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**REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
“THE CHALLENGES OF THE TRANSATLANTIC
AGENDA AND THE PROSPECTS OF US-ITALY
COOPERATION”**

by Riccardo Alcaro

Report of the international conference on “The Challenges of the Transatlantic Agenda and the Prospects
of US-Italy Cooperation”
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1. Introduction

In an effort to promote dialogue, cooperation, and reciprocal understanding between the United States and Europe, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) of Rome organized an international conference on the current state of the transatlantic relationship, with a focus on Italy. The conference addressed three areas of strategic interest for both the US and Europe and in which Italy can play a significant role: the European integration process, the stabilization of the Balkans, and the Middle East.

The Brookings Institution of Washington, DC, contributed to the organization of the meeting, which was sponsored by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF-US), the Compagnia di San Paolo, and the American Embassy in Rome. It was held in Rome on June 11th, 2007. Participants were comprised of foreign policy experts, academicians, and officials from Italy and a number of distinguished scholars and practitioners from the United States. The conference took place in the immediate aftermath of US President Bush's trip to Europe, which included a visit to Rome.

This reports provides a summary of the debate held during the three sessions. The IAI has drawn from the debate a short set of policy recommendations and conclusions, which are included in this report.

2. Agenda

The conference focused on three main topics – the EU, the Balkans, and the Middle East – and was consequently divided into three sessions. Each of them featured an analytical introduction and critical remarks by a select group of experts followed by an open discussion.

Ettore Greco, IAI's deputy director and visiting fellow at the Brookings, introduced the conference by presenting the topics and the related problems.

In the first session – The EU at the crossroads: reform or stalemate? – participants debated the future international role of the European Union on the eve of the crucial European summit tasked to adopt a new institutional reform to replace the moribund EU constitution. *Gianni Bonvicini*, IAI's director, chaired the panel, which comprised:

- *Silvio Fagiolo*, former ambassador and professor of international relations at the LUISS University in Rome, who made the analytical introduction;
- *Chris Preble* from the Cato Institute of Washington, DC, *Luca Giansanti* from Italy's Foreign Ministry, and *Paul E. Gallis* from the Congressional Research Service, who acted as discussants;
- *Umberto Ranieri*, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Italy's Chamber of Deputies, who spelled out Italy's priorities in the EU.

The second session – The status of Kosovo and the future of the Balkans – concentrated on the policies the US and the EU should adopt to give new impetus to the lengthy and troubled process of stabilization of the Western Balkans. The focus was on the complex issue of Kosovo's future status. *Jeremy Shapiro*, director of research of the Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) at the Brookings Institution, was the chairman. The other members of the panel were:

- *Ettore Greco*, tasked with introducing the topic analytically;
- *Daniel P. Serwer* from the US Institute of Peace of Washington, DC, *Maurizio Massari* from Italy's Foreign Ministry, and *Patrick G. Moore* from Radio Free Europe, as discussants.

Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, head of cabinet of Italy's foreign minister, intervened at the end of the second session with a comprehensive appraisal of the European and American strategy on Kosovo and the Balkans.

The last session – Iraq and beyond: challenges of transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East – took stock of European and American difficulty in finding a common ground for an active and comprehensive cooperation on the number of crises that plague the Middle East. The panel was chaired by *Giovanni Gasparini*, senior fellow of the IAI, and included:

- *Tamara Wittes*, research fellow at the Brookings Institution, as the introductory speech giver;
- IAI's vice-president *Roberto Aliboni*, *Jon B. Alterman* from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) of Washington, DC, and *Roberto Menotti* from the Aspen Institute Italia, as discussants.

At the end of the conference *Stefano Silvestri*, IAI's president, and *David Calleo*, director of European studies at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies of Washington, DC, made some concluding remarks.

The conference's agenda and list of participants are attached to the present report.

3. Background material

The IAI provided the participants in the conference with three papers on Italy's foreign policy priorities, choices, and problems. The papers were circulated in advance and were not presented during the conference, since they were meant to serve purely as background information and analysis on Italy's position on the three topics debated in the meeting.

The papers concerned, respectively, Italy's strategy on the EU; the developments of the US-Italy relations since the new Italian center-left government took power in April 2006; and Italy's security and defense policy in the context of the EU, NATO, and the UN.

In her paper on Italy's European policy, *Elisabetta Brighi* from Oxford University argues that Italy has partially balanced its traditionally strong enthusiasm vis-à-vis EU integration (and, to a lesser extent, enlargement) with an injection of realism. This has paved the way for a more open debate on Italy's role within the EU, with clear differences – at least rhetorically – emerging among the various political groupings. However, Brighi laments that the terms of the debate remain too often hostage to the petty confrontation between rival political groups, and that Italy has yet to articulate a

convincing strategy on Europe that moves beyond declaratory policies and makes objectives and means meet.

In his paper on US-Italy relations, *Jason W. Davidson*, assistant professor of political science at the University of Mary Washington, argues that, in spite of recurring tensions between Washington and the center-left government led by Romano Prodi, cooperation has remained solid. Actually, since Prodi took office last year the US and Italy have repeatedly been at odds on a number of issues, ranging from the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq to the indictment by an Italian judge of several CIA officials charged with the abduction of a terrorist suspect in Milan. But Prodi has showed a strong commitment to the partnership with the US even when doing so has proven costly for the cohesion of his majority, for instance by standing firm on the deployment of Italian troops in Afghanistan (which far-left parties in the government coalition oppose).

In his paper on Italy's security and defense policy, *Roberto Menotti*, senior expert from the Aspen Institute Italia, examines the main factors that have shaped Italy's fundamental choices in the security and defense field. His central argument is that Rome faces the difficult challenge to adapt to the new security agenda (counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, regional crises) at a time in which the tripartite institutional framework of its security and defense policies – the EU, NATO, and the UN – has also been undergoing major changes. Menotti's conclusion is that Italian policymakers and defense planners have yet to identify the unavoidable tradeoffs between objectives and capabilities that would lend more coherence to a security and defense policy that has to do with a more volatile and fragmented security environment.

Menotti's paper was published in the Fall issue of IAI's English-language quarterly *The International Spectator* (coming out in early September); Brighi's and Davidson's papers are available on the institute's website – www.iai.it.

4. Contents

A. *The EU at the crossroads: reform or stalemate?*

Legitimacy and leadership crises affect both the EU and the US. A point was made early during the debate that seemed to gather general consensus, that is, that the European Union and the United States have to cope with parallel crises, one of legitimacy (the EU) and the other of leadership (the US). The difficulties of the European Union, it was argued, basically stemmed from the failed attempts to define its political profile and geographical scope – a failure which is reflected in both the constitutional stalemate and the uncertainties surrounding the enlargement process. As far as the US is concerned, no-one contested that its problems, particularly the very low appeal of its foreign policy in many countries, originated mostly – though not entirely – from the disastrous experience of the war in Iraq.

The new sources of legitimacy of the EU lie beyond its borders. Some participants contended that the EU can no longer rely on its traditional sources of legitimization – European reconciliation, post-World War II economic recovery, and modernization – not least because of its success in promoting them. The European public are uncertain about what the EU stands for and, therefore, needs their leaders to spell out clearly what further benefit they can get from lending their consent to the European project. A participant invited the audience to look at the agenda of the German EU presidency to

get an idea of where the EU legitimacy can originate from: by emphasizing the need to address collectively transnational issues such as the environment, energy security, and migration, the German government implicitly pointed to the fact that key sources of the EU's legitimization lie now beyond its borders. Hence, a stronger role of the EU in international affairs is key to reinforcing its credibility – and thereby legitimacy – vis-à-vis the European public opinion.

The US needs a reliable EU to re-gain its international standing. Participants agreed that the invasion of Iraq, as well as other controversial measures adopted in the so-called “war on terror” (e.g. Guantanamo and the like), have seriously damaged the global standing of the United States and its ability to lead. It was underlined that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had practically exhausted US capacity to intervene militarily in another major theatre. According to some participants, the era of US unilateralism was over and a global system is emerging in which cooperation and power-sharing are indispensable to preserve US primacy as much as its military and economic prowess. Participants agreed that a stronger European Union – widely recognized as the ‘natural’ partner of the US – was in US interest. They maintained consequently that the US should encourage European efforts to adjust and expand its security and defense profile (including by increasing defense budgets).

Must a ‘stronger’ Europe be ‘more united’ too? Despite all participants apparently shared the view that a more capable European Union was a valuable strategic asset for the United States, there emerged no clear consensus whether such a ‘stronger’ Europe had to be more integrated too. Italian experts and officials generally assumed that an institutional arrangement that would streamline the EU foreign and defense apparatus was a *sine qua non* for the EU to become an effective security actor in the international arena, whereas opinions among the American participants were more nuanced. The former insisted that the US should realize that the European Union is strategically and politically unable – and unwilling – to rise to the status of a potential rival of the US and, therefore, Washington should make European unity a priority of its foreign agenda and commit to a mutual obligation of consultation. While agreeing that the US should consult the EU more comprehensively, the experts from the US did not expressed themselves about the desired course of the European integration process. However, they underlined that, regardless the institutional structure of the EU, the US should pay more attention to the concerns and recommendations of its European allies and partners. Italians and Americans did agree, however, that the EU had to prove that it can bring a specific added value if it wanted its voice to be heard in Washington.

The development of an ‘equal’ partnership hindered by US ambiguity... Several participants doubted that the shift to greater consultation recently showed by the Bush administration actually reflected a new strategic orientation rather than a tactical adjustment due to US difficulties in Iraq. They stressed that the US did not hesitate to act unilaterally even when dealing with potentially divisive issues, pointing to the planned extension of the US missile defense system to Eastern Europe, which was carried out without previous consultation within NATO or with the EU and was met with embarrassment in Europe and anger in Russia. In their opinion, this shows that the United States has yet to take the strategic decision that the European Union as a whole should be given a greater say on issues of mutual concern (such as the defense of

Europe and the relationship with Russia). It was remarked that the Democratic-led Congress may act as a driving force for dissipating US ambiguities. Several encouraging signals were mentioned. The Congress' appreciation of EU reconstruction capabilities had reportedly grown significantly, and US wariness over the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) because of the perceived risk that it could marginalize NATO structures was said to have basically evaporated. In addition, it was emphasized that the Congress had blocked the authorization for the deployment of components of the missile shield in Eastern Europe because of worries similar to those of the Western Europeans, who resented the fact that NATO was neglected, feared the implications of antagonizing Russia unnecessarily, and quietly questioned the functionality of the anti-ballistic missile system.

...and European divisions. Many participants, however, expressed the opinion that intra-European divisions rather than the US attitude constituted the major challenge for the EU to sharpen its international profile. Some put into question that the very notion of a common foreign policy would ever advance much further than the current common denominator-based procedure, claiming that the gap between the EU's priorities and those of some of its most important members was unlikely to close. Much emphasis was put on the difficulty to accommodate interests and concerns of both small and large EU members. Even the long-invoked convergence between the largest countries, it was remarked, was no guarantee that a durable and sustainable compromise be reached during the June 20th-21st European Council. While the general opinion was that the EU leaders would find a kind of understanding on an alternative text to the failed Constitutional Treaty, the formation of smaller groups of like-minded countries willing to integrate more deeply was also expected. A participant observed that such an outcome would preserve the nature of the EU as an ever-moving process. Different views were expressed about the problem of whether such 'core groups' ought to acquire a standing character or be ad hoc arrangements, be regional or thematic-oriented. It was noted that a greater flexibility in the EU's configuration would give the US enough leeway to influence future developments (including the enlargement process).

EU-US cooperation must be based on a shared strategy. All participants acknowledged that even a US explicit and strong support for the EU would not solve all problems. Indeed, there remained the necessity to define the pillars of the transatlantic partnership, including what it stands for, when it has to act, and with what means. Apart from identifying common objectives, the United States and the European Union should establish an acceptable criteria of action – especially when it comes to the use of force – to rationalize resources and enhance capabilities through a greater specialization. Participants expressed their concern that, lacking such an understanding, the transatlantic partners would be unable to set up a durable framework for cooperation.

B. The status of Kosovo and the future of the Balkans

The Balkans: still a fragmented reality. All participants agreed that the Balkans are still featured high on the list of priorities of the transatlantic agenda, even though the debate made it clear that European and American concerns and interests do not match entirely. Participants were unanimous in viewing the Balkans as a complex reality resting on a fragile balance, but there emerged no clear consensus about whether a prompt action on Kosovo would backfire or trigger a virtuous circle able to put the

whole region on a stable and reform-oriented path. While the Americans emphasized the urgency of a quick definition of the future status of Serbia's breakaway province, the Europeans expressed caution about any solution which did not take into account the broader regional context.

Transatlantic cooperation is a key element of a successful strategy. A participant recalled that there have been some success stories in the Balkans which could be instructive for the future. He mentioned the swift action by NATO – and later the EU – that soothed rising tensions between ethnic Albanians and Slavs in Macedonia in 2001, and the EU-brokered peaceful secession of Montenegro from Serbia in 2006. A reference to the pacification of Bosnia and Hercegovina was also made, though it was acknowledged that its outcome is still mixed. A participant underlined that, while the European Union has undeniably taken on a more prominent role in the management of the Balkans' stabilization, the United States has been the driving force behind all major developments in the region. He then concluded that a 'European plan' is necessary but not a sufficient element to bring durable stability to the region, and that a transatlantic approach – and a concerted plan – is badly needed.

The EU should not backtrack on its integration promises. Against this backdrop, the US push to break the perceived inaction on Kosovo was welcomed, not least because it is testimony that Washington does not neglect the issue and wants it settled. However, it makes the development of a consistent European common approach more urgent. It was recognized that the notion that the future of the Balkans lies in the European Union remains officially unchallenged. Some participants pointed to some sensible measures recently adopted by the EU as a further testimony of this, like the decision to prolong the mandate of the high representative office in Bosnia and to start talks on new contractual links with Serbia in spite of its still insufficient cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Nonetheless, a participant drew attention to the fact that some EU members have adopted measures that could preclude new accessions to the Union. France, for instance, introduced a constitutional change that submits acceptance of would-be members other than Croatia to public approval by popular referendum. The prospect for Balkan countries' integration in the EU is then rather nebulous. Participants agreed overwhelmingly that the European Union should dissipate any ambiguity regarding the future of the Balkans, including the definition of the Kosovo's future status. However, opinions on how the EU should realize this varied considerably.

The Athisaari plan for Kosovo: pros... Participants put under scrutiny the plan drawn up by UN special envoy Martti Athisaari, which would grant Kosovo an internationally supervised independence. Experts from both Italy and the US generally agreed that the plan's main merit is that it outlines a clear prospect to end the political limbo in which Kosovo has lived since the 1999 war. There was also unanimous consensus that the envisaged solution – independence under strict UN, EU and NATO oversight – is the only viable option, even though Serbia continues to oppose it staunchly. Participants appeared to share the view that Serbia lost any possibility to retain Kosovo in the aftermath of the 1999 war. It then became clear that past Serbian violence against the ethnic Albanian majority would prevent the UN from ever giving the province back to Belgrade. It was argued that the Athisaari plan would give official recognition to an

eight-year-old reality, i.e. Kosovo's independence from Serbia. Acquiescing to the longstanding cravings of Kosovo's overwhelming Albanian majority would be crucial to avoid the risk of violence flaring up again.

... and cons. While participants approved of the Athisaari's blueprint, they explicitly recognized that it could have negative implications, most notably the risk that Serbia's intransigence could eventually lead to partition between the northern areas, where most Kosovar Serbs live, and the rest of the province (a participant stressed that Serbia might be aiming precisely at this outcome). Participants expressed confidence in the capacity of the European Union and the international community to manage Serbia's discontent over Kosovo, by making clear to Belgrade that the advantages of continued cooperation unmistakably outweigh the political and economic costs of isolation. Some participants, however, contended that the odds for this strategy to succeed would be greatly enhanced if Kosovo's independence emerges from a UN-defined legal framework. They consequently stressed the necessity to redouble efforts to overcome Russia's refusal to give its assent to an imposed solution on Serbia, even if that would imply a postponement of the final settlement. This point proved one of the most contentious during the meeting, with most Italian participants advocating a delay and several US experts opposing it.

First option: quick implementation of the Athisaari plan. Several participants, mostly from the US, maintained that the Athisaari plan should be implemented quickly, even without UN mandate. In their view, a delay is a losing game. They insisted that failure of the international community to bring clarity on the future could eventually result in unilateral actions by Kosovo's Albanians, including the use of force. Violence could spill over Kosovo's boundaries, fomenting pan-Albanian instincts in Macedonia and Albania proper, and strengthening the hand of the radicals in Belgrade. Furthermore, in the absence of a solution to the final status question, Kosovo's provisional institutions of self-government risk to become increasingly dysfunctional. Finally, opponents to the delay argued that any postponement would eventually be useless because Serbia has made its opposition to Kosovo's secession actually non-negotiable. For these reasons, the quick implementation of the Athisaari plan seem the preferable option. While admitting that an extra-UN solution faced a number of hurdles, several participants argued that none of them was insurmountable. They contended that Russia has significantly reduced its influence by binding its position to that of Serbia and by antagonizing much of Europe (including a traditionally friendly country such as Germany) with its fierce reaction to US missile shield plans and its recurring clashes with several EU members. The conclusion was drawn that Russia, having painted itself into a corner, had no actual power to hamper Kosovo's transition to sovereignty. A participant also dismissed fears that an extra-UN recognition of Kosovo's independence would set a dangerous precedent, as the Yugoslav dissolution and the de-colonization process provide a wide range of comparable instances. He also denied allegations that US calls for swift action on Kosovo reflected Washington's diminished commitment to the future of the Balkans. Indeed, almost all participants agreed that, even though the EU is destined to play a major role, US troops are not going to leave Kosovo anytime soon (be it independent or not), nor will the US cease to act as a powerful broker in the region.

Second option: delay of the final settlement. Other participants, mostly experts and officials from Italy, did not share the view that an extra-UN solution would eventually result in a stabilized Kosovo, a tamed Serbia, and a passive Russia. On the contrary, they expressed the fear that a rush settlement would cause far more problems than it could ever solve. Firstly, it would make it hugely difficult for the EU to deal with an estranged Serbia and complicate its efforts to manage the stabilization of the whole region. Secondly, it would unnecessarily antagonize Russia. Several participants said that they were confident that an extra-time would allow the EU and the US to reach an understanding with the Russians, presumably by identifying a palatable tradeoff between Kosovo and one of the several issues over which Moscow and the west are at odds. It was argued that some reasonable concessions, for instance refraining from inviting former Soviet republics to join NATO soon, would be a price worth paying for Russia's abstention from the key vote on Kosovo in the Security Council. Thirdly, it was contested that a short-termed delay would bring about new violence and stir up pan-Albanianism, since Kosovo's Albanians would have only to lose in annoying the west with provocative acts, and neither Albania nor Macedonia's Albanian community have expressed much enthusiasm for the 'greater Albania' project. Last, the European Union would face serious legal hurdles in setting up a police and civil mission in Kosovo under an EU banner without an explicit UN mandate. Worse still, those EU members which fear most the possibility that Kosovo would set a dangerous precedent, like Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania, could not recognize Kosovo's self-declared sovereignty. The issue of European unity was thus put on the table.

Should Kosovo be settled at the expense of EU cohesion? An American participant stated that the United States and its closest allies in Europe, like Britain, should exert pressure to define Kosovo's status even though the EU as a whole fails to reach a unanimous position on the issue. Other experts from the US, though not all with the same degree of certainty, appeared to share this opinion. On the contrary, Italian participants – both experts and officials – were dismayed at the idea. They emphasized that the EU is bound to take over the ultimate responsibility for Kosovo's transition to independence, as most political, economic, and military costs of the process will fall on European shoulders. Therefore, in their view, it is imperative that the US realize that European unity is an essential, if not the essential, ingredient of a successful receipt for Kosovo. It was warned that a lack of European cohesion would impact negatively on the transatlantic relationship too. It would nurture suspicions in Europe that the US does not hesitate to act divisively vis-à-vis the Europeans if it deems that it serves its purposes. A scenario in which the United States and some EU members recognize Kosovo's independence while other member states do not would be disastrous and would not bode well for the future of US-European relations.

C. *Iraq and beyond: challenges of transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East*
Unevenness characterizes US-European cooperation in the Middle East. Participants identified three main spots of transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East: the dispute over Iran's controversial nuclear program; the Arab-Israeli conflict; and democracy promotion. Intensity and scope of collaboration were said to vary significantly, with Iran seen as a valuable example of coordinated approach, while the results on the Arab-Israeli conflict and democracy promotion were judged as mixed or insufficient. As most participants agreed that the transatlantic partners, especially the

United States, should strengthen coordination, a US expert recalled that multilateralism is no receipt for success on its own, as shown by the extensive difficulties which NATO faces in Afghanistan. It was replied that the apparent failure of the multinational mission in Afghanistan did not stem from its multilateral framework, given that the United States retained the strategic clout over the NATO-led force (which, moreover, was involved only after the ousting of the Taliban). It was also underlined that one should not forget the impact of the Iraq war on developments in Afghanistan (and elsewhere). Indeed, participants were unanimous in admitting that any course of action eventually agreed by the US and the EU would remain highly dependent on what occurs in Iraq.

Cooperation on Iran is fine, but still at risk. Participants agreed that Iran represents the finest example of transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East and the Gulf region. It was remarked that the United States had overcome its initial skepticism and shifted to positions closer to those of the Europeans. However, it was acknowledged that there remains some differences. It was highlighted that the EU wants the UN sanctions to be accompanied by other non-confrontational measures, notably US' acceptance to have a wide-range dialogue with Iran. An expert pointed to the recent meetings between US and Iranian officials in Iraq and Egypt as an encouraging sign, but only few expressed much optimism. Participants seemed confident that the US and the EU would be able to settle their differences as long as the Iran issue is dealt with within the United Nations. Yet, some participants argued that, should the UN process fail to deliver positive results, the US is likely to adopt disturbing measures for the Europeans, such as imposing restrictions and fines on European companies willing to invest in Iran's lucrative energy sector. It was added that the US could eventually yield to the temptation to resort to the use of force. Most participants appeared to share the view that not only is the regime change in Iran an unworkable option, but also that a targeted strike against Iran's nuclear facilities would backfire. It was argued that the Europeans should be perspicuous with the Americans emphasizing that they will not support military action and should redouble their efforts to keep alive the chances of a concerted solution.

The Arab-Israeli conflict: only a supporting role for the EU? Participants debated the potential contribution of the European Union to the definition and the implementation of the blueprint for the Arab-Israeli conflict that the US administration is expected to outline soon. Several participants argued that the Europeans should urge the United States to accept peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and its other neighbors should not be open-ended. On the contrary, they maintained that the issue of the Palestinian state should be addressed at the beginning, and not at the end, of the process. They identified the Saudi peace plan, according to which all Arab states would recognize Israel and its right to security and peace in return for Israel's withdrawal on the pre-1967 borders, as a reasonable starting point, since it focuses on the final status rather than short-term confidence-building measures. It was argued that Europe has an important role to play as a bridge-builder between the US, Israel and their foes in the region, notably Syria. Some participants noticed that such EU countries as Italy embarked in the thorny task of helping pacify Lebanon last year also in the hope that this would enhance EU's credibility in the region. As some participants doubted Europe's sway on the US and other relevant actors, it was replied that the EU's

participation in the Quartet did have a 'restrain-effect' on the US. The EU, it was recalled, was at least able to persuade Washington to set up an ad hoc mechanism to deliver aid and funds to the Palestinians bypassing the then Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, and to urge the Israelis to resume tax and custom revenues due to the PA (at the time the meeting took place, Hamas had not yet been ejected from government following its violent seizure of control of the Gaza Strip). However, the implicit conclusion of such reasoning was that participants saw no great chances for the EU to influence the shaping of crucial political decisions on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

No shared strategy on democracy promotion. Transatlantic cooperation on democracy promotion in the region was generally deemed as poor. The debate highlighted at least three reasons why the EU and the US have been unable to coordinate their policies. First, the debacle in Iraq has compelled the US administration to put on hold democracy promotion and to fall back on a more traditional realist approach. Second, it was stressed that the Europeans are not eager to support a doctrine that is widely discredited because of its close association with the military intervention in Iraq. Third, some participants underlined that the authoritarian Arab states, after initial difficulties, appear stable and capable of co-opting or repressing internal factions and groups that might have the potential to bring about political changes, including democratic-oriented reforms. Several participants worried that the Iraq fiasco had seriously, if not permanently, undermined the very notion of western-like democracy in the Middle East. In fact, there was general consensus that momentum for democracy in Arab countries has all but dissipated. Some experts said that the United States should follow the European example and pursue democracy and stability on separate tracks. It was suggested that the transatlantic partners make use of incentives and conditionality to encourage regional states to reform, and Turkey was mentioned as an example of the good results that such a combination can give. Nevertheless, many participants stressed that Turkey is a unique case in the Middle East, not the least because it is spurred in its reform efforts by the prospect of eventually entering the European Union. Despite the current predicament, most participants agreed that the EU and the US should not put aside the goal of fostering democracy, it might also result in a valuable instrument to constrain the rise of Islamic radicalism. To this end, however, several participants underlined the need to engage actively and on a prejudice-free basis groups and organizations which have their ideological roots in political Islam.

Iraq looms large over the Middle East. As already mentioned, all participants agreed that the future of the Middle East and the Gulf region hinges on, or at least is deeply affected by, what happens in Iraq. Several experts argued that the disaster in Iraq compelled the United States to give in its ambitious project to revolutionize the Middle East and to go back to a more traditional, stability-oriented realist approach. An expert drew attention to the fact that this also implies risks of a serious backlash. He said that some senior members of the US administration are inclined to rely on the 'moderate' authoritarian Arab states and even on radical Sunni armed groups (as in Lebanon) to counter the Iranian and Shia rise, that they see now as the main threat to US interests. He argued that the US should adopt a two-track strategy based on containment and compromise, instead. Iran and Shia groups, where sensible, should be engaged actively. An Italian expert said that there are clues that the US administration is actually pondering this strategy, and pointed to the recent contacts between the US and Iran over

Iraq. Nonetheless, he criticized the United States for pursuing this path – which appears to reflect the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report – while insisting that victory still depends on US military commitment. By doing so, he said, the administration is not preparing the public nor its international partners, both European and Arab, to a change of course. Another expert contended that, since Iraq is going to remain unstable for the foreseeable future, it should be imperative for the United States to set up a regional framework with the goal to contain the spillover of violence and instability. All Iraq's neighbors, as well as US European allies and/or the EU as a whole, should take part in such a compact.

5. Conclusions

The debate at the meeting was lively and intense. The participants laid out a wide range of different opinions and options on the issues discussed. Nevertheless, some shared assumptions did emerge, and some conclusions may be drawn from the discussion as well.

- All participants moved from the premise that the volatility and complexity of the current security environment, notably the absence of a clearly identifiable external threat, is the main obstacle to a renewed partnership between Europe and the United States. The implicit assumption was that international terrorism (or other so-called global challenges) does not fit in the position once held by the Soviet Union, as threat perceptions vary significantly across the Atlantic. The recommendation that should be drawn from this point is that the United States and Europe badly need to improve consultation mechanisms to acquire a better understanding of reciprocal needs and interests.

- Another point on which there appeared to be a general consensus is the following: the transatlantic relationship, even when it relies on shared objectives, experiences occasional difficulties because of the inability to establish a clear hierarchy of the ends and of the means required to achieve them. It follows that the US and Europe need, firstly, to sort their shared priorities and, secondly, agree upon specific criteria of action, so as to facilitate both the selection of the most appropriate means (including the use of force) and the rationalization of resources.

Coming to the topics debated in each of the meeting's session, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- **Europe.** All participants agreed that the United States should pay more attention to specific European needs and that a strong Europe is in the US interest. Even though there was no unanimous indication concerning the desired course of the European integration process, a more effective and capable European Union was identified as the most valuable partner of the US by far (not least because several small or medium-size countries, like Italy, can better contribute to achieving agreed objectives within the framework of the EU). A strong Europe is an indispensable asset for the US to build a sustainable post-Cold War leadership. The conclusion may be drawn that the United States should refrain as much as possible from adopting policies that can create divisions within the European Union.

- **Kosovo and the Balkans.** The thorny issue of Kosovo's future status is likely to be a challenging test for transatlantic coordination and solidarity. In spite of the divergent and sometimes conflicting views on whether to force a quick solution or

accept a short-termed delay, efforts should be made to preserve unity at both the European and transatlantic level. Given that the EU is expected to take over responsibility for Kosovo's transition to independence, the US should take into due account the EU's concerns and recommendations. A scenario in which the United States and some of its closest European allies, like Britain, recognize Kosovo's self-declared independence at the expense of the cohesion of the EU would complicate, if not jeopardize, the stabilization of the Balkans and deal a serious blow to the transatlantic relationship.

- **Iraq and the Middle East.** Recognizing that future developments in Iraq has had deep repercussions across the whole region, affecting such issues as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the dispute over Iran's nuclear program, and the appeal of western-like democracy in the Arab world, roused the participants to express the hope that the United States will coordinate an eventual change of strategy with Iraq's neighbors, so as to contain the spread of instability more effectively. The EU should also be encouraged to take part in this regional compact.