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**REPORT OF THE SEMINAR ON  
“TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
MEDITERRANEAN”**

*by Valerio Briani*

Report of the seminar on “Transatlantic Perspectives on the Mediterranean”, with the contribution of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the scientific support of EuroMesco  
*Rome, 28th June 2008*

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**Introduction**

The Mediterranean region is an area of great opportunities and challenges. Moreover, it is a region of strategic importance for both the European Union and the United States. For these reasons, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) of Rome organized an international seminar on “Transatlantic Perspectives on the Mediterranean”.

The seminar’s aim was to examine and assess US and EU views and policies in the Mediterranean region, to discuss the most important challenges in the area, and to explore opportunities for deeper transatlantic cooperation.

The seminar took place in the IAI Library, in Rome, on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008. It was made possible thanks to a generous contribution from the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the scientific support by EuroMeSCo.

**1. Agenda**

The seminar was divided into four sessions. Each session was opened by a speaker and a respondent, whose introductory remarks were followed by open discussion.

In the first session, *Different US and EU approaches to the Mediterranean area: is any transatlantic opportunity there?*, participants debated current US and EU approaches in the region, pointing out issues of common transatlantic interest and focusing particularly on democracy promotion and security issues.

Speaker: *Ian Lesser*, Senior Transatlantic Fellow, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington

Respondent: *Roberto Aliboni*, Vice-President, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome

In the second session, *Turkey’s perspectives and transatlantic relations*, the discussion focused on Turkey’s foreign policies and its role in the Mediterranean region and in the Middle East.

Speaker: *Huseyn Bagci*, Professor, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara

Respondent: *Mario Zucconi*, Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC

In the third session, *Evolution in the Maghreb: EU-US between competition and cooperation*, participants discussed the main features of US and EU policies in the Maghreb, and their influence on democracy promotion and development in the area.

Speaker: *Yahia Zoubir*, Director of Research in Geopolitics, Euromed Marseille, School of management

Respondent: *Isabelle Werenfels*, Research Fellow Associate, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin

Finally, in the fourth session, *Nuclear energy development and non-proliferation in the Mediterranean*, the main subject was the development of nuclear energy production capabilities in the Mediterranean and Gulf areas, along with non-proliferation challenges and solutions.

*Speaker: Giacomo Luciani*, Director, Gulf Research Center Foundation –Geneva Office  
*Respondent: Joseph F. Pilat*, Senior Advisor, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Richmond (USA)

## **2. Different US And EU Approaches in the Mediterranean Area: Is Any Transatlantic Opportunity There?**

*Do the US and the EU have a common approach in the Mediterranean?*

On one side, a participant noted, there are many different areas of EU-US shared interests in the Mediterranean region: energy security, Israel, proliferation of weapons of mass destructions, and political and economical transformation of the countries of the area. To these issues, other participants also added the democratisation of Turkey, stabilization of Iraq and the price of oil. Another convergent interest between the US and the EU, according to a participant, would be the promotion of regional integration, which would allow greater south-south development. Not everyone agreed with this point, however. A participant affirmed that the US has little interest in regional integration, as it seems to focus on bilateral relations with the countries in the area.

However, participants agreed, there are structural differences between the US and the EU approach that hampers the cooperation in the Mediterranean. There seems to be an asymmetric view of the Mediterranean. The US doesn't look at the Mediterranean as a whole region, and divides it along rigid lines: Europe (and the southern European countries) on one side, and North Africa on the other. According to another participant, the US sees the Mediterranean as merely the western part of the Greater Middle East. Europe, on the contrary, sees the Mediterranean as a unified strategic space, separated from the Middle East. This asymmetry, a participant noted, is important because it pushes the US to focus its action in the Middle East, while the EU is more focused in its own Mediterranean neighbourhood, on which it bases its own strategic vision. These asymmetric points of view represent a major obstacle to consistent transatlantic cooperation.

*The Union for the Mediterranean doesn't seem very promising*

Participants agreed that, for the moment, the Union for the Mediterranean (UFM), promoted by the French president Sarkozy, doesn't seem to be a very effective instrument for democracy promotion or regional integration. The UFM, a participant said, is basically void of substance as it does not include many of the most relevant issues of the Mediterranean region. The European Union, the participant concluded, does not know how to promote democracy outside the EU, or maybe it doesn't want to, in order not to endanger powerful economical interests. Another participant added that the UFM project had actually unintended and unwanted consequences; for example, criteria of democracy promotion went actually down regarding Libya.

Other participants expressed a slightly less pessimistic view of the UFM. In any case, it was agreed by all participants that the way France promoted the UFM project was not

very helpful. Timing and preparatory diplomacy could have been chosen and executed more carefully. A participant noted that maybe not even the French government itself had a clear objective in mind, and that would explain the confusion. It could be speculated that the UFM was intended simply as a way to promote French economic interests, or to hinder the prospects of Turkish EU membership (to which president Sarkozy is opposed).

*Promotion of democracy efforts in the region largely failed*

Participants agreed that, notwithstanding the declarations of principles, transatlantic efforts toward democracy promotion did not succeed. The EU should pursue a normative policy, based on human rights and democratic values but, so far, proved unable to do so. An explanation, a participant noted, could be that the increasing “re-nationalization” of the Union hampers EU’s common policies. Many participants also underlined that, after 9/11, policies in the Mediterranean have become increasingly “securitized”, with the consequence that efforts toward democratisation were somewhat abandoned in favour of maintaining the status quo. Even the Bush administration, which formally placed a high interest in developing democracies, seems to have no idea on how to promote democracy without creating instability, and returned to a mainly realist, pro-*status quo* position.

### **3. Turkey’s Perspectives and Transatlantic Relations**

*The new government has promoted a more active role of Turkey in the region...*

Participants agreed on the increasingly active and assertive role of Turkey in regional politics. A participant characterized the current Turkish government foreign policy as “neo-ottoman”, in the sense that it envisages a much more active role for Turkey in regional crises, even if it is also a realistic one. Turkey is today more willing and able to play a proactive rather than reactive role, as it often happened in the past.

A participant attributed this new and more active role of Turkey to the replacement of the old, classical Turkish political establishment, which aimed to keep Turkey out of regional conflicts, with the new AKP Party leadership. This domestic revolution, a deep transformation in Turkish society, has been driven not only by foreign influences but also by socio-demographic trends.

*4.2 ...but it’s as Europeanist as the previous one*

However, there are also traits of continuity between the old government and the new one. The main of these traits, it was agreed by participants, is the Europeanism of Turkish government. This is an important link with the past. The AKP government sees the relationship with the EU as a priority for Turkish foreign policy, as it is very well aware of the potential advantages of EU integration for Turkey. For this very reason, a participant observed, today the EU play so central a role in Turkish domestic politics. And for the same reason the creeping anti-European feelings that sometimes surface in the Turkish society are a worrying phenomenon.

*Turkey seems to play a realistic and responsible role in the region*

A participant maintained that, although Turkey is increasingly involved in regional affairs, its role is that of a responsible actor. Turkey would definitely not support an

attack against Iran, as the situation in Iraq has already destabilized the region to a disturbing degree. Iran is also a very good commercial partner for Turkey. Moreover, another participant added, Turkey is not interested in a regime change in Iran because a democratic Iran could become much more influential in the region, and that would reduce Turkey's own influence. However, Ankara is nonetheless worried for the development of Iran's nuclear program, as it would be destabilizing for the whole region. Indeed, another participant added, Turkey is positively working for stability in cooperation with the other regional powers.

#### **4. Evolution in the Maghreb: EU-US Between Competition and Cooperation**

*Is the EU really an actor in the Maghreb?*

A major shortcoming of the EU's foreign policy in the Maghreb is the plurality of actors involved in it, a participant asserted. There are many different EU institutional actors (the Commission, etc...), as well as single countries and different groups of countries (Northern and Southern European countries), and policy differences between these actors objectively hinder EU policy in the region. For example, the EU doesn't have a clear position on dialogue with non-violent Islamists: countries such as Spain and Italy support it, while France doesn't. Moreover, today the EU itself is in a state of crisis because of the failed ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and it will probably be unable to launch any efficient policy in the coming months.

*A change of strategy is needed*

A common Maghrebian citizen, a participant stated, doesn't see any difference between EU and US policies. Both the EU and US, the participant maintained, seemed to think that good governance and a functioning market economy would automatically create democracy and development in the Maghreb countries. In short, the US and EU have intervened in Maghreb with typical "Washington consensus" policies. The results, it was agreed, have been poor. Major problems, such as high unemployment, have not been solved. Furthermore, not enough efforts have been made to strengthen the rule of law in the Maghreb countries. A participant advocated a stronger role for the state, which should be allowed to sustain and promote private initiatives. It is paramount that people in the Maghreb can see rapid improvements, and for that a state-led intervention could be very useful.

#### **5. Nuclear Energy Development and Non-Proliferation in the Mediterranean**

*Motivation for the revived interest for nuclear energy in the Gulf may be economic*

Participants agreed that there seems to be a sudden revived interest in civilian nuclear energy in several Arab countries, and discussed the motivations that may be behind that. Some participants interpreted this interest as motivated by Iranian actions. For another participant, however, the main motivation why the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries pursue nuclear capabilities is economic. Paradoxically, GCC countries currently face an energy crunch. The demand of electricity for domestic use is growing around 8% per year, hydrocarbon fuels have high and rising opportunity costs. Furthermore, the recent expansion of the GCC countries' refining capacity lowers the

production of the residual fuel oil which these countries used for energy production for their own domestic needs. Thus, from an economic point of view it make sense for the GCC countries to build up nuclear power, as well as develop renewable sources, in order to diversify their sources of energy. Moreover, nuclear energy is capital intensive and represent an excellent store of value for the future, in times of financial uncertainty. In conclusion, GCC countries seems to have sound economic and strategic motivations for the development of nuclear energy.

*North African countries are not in the same favourable conditions for nuclear development*

The situation is different for North African countries and in the Levant. First of all, these countries are generally short of capital, and the investment for nuclear energy will have to compete with other domestic investments. Moreover, the costs of burning gas (on which North African countries mainly rely) is lower than burning oil, so economic incentives for nuclear power is less clear. Since these regimes usually have a stronger nationalistic and autarchic character, they will probably refuse to rely on foreign countries for the technology, know-how and manpower necessary for nuclear development. The development of domestic capabilities will slow down the process, but it may increase proliferation risks.

It would be in the EU interest, a participant argued, to promote nuclear development in the North African countries. If these countries are not able to rely on nuclear energy they will be forced, as their electricity needs grow, to increase their gas consumption. This will mean less gas available for exports in Europe, making European countries even more dependant on Russia. Moreover, a partnership between European and North African countries would lessen worries of proliferation. This European-North African nuclear partnership may very well be developed within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.

*Non-proliferation efforts are evolving, but still much needs to be done*

Global non proliferation regime and international safeguards, a participant explained, evolved continuously in response to new issues that emerged recently. Non state proliferation nets, such as the one which involved Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan, are an example. In response to these new challenges, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) developed new solutions, such as the capability to detect non declared nuclear activities. New cooperation initiatives are also in place, such as the Threat reduction program, reliable supply, proliferation resistance (that is, technological obstacles to proliferation). All these initiatives are pursued globally. However, participants agreed, there is still much to be done, as the challenges are also global and evolving.

Participants agreed that the Middle East poses additional challenges for counter-proliferation efforts. One, for example, is the need for preliminary confidence-building measures. Another could be the double standard between Israel and the Arab countries: what is asked to the Arabs, in fact, is not asked to Israel. A regional organization could facilitate IAEA inspections but Israel would not allow any inspection in the Dimona nuclear facility. Other ideas for counter-proliferation in the Middle East include the creation of an international facility which could provide full range nuclear activities for all the countries in the region. In any case, participants agreed, transatlantic cooperation will be paramount to stop proliferation.