

G7 pretence of acting as the guardian of global rules

A significant number of world leaders gathering in Biarritz next weekend have risen to the top by promoting a nationalist agenda

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The Group of Seven summit starts next Saturday and is always a good barometer of the global balance of power.

One yardstick is the number following the “G”, which denotes the number of countries in the group. Membership has fluctuated over time in response to shifting political considerations.

Another measure lies in the mix of leaders around the table. This year the telling difference is not the size but the sympathies of those who will gather in Biarritz on the French Atlantic seaboard.

A significant caucus in the room have risen to the top on the basis of nationalist political agendas.

At a time when world stock markets are wobbling like blanc-mange, that is bound to detract from the effective partnership on managing the global economy that gives the summit its edge.

The G7 was the G6 when the first meeting took place in France in 1975. It was the apex of the western club of nations. The idea was that like-minded leaders could use the opportunity of being at close quarters for a prolonged period of time to address pressing issues together.

The post-Cold War expansion to a G8 format was last seen at an Irish golf course resort and hosted by then British prime minister David Cameron in Enniskillen in 2012. The group has since shrunk back again to mostly western liberal democracies but new divi-



Anti-G7 activists hold banners reading: 'This is not your playground' outside the Palace Hotel in Biarritz, southwestern France.

sions are likely to dominate next weekend.

Since the inaugural meeting, the three main topics have been about boosting inflation-free growth, stopping protectionism in global trade and tackling energy and climate issues.

While the body represents a narrow band at the top of the global order, the discussions have been strongly rooted in the idea of shared interdependence.

The outlook of the meetings has been that making international rules stronger promotes a common good.

Within that framework, there have been many successes, including the World Trade Organisation and successive rounds of trade liberalisation. Effective actions such as addressing the Latin American debt crisis in the 1980s and co-ordinating the immediate response to the 2008 financial

crisis have been the result of previous summits.

There has been immense thematic changes as well. Development aid has expanded and moved to the heart of global relationships since 1975. And without the G7 or G8, it is unlikely we would have the global climate change agreements that, whatever disputes still rage, provide some fight back against global warming.

It is unlikely that most, or any, t

Europe's carrot-and-no-stick approach has c

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When Israeli authorities last week approved plans for more than 2,000 settlement housing units in the occupied West Bank, the European Union was quick to condemn the move.

“All settlement activity is illegal under international law and it erodes the viability of the two-state solution and the prospects for a lasting peace,” read the statement issued by the European External Action Service, the EU’s diplomatic service.

It went on: “The EU expects the Israeli authorities to fully meet their obligations as an occupying power under international humanitarian law and to cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion, of designating land for exclusive Israeli use, and of denying Palestinian development.”

This might read as strongly-worded criticism but in fact, it is similar to dozens of expressions of concern issued by the EU over the years in response to events like Israeli settlement expansion or the demolition of Palestinian homes.

These pro forma press releases are perhaps symbolic of the EU’s approach to Israel and the Palestinians; while paying lip service to international law, Brussels’ policy is stuck in a rut – so much so that the EU has come to play a key role in maintaining the apartheid status quo.

In more recent times, the EU’s foreign policy in general – and

its engagement with Israel and the Palestinians in particular – has been hobbled by significant internal developments, including Brexit, as well as growing divisions among member states that Israel has been keen to cultivate.

As a report earlier this year in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz put it: “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been trying to exploit the growing ideological divide within the European Union to dismantle the union’s consensus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

In forging ties with central and eastern European countries, Mr Netanyahu has exacerbated a long-standing problem for EU foreign policy, namely the need to secure sign-on from all member states.

But the flaws in the EU’s approach to Israel and the Palestinians predate these trajectories.

Brussels has invested deeply in the so-called Israeli-Palestinian peace process, whether in the form of diplomatic initiatives, donor support and training for the Palestinian Authority – and in particular its police force – as well as forging economic and research partnerships with Israel.

While on paper, all forms of engagement are intended to serve the goal of a two-state solution and respect for international law, in practice the EU has consistently ruled out practical measures to hold Israel to account for its routine and grave human rights violations – even those policies designed to thwart the very two-state framework the EU says it



An Israeli border policeman grabs a Palestinian demonstrator during a protest against the Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes.

supports.

For a long time, even as Israel concentrated on creating its “facts on the ground” in occupied Palestinian territory, the EU insisted that its most valuable contribution was to help maintain “stability” and to “incentivise” the Israeli government and PA to

pursue good faith negotiations.

As a senior EU official told me in 2016, the priority was to “re-establish some trust and confidence in the parties”, with the goal being “improving the situation on the ground, recreating a better environment for talks and then moving to meaningful talks on the

final status issues”.

Three years on, nothing has changed. Last month, the EU reaffirmed to the UN Security Council the importance of direct negotiations, adding that it was “ready to work with the United States” and other partners “in carrying out economic projects, which t

Riven with internal conflicts, the union has been reduced to the role of mediator between Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority