European Commission - Speech

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Speech by Commissioner Šuica at the EU Ambassadors Conference - panel on the EU as a Global Actor and a Partner of Choice

Brussels, 6 February 2025

Dear Ambassadors,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be here at the **Ambassadors Conference**.

The title of this panel is very pertinent, and our debate could not take place at a better moment.

We have entered a **new era** of **harsh geostrategic competition** based on a **transactional approach**

Clearly, the rules of engagement are changing.

For us as European Union, engagement with countries across the world is not only an economic necessity. It is Europe's response to rising global competition. We want **more cooperation with all who are open for it**. We are ready to engage on the basis of mutual interests.

We look at cooperation as a common vision and a search for mutual gains.

On this highly competitive world stage, the EU needs to prove that it can be an impactful global actor. And we want to be a first partner of choice to countries, starting from our neighbourhood.

It is in this spirit that the **new portfolio of the Mediterranean** came into being.

The creation of a **new Directorate-General** sends a clear message to our partners: you are a priority for the European Union and we are ready to deepen further our cooperation. This is going to address the unique opportunities and challenges of the region - bringing together the two shores of our shared *Mare Nostrum* and beyond.

Let me say that I am very happy that the new DG MENA has now been launched. I am grateful to Stefano, whom you all know very well, for his dedication, support and leadership in this challenging transition period.

I am looking forward to working with everyone in the DG MENA team and you ambassadors in achieving a strong EU footprint in the region and beyond.

We cannot not make it without you!

We are going to work for a future that **strengthens** our **ties with the Mediterranean and the Gulf**, and enhances prosperity, regional security, and collaboration.

The recent events in the Middle East – like the fall of the regime in Syria, or the ceasefire in Gaza – demonstrate the **critical importance of the Mediterranean** portfolio and its global impact.

The European Union wants to continue to be a **credible and reliable partner in the region**.

Let me briefly outline my **vision** and the **priorities** of **my portfolio**:

- Firstly, the **New Pact for the Mediterranean** which we will adopt later this year.

We will prepare it in close cooperation with our partners. I will reach out and listen to the stakeholders in designing the Pact.

The Pact will lay the foundation for stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships, grounded in shared aspirations, will forge a true partnership of equals.

Furthermore, the Pact will, for the first time, bring the MENA region and the Gulf region closer together. The triangular EU-MENA-Gulf cooperation is a strategic approach.

- Secondly, we will build **opportunities for common growth in key areas** through regional investment partnerships. This concerns the areas of trade, renewable energy, clean tech, digital and transport connectivity, and the blue economy.

We will also take the **cultural dimension** into consideration. From the protection of cultural heritage, including tourism opportunities, to museum cooperation. From university exchanges to cooperation among foundations.

We want to move ahead from old stereotypes.

We are players, not only payers.

And this brings me to my following point.

- Thirdly, I will bring closer the two parts of my portfolio, Mediterranean and demography by focusing on people-to-people relations, particularly **supporting young people.**

It is useful to keep in mind that, in the Southern Neighbourhood, 50% of the population is under the age of 24, many of whom are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me turn to Patricia's second question:

How do I see **our role in the EU institutional set-up.**

How do we work to ensure **consistency, coherence, and a strong impact** of EU foreign policy?

My reply is this: The **whole-of-college approach** and **Team Europe.**

My view of this new Commission is that we have a horizontal approach. There is a very clear objective of breaking the silos through a structure of collaboration and coordination.

This whole-of-College approach is both

- a very important task for our daily work,
- and a need to achieve our goals over a longer period.

Just look at the three of us on this panel, for example: With our specialist portfolios we all work closely with Kaja [Kallas] as our High Representative and Executive Vice-President.

Amongst the **three respective portfolios** Mediterranean, Preparedness and Crisis Management, and International Partnerships – **we coordinate** a lot among ourselves. And in practical terms, we indeed have interconnected roles, for instance in many countries of the Middle East.

But cooperation and coordination go much further: Trade, energy, digital transformation, the blue economy, migration – these are all EU policies which we want to include in the agreements with our partners.

We in the Commission **must work together to deliver and be impactful**.

The other pillar for successful cooperation is **Team Europe**. There is no single European Union institution that would run Europe's foreign policy on its own.

On the contrary, we are in this together with a strong inter-institutional bearing. This enables us to promote consistency, coherence and efficiency of the European Union as a global actor.

The Member States also play an indispensable role in this. Strong collaboration with the Member States is crucial for our success. United we succeed.

Finally, we should not forget parliamentary diplomacy. You had a dedicated session over at the European Parliament on Tuesday night on this. And I believe I speak for the entire College when I say that the European Parliament plays a key role in our foreign policy, also through the legislative files.

Dear Ambassadors,

YOU all play a central role in our efforts.

As **ambassadors** in the EU Delegations, you are not only **our eyes and ears,** but also **our brains and our hearts**. And **our voice** on the ground.

Moreover, you are also our filter and connector on the ground.

A filter to ensure that respective messages pass in a clear yet also diplomatic and impactful way.

And a connector among European Union and its Member States on the ground ensuring valuable coordination at local level.

Your expertise and experience are indispensable for us. And so are your political reporting and your valuable recommendations. I have had the chance to exchange with several of you over the last months and I am looking forward to continuing these exchanges.

The **playing-field** we are operating on has become a lot **tougher** and globalised. There are **anti-EU narratives** from various players, and they seek to hamper our reputation and our track-record on the ground.

This is why I am working on a strategic communication plan [as per my mission letter] to promote the EU's role in the Southern Neighbourhood and beyond.

Our **visibility** and image is not quite where it could or should be.

We want to be bolder on communicating what we do, why we do it, and on the beneficial impact of our actions.

You as ambassadors are of great help in this regard when engaging directly with local communities.

However, to further increase our visibility, we need the **means**.

Social media, for example, play an important role in the countries of northern Africa, the Middle East, and the Gulf region.

The means available in the Delegations and in the Headquarters should reflect the **reality** of the **challenges** you are facing.

To conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The **Mediterranean** has a lot to offer.

To best achieve our **foreign policy goals**, we need both

- a sophisticated level of coordination at the Headquarters, and
- increased visibility on the ground.

As regards coordination, I am glad we have

- a solid structure for this in the current College and
- an excellent inter-institutional set-up in place as Team Europe.

As regards visibility, I count on the strong role of the Delegations and your expertise and valuable work on the ground

To live up to the needs in a world of robust geostrategic competition, we also need the means for impactful work and **visibility** on the ground.

Working closely together is key to ensuring the **European Union** is a **strong global actor**.

Unity is our force.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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Press contacts:

Guillaume MERCIER (+32 2 29 80564)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email