for many things in the EU:

A commitment to free trade. Sound economics. Deepening internal market and smart regulation. Less red tape and a more competitive Europe. Promotion of human rights and the rule of law. A Europe with an effective voice in the world arena.

I want to see a European Union which can be used as a tool for economic growth, prosperity, and improved living standards and better security for the people.

So in the midst of the crises it is important for the EU to focus on the most essential issues. We do not need to deepen integration. In some issues we have to work closer together, and respect the common agreements firmly.

In other issues we should concentrate on the essentials. The principle of subsidiarity has to be respected. Decisions must be transparent and made as close as possible to the citizens.

As a Union of 28 democratic states the EU can never become as fast in its international moves as the big states under authoritarian regimes such as Russia or China. Nor can its international mission be as planned and streamlined as that of the United States. But we can be more strategic and should improve our decision making.

The more the EU's foreign and security policy principles – like democracy and sovereignty - are contested, the more the EU should steer its policies towards strengthening them. This entails in a commitment to strengthen the EU as a security community. This is particularly relevant given the hybrid security threats facing Europe. The Union should therefore make a clear commitment to this end in the upcoming EU global strategy on foreign and security policy.

Moreover, it must mean effective conflict prevention in Africa and in the Middle-East. The fact that the international community has not been able to stop the war in Syria doesn't mean that the Union's efforts to try to prevent conflicts elsewhere would go in vain.

To safeguarding its own interests in the present security environment the member states must implement jointly agreed EU's foreign and security policy goals. Secondly, since a broad international action will be required to resolve the crises, the EU should take a more effective role at the global level.

EU will not become stronger or more respected by repeating slogans such as "we need more integration". Rather what is required is that the European nations start to focus on the real value added of working together and acting accordingly. Since even the biggest members are not able to tackle the present - let alone the possible future - crises alone.