



Public Diplomacy Challenges: Egypt and the European Union

Egyptian Mail – The Egyptian Gazette
18 September, 2007 page number 4

by

Dr. Mona L. Zaki

Chairman of International Cooperation Committee, Egyptian European Council
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Business School, The American University in Cairo
Chief Executive Officer, Global Strategic Consultants

Egypt has always played a major role in the Middle East Peace Process as a mediator and promoter of peace throughout the region. However, the attacks of September 11, provoked an extensive realignment of conventional wisdom in the west, and one of the issues under the greatest stress was the issue of faith in the steady emergence of a more integrated and orderly world.

Commentators began to raise the question of whether the onward march of globalization has been brought to an end, or could even go into reverse.

We know from history that there is no inevitable logic driving the world steadily towards greater integration. The world was in some ways as “globalized” before the first world war, but two world wars and the Great Depression detached ties between national economies and fragmented the world economy.

In recent years, Egypt has devoted increased attention to political and economic reform to boost economic performance. Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif and his cabinet, have been working on improving the performance of the economy, by announcing a number of

economic reforms, including foreign investment rules, customs duties, restructuring and privatization of state enterprises, competition policy, fiscal policy, subsidies and deregulation. But concern about social disruption from winding back government subsidies and other structural changes, is a big challenge facing the Egyptian government. As for internal security concerns related to the increasing Muslim Brotherhood movement that could lead to more Islamic extremism and militancy are on the top of the list of worries not only for the Egyptian authorities but also the intellectuals and liberal education advocates.

In the midst of such challenges in Egypt, what would the role of diplomacy be ?

Diplomacy is based on political justice. Real diplomacy will never be realized unless the true meaning of freedom and justice is understood and applied. Until that is attained, nothing will happen but acts of terrorism, more violence and bloodshed.

The United Nations role must be strengthened. UN bodies must be sharp and effective in making their decisions and taking action, and above all must be governed by justice.

And here comes the challenges of the changing regional economic and business climate and the implications of the process for European Union public diplomacy strategy!!!

Public Diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in that it deals not only with governments but primarily with non-governmental individuals and organizations. Its activities often present many different views by private individuals.

Public Diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policy. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interest in one country with those of another.

This approach deals heavily with the process of adjusting the organization (government) to its environment and adjusting the environment to the organization. It is a dialogical communication process that is characterized by the reciprocal, beneficial relationship between the organization and its publics based on negotiations and mutual understanding. It is this perspective "to survive is to adapt; and to adapt is to change".

Public Diplomacy requires more involvement and personal commitment from the government side to the community. It also involves more research about the needs, demands and interests of the people of the host country.

Today, governments must win the support of people in other countries, as well as leaders, if policies are to succeed.

This brings us to the **European Union** where it always emphasizes the commitment of the European Union to deepen the relationship with the Middle East, not only by strengthening economic partnership and commercial linkages, but also by building bridges of understanding between both communities.

One of those bridges, to mention but a few, is the Egyptian European Council, EEC, founded in 2003. The EEC strives to be part of the key players to face this challenge, by strengthening and developing better mutual understanding and effective relations between the EU countries and Egypt. A relationship based on the respect of democratic principles and fundamental human rights, enhancing common interest, namely peace, democracy and regional development. The Council provides a platform where participants from both side (European and Egyptian) can exchange views in an informal setting thus achieving better understanding of one another and of the many pressing issues of concern in the region. It encompasses a group of high-level businessmen, bankers, industrialists, diplomats, investors, academicians and legal experts. This important mission will be only achieved by the contribution of all parties involved in enhancing the dialogue between civilizations along with promoting business opportunities between Europe and Egypt.

Egypt needs to see more European Union direct investments in the region. Promoting the exchange of tourism, education, trade, investment, etc... between both parts of the world is a good approach to further strengthen the partnership between Europe and Egypt : an ideal partner for Europe as the strategic gateway to Africa, the Middle East and the Arab world.

In conclusion, the Middle East region is in deed in need of global exposure and integration with the outside world on all levels. And I believe that European Union can easily find its place in a very positive and influential way.

Let me end by saying "Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."

Dr. Mona L. Zaki,

Chairman of International Cooperation Committee, Egyptian European Council
Adjunct Professor, Business School, The American University in Cairo
Chief Executive Officer, Global Strategic Consultants