



Interview with Mr. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic, in the egyptian newspaper "AL AHRAM"

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QUESTION - Mr. President, welcome to Egypt, and thank you for agreeing to answer some questions for Al Ahram. Exactly ten years ago this month you made your first visit to Egypt as President of the French Republic. A great many changes have taken place since then, both inside and outside Egypt. How do you see this visit to Egypt, particularly given that it is taking place during a very turbulent period in the Middle East?

THE PRESIDENT - First of all, I would like to say that I am very happy to have the opportunity to speak with a newspaper of the calibre of Al Ahram on the occasion of a trip to Egypt, a country I love and admire and which I do not visit frequently enough. I would also like to express my great pleasure in visiting Egypt again, at the invitation of my friend, President Hosni MUBARAK.

I would also like to express my great esteem for the Egyptian people. The Egyptians are a courageous and intelligent people who assume their very considerable responsibilities in the Middle East. They occupy a position astride Africa and Asia and have special responsibility in the general equilibrium of the Middle East, a fascinating but difficult region and the cradle of very old civilisations.

My visit has a two-fold objective.

First, we are keen to give new impetus to our bilateral relations, which are excellent and are cemented by a long history and solid relations of friendship between heads of state, nourished by frequent, high-level exchanges which are now on the level of global diplomatic consultations. My last trip to Egypt was almost four years ago. Since then, Egypt has undergone great changes. Faced with substantial challenges, it has chosen the path of modernisation and openness. France is keen to encourage Egypt along this path and my visit is therefore a perfect opportunity to take stock of our cooperation with the aim of revitalising it, in both the cultural and the economic field.

You are well aware of the current international situation, with growing tensions in the region and grounds for misunderstanding between peoples of



different cultural backgrounds. Egypt is a great country that makes a crucial contribution to stability in the Middle East but also in the Mediterranean and Africa. It shares many common values with France, based on dialogue and mutual respect. For France, Egypt is a comprehensive and constructive partner, serving peace, stability and development. It is therefore vital that our two countries consult with each other on an ongoing basis. My visit will be an opportunity to compare our views and see how best we can act faced with new challenges.

QUESTION - Your visit to Egypt comes at a time when our country is undertaking substantial political and economic reforms initiated by President MUBARAK. What is your opinion of these reforms?

THE PRESIDENT - It is true that Egyptian society has for some time been undergoing a genuine transformation. The economy is modernising and opening up to the world market. It is also revitalizing its institutions and in 2005 we saw intense political debate, with reform of the procedures for electing the head of state, followed by the presidential and legislative elections.

These changes, initiated under the leadership of President MUBARAK, are very constructive and I would like to promise France's full support in taking them forward. As the cradle of human rights, France sees democracy as a universal value, but it also understands that each country must adopt reforms at its own pace, retaining its own sovereignty and in harmony with its identity. Change is necessary if Egypt is to adapt to the new realities of a world advancing towards globalisation. None of us doubt that this process of reform will continue and develop. What is important is that Egypt decides, democratically and as a sovereign nation, on the paths it takes towards modernisation and the pace at which it proceeds. I believe that this is the intention of President MUBARAK in the debate he has proposed at the end of December concerning constitutional reforms in Egypt.

QUESTION - You have known President MUBARAK since he was Vice-President and you were Mayor of Paris. How have relations between you developed to the point that today you share one of the most important political friendships in the world? What are the main elements of the analyses and vision that you share with President Mubarak?

THE PRESIDENT - President MUBARAK and I have known each other now for more than 30 years. I believe that I met him for the first time when he was commander of the Egyptian Air Force. I also met with him often when he was Vice-President. He is a man for whom I have long had a great deal of esteem. We have enjoyed friendly relations from the beginning and have always been in agreement on all the problems that we discussed. Our meetings have always been meetings between old friends, taking place in a warm and friendly ambiance. We speak very freely of the different problems; he gives his opinion and I give mine on all subjects.

This very close relationship has been nourished by many meetings and frequent telephone contact. Throughout these years, we have always talked about the



great questions of our time, whether this means peace in the Middle East, strategies for combating terrorism or ways of building bridges between the two sides of the Mediterranean. We share the same commitment to peace and stability in the region, grounded in the conviction that armed conflict is never a solution. President MUBARAK is a man who possesses the wisdom and experience that the Middle East needs. My discussions with him have greatly enlightened me about the particular sensitivities of this region and we are united by a common vision of the challenges facing this part of the world and the ways in which they can be met.

This vision is first of all grounded in the will to carry on a dialogue as equal partners, respecting the identity and the convictions of both.

We share the conviction that we must act in compliance with international law, which, in particular, implies implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations. In a globalised world, multilateralism is evidently the best framework for organising international relations.

Lastly, we are both convinced that the partnership between our two countries can contribute to fostering the spirit of dialogue, harmony and reconciliation so vital to the peoples of this region for establishing peace, maintaining stability and promoting development.

QUESTION - Relations between France and Egypt have always been considered excellent. And on the economic level, France is one of the five largest investors in Egypt. What new economic projects do you intend to discuss with President MUBARAK?

THE PRESIDENT Our economic exchanges are both dynamic and diverse. Today, France is Egypt's third largest trading partner. In 2005 alone, bilateral trade imports and exports rose by 50%. One of the main contributors to this growth is the liquefied natural gas agreement signed with Gaz de France, the largest contract ever signed between our two countries. Egypt will be supplying approximately 10% of France's annual gas consumption, thereby playing an important role in covering our energy requirements. This is a splendid example of industrial cooperation and it will also contribute to a better balance of trade between our two countries.

France is also very active in the service sector. Our companies are moving into the Egyptian market in a very wide range of activities, including tourism, distribution, transport and IT and financial services.

Last but certainly not least, France has become the second largest foreign investor in Egypt, after the United States, through some 90 companies that employ almost 36 000 Egyptians and investments amounting to close on two billion euros. A growing number of French investors are attracted to your fast-growing country, which is situated at the hub of several free-trade zones, a country that is opening up and deregulating its economy, leading to a rapid transformation of the general business climate.



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As concerns concrete projects, I will naturally be talking with President MUBARAK about construction of the third subway line in Cairo. French companies have a great many strengths in this area and France is willing to make a substantial contribution.

In other words, France is determined to back the winning strategy of Egypt. To support this new momentum, I will be accompanied by a delegation of businessmen with the aim of setting up the Franco-Egyptian Presidential Business Board in the ultramodern "karya zakeya" technology centre. Its task will be to strengthen the partnership aspect of our relations. We will also be talking about possibilities for intervention by the Agence française de développement (French Development Agency) in Egypt.

QUESTION Mr. President, you often speak of the need for dialogue between civilisations and France has always played an important role in advocating respect for the culture of other countries. You will shortly be inaugurating the French University in Egypt. How do you envisage its role in maintaining the dialogue of cultures between France and Egypt, on the one hand, and between France, Egypt and the world, on the other? What aspects of cooperation in the field of education will you be discussing with the President of Egypt?

THE PRESIDENT I am convinced of the need for dialogue between cultures. This is a matter of personal conviction first of all: I love the Middle East and know a little about its history and civilisations. This knowledge of history has quite naturally nourished a respect for people and when one respects people, one understands them better. People see very clearly when they are respected and when they are not.

From this point of view, cultural and linguistic exchanges are in fact essential to maintaining brotherly relations between peoples on either side of the Mediterranean.

In this respect, the official inauguration of the French University in Egypt will be one of the highlights of my visit. This French-language Egyptian university, a project dating back some 10 years and which started up three years ago, has attracted an enthusiastic public and established a reputation for quality teaching. It is the only Egyptian educational institution that teaches in French, as well as Arabic and English. Graduates are awarded diplomas issued both by the FUE but also by French universities, making it easier for students to pursue their studies in France or in Europe. Evidently, these diplomas offer important career prospects, particularly in the growing number of French companies doing business in your country. Furthermore, the FUE has rapidly attracted the attention of private sponsors and investors and I would like to pay a particular tribute to them today.

But Egypt and France also enjoy cultural ties of a very special nature and strength which this visit will allow us to reinforce. Egypt has always held an enormous fascination for France. What would our capital city resemble without the obelisk, the gift of Mehmet Ali, in the Place de la Concorde. France too



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has always given the best of itself to Egypt. By piercing the mystery of the hieroglyphs, Champollion helped the Egyptians rediscover their past. In the 20th century, the French contributed to the industrialisation and modernisation of Egypt in every field, including agriculture, medicine and education. Today, France is still passionately interested in Egypt. Our cooperation in the field of archaeology is unrivalled. This enthusiasm is shared not only by Egyptologists but also by the general public. Some 500,000 French tourists visit Egypt every year and thousands of French expatriates live in your country. All these factors make an essential contribution to the richness of our relations as a bridge between the two sides of the Mediterranean.

QUESTION - Dialogue between world cultures and religions is essential in France given the existence of a large Muslim community in your country. Islam is France's second religion. How do you envisage relations with Muslims in France in the framework of the international hostility towards Islam in today's world? How does the French government intend to improve the situation of marginalized communities in France and what are the reasons behind the disturbances that broke out in your suburbs just a few months ago?

THE PRESIDENT The way in which you have phrased this question is very significant, in my opinion, of the confusion or misunderstandings that often arise when we talk of relations between Christians and Muslims, East and West, South and North.

I do not believe that there is hostility between the Arab-Muslim world and that part of the world stemming from the Christian or Judeo-Christian tradition. I do not believe in the inevitability of a war of civilizations or cultures. The doomsayers who brandish this threat are seeking to amalgamate problems that have nothing in common, at a time when the fate of all the people in the world is becoming increasingly interdependent. What we are dealing with here is more a clash of ignorance than a clash of civilisations. But because this risk of amalgamation exists, we must foster a spirit of tolerance and dialogue, mutual respect, education, and culture, along with an affirmation of humanist values. This is particularly important in that the peoples of the world have not been prepared for this cohabitation of cultures to which globalisation is leading us and we must therefore tread carefully.

Along these lines, I understand that the publication of certain cartoons in Europe was poorly perceived and criticised by many Muslims. At the time of this crisis, I reaffirmed France's position by condemning all examples of manifest provocation likely to arouse passions and insult people's faith and beliefs. I emphasized the fact that freedom of expression, which is one of the foundations of our Republic, should be exercised in a spirit of responsibility and should also be founded on the values of tolerance and respect. By the same token, I condemned the violent actions taken against European citizens or diplomatic missions. Such acts are unacceptable and play into the hands of extremists.

France and here I address the second part of your question respects all religions and convictions. Islam, which has indeed become the second



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most-practised religion in our country, has its rightful place in France. Many Muslims living in France also have French nationality. However, France's tradition of religious pluralism requires a particular organisational framework to ensure harmonious coexistence between all religions and beliefs. For this reason, we have chosen the path of secularism, which means the neutrality of the state and its institutions, not for the purpose of denying the reality or the rights of religions, but to ensure that they can live together in harmony. France enjoys an exemplary position in this respect. Muslims benefit from total freedom of thought and conscience and the freedom to practice their religion, like all those who practice other religions, and in particular, the "religions of the Book".

Last, we come to the problem of difficulties in integration encountered by certain people, often those with an immigrant background, living in underprivileged neighbourhoods. This is a complex question that calls for a comprehensive response, the fight against discrimination, where we can point to many successes thanks to determined action. I am thinking in particular of the High Authority to Fight Discrimination, whose powers were recently widened to respond more strongly to unacceptable discriminatory practices. We must also promote equal opportunity in the field of work, access to housing and education. And at the other end of the chain, we must look at the question of migratory flows, which calls for a concerted response from the countries south and north of the Mediterranean.

On all these themes, I will naturally be listening with great attentiveness to the advice and comments of President MUBARAK.

QUESTION Your approach to the fight against terrorism has been close to that of President MUBARAK, in particular in the sense that you see it as an international and not simply a Muslim issue. Today, given increasing hostility to the Muslim world, how do you envisage cooperation with Egypt to combat this international menace?

THE PRESIDENT Terrorism is barbarity. France has always condemned it in every form, wherever it comes from, since nothing can justify it. Terrorism is an issue with many causes and is found, alas, on many continents. The Muslim world is indeed its primary victim. During the series of terrorist attacks in Egypt in 2004 and 2005, France demonstrated its solidarity with your country and expressed its warmest sympathy to the families of the victims of these inhuman acts. It also supports Egypt's diplomatic initiatives to unite the efforts of all in the fight against terrorism within the framework of the United Nations and at the Barcelona summit. I hope that Egypt will make progress in its turn towards adoption of the UN comprehensive convention on terrorism.

As you know, in the past terrorism has also exacted a heavy toll on France, which has always responded with great firmness. It knows that some terrorist movements exploit the upheavals and misunderstandings arising in the wake of globalisation. Indeed, this is an additional reason to encourage dialogue between cultures in order to foster greater understanding and perception of our



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differences in a spirit of mutual tolerance and openness.

QUESTION For many years, you have maintained continuous dialogue with President MUBARAK concerning the problems of the Middle East and other global problems, in respect of which your opinions are similar. How do you envisage the possibility of coordinating your efforts to help the region find a way out of this infernal circle of violence?

THE PRESIDENT There can be no solution to this problem of relations between Israel and the Palestinians without an agreement, which can only be reached after dialogue. There has been progress in this respect, followed at times by retreat. We cannot impose a situation on one of these two peoples. We must negotiate an agreement.

It is true that the question of peace in the Middle East is a subject that President MUBARAK and I have discussed at great length and we have always enjoyed a great convergence of views. For many years, we have stated that peace in the region depends on the emergence of two states living side by side in mutual dignity and security. France, which is a friend of the Palestinian people and of Israel, hopes that the former will very rapidly realise their legitimate aspiration to create a sovereign state and that the second will be granted the security to which it is entitled.

But we also know that progress can come only through negotiation and that nothing durable can be built on violence. This is why both France and Egypt have always supported the efforts accomplished since the Oslo accords to find a negotiated and therefore lasting solution. They have both supported the efforts of the Quartet to promote a just and realistic solution in the framework of the Road Map. They provided constructive support to the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, which, leaving aside its unilateral dimension, should constitute a step forward in implementation of the Road Map. I would like to pay particular tribute to the role played by Egypt in Gaza.

Today, now that the Israeli elections have passed, the international community must once again make a strong commitment to this question. We will very naturally be reflecting on this point together.

QUESTION The victory of Hamas in free and democratic elections in Palestine has aroused opposition in certain countries, particularly Israel and the United States and also the European Union. You have called on Hamas to respect the rule of law recognised throughout the world, one aspect of which is official renunciation of violence. But Israel continues to practice violence against the Palestinians and to weaken the new government. What is the position of France regarding Israeli policy against Hamas? Do you believe that there is still a chance to save the peace process?

THE PRESIDENT Democratic elections were held and the Palestinians have made their choice. France respects this choice.



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However, the arrival of Hamas to power raises the issue of assistance to the Palestinian Authority as it is on the European Union's list of terrorist organizations for having advocated and practiced terrorism as a usual form of political action. In this regard, France's position is the same as that of the Quartet. All contact with the Hamas government must respect three principles: the recognition of Israel, the renunciation of violence and the recognition of the agreements signed by the PLO and Israel, especially the Oslo Accords. We also know that the situation in the Palestinian territories is extremely difficult and that international assistance must be continued. Therefore, the European Union, the main donor in the territories since the Oslo Accords were signed, has decided to continue all its humanitarian aid via the UNRWA and NGOs, accounting for roughly half of the assistance granted to date. We are in the process of reviewing direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority. We plan to move forward in this regard in order to meet the urgent needs of the populations. Yet I plan to address this problem in detail with Mr Mahmoud Abbas when I meet with him in Paris at the end of the month.

As concerns hopes for peace, Hamas's accession to power very clearly changes the situation in the region. It is still too early to judge its real impact on prospects for a settlement in a region where, as you know, things can change very rapidly.

As of now, we call on Hamas to understand that the path of violence is a dead end and to pursue its transition towards political action by continuing to respect the truce and committing to a process of renunciation of violence and recognition of Israel. Hamas agreed to participate in elections and it must now fully accept the logical conclusion of this decision. There is no other alternative.

But we also say to the Israelis that they must renounce the temptation to unilateralism, cease targeted assassinations and further colonisation. A just and lasting peace cannot be established in the region by only one or other of the parties. In the last analysis, we all know and the Israelis and Palestinians also know, that there is no alternative to reopening real negotiations. I therefore call on both parties to do everything that is required to resume negotiations. Here again, there is no other alternative.

QUESTION During your presidency, there have been periods of tension in the relations between France and Israel. How do you see the future of relations between your two countries after the Israeli elections and formation of a coalition government led by the centrist party Kadima headed by Ehud Olmert? Do you believe that these relations can have a negative, or perhaps positive, influence on the strong ties between France and the Arab world?

THE PRESIDENT France supports the legitimacy of Israel and has enjoyed friendly relations with the Hebrew state since its creation, relations that have been reinforced by the reopening of bilateral relations in the last few years. As concerns the peace process, these relations have always been grounded in a balanced approach that is reflected by a determination to act in favour of



a just and lasting resolution of the conflict.

The legislative elections allowed the Israeli people to more clearly demonstrate their aspirations for a solution to the conflict, which calls for the reopening of a process founded on negotiation. In this respect, I note that as soon as Prime Minister Olmert knew of the success of his party, he emphasized the fact that his first option was to resume negotiations. You can be certain that France and the European Union will bring all their weight and influence to bear to serve this aim.

QUESTION After the victory of Ehud Olmert, head of the Kadima party, in the Israeli elections and, before that, the victory of the Hamas party in the Palestinian territories, do you believe that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has arrived at a point of no return? What role can France play to bring together these two camps, which do not recognize each other?

THE PRESIDENT The only point of no return that I can imagine is the point that will be reached with peace itself. True, the events of the last few months have created a situation of uncertainty. There is uncertainty about the new Palestinian government's capacity to respond effectively to the aspirations of its people, which is intimately linked with respect of the principles reiterated by the international community. There is also uncertainty about the direction that the new Israeli government will choose at a time when the temptation to take unilateral initiatives is still strong in Israel.

In view of these developments, I would like today to emphasize one point: the democratic principle has found expression twice, on both sides. This principle has always been the best ally of peace. On March 28, the Israeli people expressed this desire for peace, the condition for which is a negotiated solution; this same desire for peace is at the heart of the aspirations of the Palestinian people. I prefer to believe that the leaders involved will be able to hear this message and adopt positions in accordance with the wishes of the international community. If this is the case, all our hopes are once again possible.

QUESTION Violence is continuing in Iraq, raising the spectre of a bloody civil war, yet the United States continues to encourage violence. How do you envisage saving Iraq from break-up? Do you believe that the European Union has a role to play in preventing this? What is France's attitude to the recent American offensive against the Sunnis?

THE PRESIDENT The Iraqi people are an old people, heirs to an old civilisation which has traditionally been somewhat divided. The crux of the problem is to emphasize what brings them together and try to avoid that which divides them.

Here again, as elsewhere, a purely security-based approach cannot of itself bring peace. More than ever, I believe that a united, sovereign, democratic and stable Iraq, living in harmony with its neighbours, is essential for peace.



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Sectarian conflict would have dramatic repercussions, both inside and outside Iraq. But this conflict is not inevitable. The Iraqis can still and must come together around a national pact that guarantees the integrity of the country and allows all the players to find their rightful place in the new institutions.

To arrive at a consensus between all the different communities in the country, we need a positive commitment on the part of neighbouring states. The break-up of Iraq would not be in anyone's interests. If these states can collectively play a constructive role to help Iraq preserve its national identity and build a state governed by the rule of law, then, once again, all our hopes become possible.

This why the reconciliation initiative of the Arab League, fully supported by France, should be encouraged. Just a few months ago, all the Iraqi parties meeting in Cairo agreed on a final communiqué condemning terrorism, but also called for a return to full sovereignty for Iraq. France was the first to encourage this development as soon as military operations ceased, to allow the Iraqis to become, once again, masters of their own destiny.

Although the multinational force was deployed in Iraq in accordance with United Nations resolution 1546, this foreign presence arouses the hostility of a section of Iraqi opinion. This question is crucial for the success of the national dialogue I am so keen to see established. Once a timetable has been set for its withdrawal, the Iraqis will be able to embark more easily on a process of reclaiming responsibility.

QUESTION Your position is the same as that of President MUBARAK in encouraging the IAEA resolution for a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. How can we realise this goal when Iran insists on its right to pursue its nuclear programme? Does France support the American position of a possible preventive attack against Iran? How do you envisage to reach such aim given that Israel continues to covertly develop its nuclear programme?

THE PREIDENT Iran's attitude today is a source of great anxiety in the region and the international community as a whole. Naturally, we do not deny Iran's legitimate right to have access to civilian nuclear energy, on condition that it respects its commitments as concerns non-proliferation and gives objective guarantees of the peaceful nature of its programme. However, the IAEA has observed that Iran has carried out its nuclear activities under the cloak of secrecy. In addition, it is pursuing a missile programme that arouses concern.

When we realised that Iran was violating its commitments, we sought, alongside our European partners, to resolve this problem through negotiation, in the form of the Paris agreement in November 2004 on suspension of conversion and enrichment activities. The Europeans then proposed to Iran a very comprehensive programme of cooperation including, in particular, assistance in the field of civilian nuclear energy. The decisions made by the Iranian leaders, in August 2005 and January 2006, to resume sensitive activities, on a unilateral basis,



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and against the unanimous resolutions of the IAEA, interrupted this process, which explains the reaction of the international community.

The Board of Governors of the IAEA had widespread support in reporting Iran to the Security Council. The Council then asked Iran to suspend sensitive activities involving production of fissile material. In both cases, the international community worked by consensus and the Security Council's decisions were passed unanimously. In addition, France and Egypt succeeded in having the IAEA include a clause noting that the solution to the Iranian issue would contribute to realising the objective of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them.

I would like to state very clearly that the door is still open for talks to resume, once Iran complies with the demands of the IAEA and the Security Council. More than ever, the decision is in the hands of the Iranian authorities. They must understand that the prospect of an Iran with nuclear weapons is unacceptable to the international community.

Naturally, I attach the greatest importance to the viewpoint of President MUBARAK in this matter, which is of vital importance for peace in the region and in the world. I also fully share his conviction that establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery in the Middle East would contribute greatly to peace and stability in the region.

QUESTION Serge BRAMMERTZ, chief investigator for the international commission of enquiry into the assassination of Rafiq HARIRI, has presented his initial report. Are you satisfied with Syria's cooperation with the commission? What do you expect from Syria in the next phase of the enquiry? Do you envisage bringing to an end the international isolation of Syria if it agrees to cooperate fully?

THE PRESIDENT France, which has historic ties with Lebanon, is committed alongside the international community to allowing the Lebanese people to recover their full independence and sovereignty within their territory. An important milestone was reached with the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005, followed by the organisation of free and transparent elections in June. These are essential and solid milestones.

However, to ensure that the process is taken to its full conclusion, outside interference must cease and the resolutions of the United Nations must be fully applied. We need to investigate the attacks that took so heavy a toll on the defenders of Lebanon's freedom and independence. To this end, France, like Egypt, fully supports the international commission of enquiry headed by Mr. Serge BRAMMERTZ. Setting up an international tribunal as quickly as possible will ensure that justice is done in an effective and peaceful manner.

As far as Syria is concerned, it can easily improve its relations with the international community by complying with the decisions of the Security Council. These resolutions, most of which were passed unanimously, are very



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clear. They require Syria to abstain from interfering in Lebanese internal affairs and to desist from supporting forces seeking to destabilise Lebanon.

For Syria, this is an opportunity to establish relations with Lebanon based on equality and mutual respect of sovereignty. The Syrian and Lebanese peoples are bound by historical, political, cultural and economic ties. These ties, which also have a strategic dimension, can be further enhanced in the interest of both states through an attitude of mutual trust and esteem.

Like the international community as a whole, I appreciate the active role played by President MUBARAK. We have consulted with each other on a continuous basis. I also know that our policy in this matter has not always been well understood. However, we have never varied in our convictions and our commitment in favour of the sovereignty of Lebanon. Neither do we have a hidden agenda as concerns Syria, which is an important country in the region, and which we hope will resume its rightful place in the normal course of international relations and, in particular, its traditional relations with France.

However, this requires a change in the behaviour of Syria, particularly as concerns its relations with Lebanon, and full cooperation with the international commission of enquiry.

QUESTION Many observers have spoken of a convergence in the political vision of France and the European Union with that of the United States, in respect of Lebanon and Iran. Does this convergence extend to other problems in the Middle East, particularly Iraq, and the policy of reforms? Does it reflect a move on your part alone, or is it reciprocal?

THE PRESIDENT We have been friends and allies of the United States since its independence, in which France played a decisive role. Like the Americans, we are keen to work for peace and international security. We seek, whenever possible, to share our analyses, discuss our vision of the world and our experience and undertake initiatives that will bring the international community together. And where we do not agree, we make our views known, as allies should.

QUESTION The international Barcelona conference on Euro-Mediterranean cooperation failed to achieve its objectives. Do you hope to breathe new life into the Barcelona Process and its principles with the aim of fostering cultural, political, economic and social cooperation between the countries in the Mediterranean basin?

THE PRESIDENT - would like to moderate your judgment of the Barcelona Process. In ten years, the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the only arena bringing together all the Mediterranean countries, has succeeded in establishing a genuine legitimacy. It can already point to a number of achievements. A common area has been created, characterised by rich human, economic and cultural flows. Its members discuss matters of security and defence. Association agreements have been signed allowing the first steps towards regional



integration and substantial financing means have been implemented. This legitimacy is also based on a specific approach: it is a partnership based on equality and continuous dialogue.

It is true that today we are facing new and urgent challenges. Countries on both sides of the Mediterranean aspire to greater security, in particular against terrorism, and to greater growth and more cultural and human exchanges. We must also deal with the problem of controlling migratory flows. Together, we have decided to develop new responses to these new challenges. We must introduce greater reciprocity in relations between the two sides of the Mediterranean. We need to be more effective, to introduce the European Union concept of enhanced cooperation into our partnership, so that the countries most interested in this cooperation can move forward.

I have also suggested new instruments, such as setting up a joint political secretariat or a reinforced mechanism for political dialogue and mobilising additional resources, in particular through creation, in the longer term, of a development bank dedicated to the Mediterranean. I am also keen to move ahead with our cultural dialogue by launching a "Mediterranean cultural workshop" that would bring together creators, thinkers and decision-makers from our different countries.

On all these issues, Egypt plays a vital role in preserving the originality of the Barcelona Process and reinforcing its effectiveness. The meeting of the Mediterranean Forum scheduled in Egypt a few days after my visit, in which France will participate, is yet another example of Egypt's role.

QUESTION We have the impression that the Western countries feel threatened by globalisation. Is this also your impression? Are there limits to globalisation in democratic countries with a market economy?

THE PRESIDENT With globalisation, information about everything is available, immediately and everywhere. We are no longer isolated within our separate countries: we share the same space and our destinies are intimately linked.

This new reality, which is profoundly at variance with the hundreds of years of experience of our peoples and our countries, should inspire us to devote even greater attention and efforts to preserving peace. We must, more than ever before, reaffirm the universal values that underlie our common existence. But we must also admit that these values must be seen against different national contexts and must be introduced at a pace appropriate to each country. We must respect the diversity of peoples, civilisations and cultures, pay particular attention to the values of tolerance and cultivate every occasion for dialogue in order to avoid misunderstandings. Protectionism leads to nothing except confinement and decline.

After years of basking in the illusion that globalisation of the economy would resolve all development problems, the international community today recognises the need for solidarity. Despite the constant increase in global wealth, one



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third of the world's population is still surviving on less than one euro a day. Far from reducing these inequalities, globalisation is widening the gap even further. Population growth, which is concentrated in the poorest regions, further exacerbates the problem. The African continent is the primary victim of these inequalities; inequalities that run counter to the most elementary morality and which pose a serious threat to peace and world stability. It would be irresponsible to ignore this situation and fail to act.

QUESTION The UN Secretary General has decided to reform international organisations, one example being the creation of the Human Rights Council, despite the opposition of the United States. How do you see these reforms and do you think there is a chance to save the UN so that it can once more play its vitally important role in the world?

THE PRESIDENT France's active participation in the reform of the United Nations in all its different dimensions would be meaningless if we were not intimately convinced of the crucial role that it plays in ensuring peace and equilibrium in the world.

The key point of this reform is to reinforce the authority and hence the representativeness of the Security Council. This requires an increase in the number of its members, which must, notably, allow Africa to claim its rightful place.

The Human Rights Council is another essential cornerstone of this reform. We share with Egypt the conviction that only the United Nations has the mandate, the legitimacy and the universality required to deal effectively with serious situations on this count. The Council, which will be more permanent than the Commission, will allow continuous monitoring of the human rights situation throughout the world. It will have a higher profile and status and greater legitimacy and authority, which will benefit the United Nations as a whole.

QUESTION Do you have a message that you would like to convey to the Egyptian people?

THE PRESIDENT We do have a message to convey to a friend! It is a message of respect and confidence. Respect for what the Egyptian people represent and confidence in their future.

Egypt is moving towards progress and modernity, with great energy and intelligence. I am very much looking forward to visiting the "smart village", for instance, because it is an excellent example of what the Egyptian people want and what they can do in their determination to become a strong and modern country. Given the huge increase in its population every year, Egypt needs to adapt on a permanent basis.

Confidence in the future of Egypt and the Egyptian people. I am referring to the economic modernity and the power of Egypt, which will be one of the key countries in tomorrow's world. I believe that it is assuming this



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

responsibility with great wisdom.

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