



CENTER FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

# SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

Views from governments and civil society on cooperative security

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## About this series

*Shoulder to Shoulder* is an interview series by the Cooperative Security Program at the Center for Transatlantic Relations (CTR). Cooperative security is increasingly perceived and shaped as a two-faced coin in which the interaction of state and non-state actors is both part of the problem and part of the solution. On the one hand, there is a need to redefine strategies and to design responses to address transnational threats by rogue governments, non-governmental forces, and international networks. On the other hand, effective and sustainable solutions to those challenges require partnerships of states, civil society, and international organizations. As a first step, the CTR Cooperative Security Program will address such interaction in the fight against terrorism. The program is one of the CTR's projects that explore the crossover between transatlantic politics and global issues. The generous support of the Arca Foundation, the Fisher Fund of the Tides Foundation and an anonymous donor made the publication of the *Shoulder to Shoulder* series possible.

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## CTR Publications

E. Brimmer, ed., *The EU's Search for a Strategic Role: ESDP and its Implications for Transatlantic Relations*

J. Quinlan, *Drifting Apart or Growing Together? The Primacy of the Transatlantic Economy*

E. Brimmer, *The United States, the European Union and International Human Rights Issues*

## In this issue

We take a preliminary look at the **Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference** that will take place in Naples on December 2-3, 2003. This meeting—the sixth since the 1995 Barcelona Conference which launched the Euro-Mediterranean partnership—will offer foreign ministers and civil society representatives from 27 countries an opportunity to assess the state of their relations as the Israeli-Palestinian roadmap unravels and violence escalates in Iraq. The Conference will need to ease Arab states' concerns that these seemingly intractable problems in the Middle East and EU enlargement will not relegate many other pressing issues affecting their region to Europe's backburner. The Italian presidency of the EU hopes that the Conference will become a springboard for progress in the three areas of the Mediterranean dialogue: political and security, economic and financial, and socio-cultural cooperation. In particular, the 27 foreign ministers may conclude work on the long-debated creation of a consultative Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, as well as reach agreement on a Euro-Mediterranean Bank or, at a minimum, a reinforced lending mechanism for investments within the European Investment Bank. Progress is also expected in the so-called intercultural partnership leading to the creation of an interregional foundation for the “dialogue of cultures.” Behind this ambitious agenda remain thorny issues that have made the relationship stagnant, including differing policies and perspectives across the Mediterranean on human rights, migration, security cooperation on terrorism and organized crime, as well as trade liberalization and European commitment to reforming the Common Agricultural Policy. We discussed the Conference's main themes with **Dario Rivolta**, Vice-chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Parliament's Chamber of Deputies—who also holds the foreign affairs portfolio of “Forza Italia” (the governing coalition's main party). In addition, we asked three Arab scholars to comment on the Conference and compare **EU and US policies** towards the Middle East. These



**Dario Rivolta**

### the Conference's debate?

**Dario Rivolta:** This national tragedy will not change our country's posture towards the region. There are international factors that go beyond Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and that need to be tackled in a wider discussion. The attack against the carabinieri underscores the urgency of strengthening our collaboration with Arab states.

### CTR: What concrete initiatives can the Conference produce?

**Rivolta:** The concrete initiatives will be decided during the actual negotiations in Naples. I hope that the discussion will go well beyond generic pronouncements and focus on urgent, practical and attainable measures. For example, the Conference should tackle what kind of investments Europe could spearhead in the Middle East. This should be a priority issue, together with serious discussions and commitments regarding the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Investment Bank, and dismantling barriers to free trade in the region. As opposed to the Doha [Development Agenda], which offers too wide a range of interlocutors and options, the more modest and geographically contained ambitions of the Mediterranean dialogue will allow European and Arab countries to focus on areas of more pressing concern.

**Bassam Tibi:** The impetus of the Barcelona process lost steam over

the issue of Palestine, and it has now been deadlocked for quite some time. The EU needs to have a breakthrough pretty soon to put the process back on track. Palestine remains the main theme of the relationship. Arab states want to see real progress, be that with more EU pressure on Israel or by the deployment of a [peacekeeping] force.

**Abdelwahab Biad:** The Conference may conclude a final agreement on establishing the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures. This new institution will improve the visibility of the Barcelona Process through intellectual, cultural and civil society exchanges. Against the background of the current international situation, everybody would stress the importance of promoting dialogue between cultures and civilizations (including dialogue between religions) in order to improve mutual understanding. But many questions regarding the foundation's activities and financing have not been resolved yet.

**Samir Makdisi:** It is difficult to predict the outcome of this Conference. But what is encouraging, as I see it, is the desire of both sides to expand and deepen their economic, and by extension, political relationships. If these are indeed developed on the basis of clearly defined and visible mutual benefits, the Mediterranean region will stand to gain substantially from its cooperation with the European Union and will

scholars are **Abdelwahab Biad**, Professor of International Law and Head of International Relations and the European Cooperation Office at the University of Rouen; **Samir A. Makdisi**, Professor of Economics, Director of the Institute of Financial Economics at the American University of Beirut and former Minister of National Economy of Lebanon; and **Bassam Tibi**, Professor of Islamology at the University of Goettingen and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the California EU Center. They offered views from their vantage observation points in Europe, the Middle East, and the US, respectively. We conducted these interviews separately by phone and correspondence with Rome, Rouen, Beirut, and New York in November 2003.

**CTR: Will the attack against the Italian contingent in Iraq affect**

therefore seek closer economic and political association. But all this implies not only that the EU should show an understanding of the concerns of the Mediterranean region (in the economic domain the issue of agricultural liberalization comes to mind), but also that it should address such concerns in concrete terms. The onus of a successful Euro-Mediterranean relationship falls more on the European side: the EU is by far the more powerful partner negotiating bilaterally with individual Mediterranean countries.

**CTR: The UN pointed out that three main obstacles to development in Arab states are insufficient freedom, women's empowerment, and knowledge. The US and the EU have linked economic success in the region to political and social change. Is the West putting its money and know-how where its mouth is to promote change and address these deficits?**

**Biad:** Western economic assistance was motivated mainly by self-interest. It helped to stabilize authoritarian regimes. A new approach is needed to link this assistance to progress on democratization, protection of human-rights, increasing opportunities for women, employment for the young, better access to new technologies and fighting corruption. There should be better monitoring of whether financial assistance actually reaches those people who need it most. There is a need for more transparency by governmental institutions' manage-

ment. Multi-lateral or bilateral assistance should be directed at stimulating a process of modernization and democratization, not to enriching oligarchies or to shoring up repressive regimes.

**Tibi:** In the past, this link had not been made. Connecting the dots is an important step forward, and it encourages Arab civil society to see light at the end of the tunnel. I was in Indonesia when President Bush pledged \$180 million to promote teaching of liberal Islam. This is quite unprecedented and very welcome. We now have to see whether public pronouncements will effectively produce concrete policy. The problem with the EU approach is that you cannot simply throw money at an issue without having an overall and coherent policy. An additional problem is that the EU is not tough enough in demanding accountability for how its money is spent. This lack of coherence has prompted Arab states to regard the EU as a paymaster, but also as a political lightweight. In contrast, when the EU speaks with one voice and when it spends political capital at a high level, the Middle East listens. A case in point is the recent visit by EU ministers of foreign affairs to Iran. Hopefully, the EU will adopt a similar approach with regard to Palestine.

**Rivolta:** In my opinion, economic development will help address these three deficits. Achieving the four objectives of economic development, expansion of individual freedoms and



**Bassam Tibi**

knowledge, as well as women's empowerment and rights should proceed simultaneously and hand-in-hand. I am persuaded that more prosperity in the region will ameliorate the social and political conditions. As I pointed out, one way to foster change is through investments. So far investments in the region have been sluggish, remedial, and ad hoc. They have not tackled structural economic change. We should aim higher if we really want to help maximize the development potential of the Arab world.

**Makdisi:** Domestic reform, be it economic, political, or social, is the responsibility of the countries concerned; it is not a process to be imposed from outside. While change has taken place in the Mediterranean region in response to domestic and global developments, it is true that much

remains to be achieved in the areas to which you refer. But would such change come from linking foreign economic aid to specific socio-political objectives? The record so far does not support this notion. The rich countries of the region are not in need of outside incentives, and the record of the less rich countries that have received aid does not point to significant advancement in the realm of political freedom. In any case, where change has taken place in the areas of women's empowerment, or knowledge, this change does not seem to be strongly linked to foreign aid, but rather to domestic factors. Admittedly certain types of foreign expertise and aid may help accelerate the move towards a knowledge-based economy. Essentially, however, any substantial advancement in this regard has to come from properly designed and well-implemented domestic policies. This is especially so in the case of political freedom and women's empowerment where any permanent progress can only be achieved as a result of civil society action. The West has not necessarily been a champion of domestic progress. It is doubtful that politically motivated foreign aid can play a significant role in this regard, certainly not as significant as that played by Western educational institutions established in the Mediterranean region over the past one hundred and fifty years. Above all natural and peaceful interactions among nations in an increasingly open world will probably have a much greater influence in the direction of fostering democracy and social equality than a pre-

determined imposition of political and economic ideologies via military intervention.

**CTR: Security cooperation has always been one of the most stagnant parts of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The Conference agenda includes a framework for EU-Arab states' judicial cooperation against terrorism and organized crime. Is this goal achievable?**

**Tibi:** I believe this goal is achievable. But the EU must muster the political will to get there. Arab states have complained for years that their violent opponents among the Islamic groups have made Europe a staging-ground for attacks. They asked repeatedly for European cooperation, which was not forthcoming. This lack of European responsiveness was due to concerns about human rights abuses, and it created a gap in enforcement.

**Rivolta:** Our main objective is dismantling terrorist networks and preventing terrorist acts. Both sides of the partnership should understand that such cooperation is mutually beneficial. Ongoing relations and exchange of information among police and secret services can be reinforced by a more structured cooperation program. This should not be difficult to agree upon. The difficulty, however, will be in the implementation phase. Our laws and judicial procedures vary widely. This is true among European

countries, and even more so beyond Europe. Harmonizing these very different systems by making them operationally interactive and enforceable will be a real challenge.

**Biad:** Cooperation in fighting terrorism and organized crime is a major challenge for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. After intensive work, a framework document was endorsed to implement a regional cooperation program in the field of justice, in particular for combating drugs, organized crime and terrorism. This framework also envisaged cooperation on migration issues. No final agreement has been reached on a regional strategy, but results have been better at the bilateral level. A lack of political will has hampered progress. Broadly speaking, cooperation has improved since September 11. It will take time, but I am optimistic.



**Abdelwahab Biad**



**Samir Makdisi**

**CTR:** What guarantees that this cooperation will not be used to undermine the already fragile human rights situation in the region? How would it affect migration policies?

**Rivolta:** There is a risk for human rights and individual freedoms. We should be both attentive and very sensitive to this risk. Incidentally, the risk is present even within Europe. For example, the mandate and powers of EUROPOL extend to collecting information on potentially dangerous individuals. This would be contrary to Italian law, which requires a court authorization to carry out operations such as wiretapping. We are still grappling with these issues, but we can't ignore that, at times, the best of intentions and the best of purposes might undermine civil and human rights even in well-established democracies. Of course, risk factors are

magnified in illiberal countries. Negotiators will have to be cognizant of, and very attuned to this risk. If a Euro-Mediterranean program on judicial cooperation is put in place, then it will be up to the parliaments to build in guarantees and exercise vigilance over its enforcement. As for migration, some of our southern Mediterranean partners have linked their collaboration to economic aid. I believe that progress on this issue will be more forthcoming if the Naples negotiators discuss positive incentives to stem illegal migrant flows, such as an expansion of individual freedoms and free trade, as well as migration quotas. We cannot tackle this problem by simply policing borders better. There should be a general plan of investments that would allow potential migrants to continue exporting their hopes and working legally, but also offer them better options at home.

**Makdisi:** This is a fair question. The guarantee here seems to be rooted in the implicit assumption that any judicial cooperation would not ignore the issue of human rights as deserving of legal protection and due process. This matter is related to the previous question concerning terrorism. If judicial cooperation will come to be used to intimidate citizens advocating civil rights and to cover their arrests under the pretence that they are terrorists, or to deny the accused a fair trial, then what such cooperation may amount to is simply one between the internal security apparatuses of the

countries concerned. But I should like to presume that what the two sides have in mind is judicial cooperation that will be based on the principles of democracy and equality and hence the enhancement of human rights.

**Tibi:** We must carefully distinguish between legitimate opposition and jihadist groups. If the distinction is clear, the risk of abusing judicial cooperation is minimized.

**Biad:** It is clear that fighting terrorism will affect human rights. We should not forget that many regimes in the region are repressive. There is no independent judiciary and no political control over security forces. Some governments may use judicial cooperation to increase pressure on their own non-violent opposition groups, or to intimidate human rights activists. In order to prevent this situation, cooperation on fighting terrorism should be linked to the broader agenda for socio-economic reform and modernization, including reform of the educational system.

**CTR:** Will the EU-Mediterranean meeting address the question of creating a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly?

**Biad:** Of course! The 2002 Euro-Mediterranean summit in Valencia recommended strengthening the parliamentary dimension of the partnership, including creating a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. Senior officials liaised with their partners' parliaments and

the EU Parliament to examine how to achieve this goal. These consultations have not produced an agreement yet. And it may be difficult to reach such an agreement before the next Conference.

**Rivolta:** I am not sure whether the negotiators will come up with a blueprint for such an institution. However, I hope that we will not be creating a new and expensive caldron with undefined powers and competencies. Quite frankly, exchanges among the parliamentarians of the region are already underway. We do not meet under the banner of an overarching institution, but our interaction is nonetheless productive. I do not see what added value a new parliamentary assembly would provide.

**CTR: Has civil society benefited from Euro-Mediterranean partnership policies? How has the non-governmental sector influenced policy change?**

**Rivolta:** It is difficult to estimate whether this has happened. Certainly, from a cultural point of view the Euro-Mediterranean partnership has produced a better understanding and a mutual posture which is less adversarial. Civil society's progress and influence varies from country to country.

**Makdisi:** I believe it has. Many of the projects that are sponsored by the EU solicit, if not require, the participation of civil society organizations. To that extent, their



**Trade Conference of Mediterranean Countries,  
Palermo, July 7, 2003**

influence on domestic policies may have grown. On the other hand, the role of civil society organizations is yet to be fully developed to the point where it can exercise a really substantial influence. Existing political systems in the Mediterranean countries do not permit, let alone encourage, the flourishing of civil society activities. Nonetheless, they are growing and with time are bound to become more influential.

**Tibi:** The EU has been active in supporting civil society groups, particularly in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco. In these countries civil society enjoys a measure of liberty and democracy. In other Middle Eastern countries such limited freedoms are simply not available. It is doubtful, however, whether even the more tolerant rulers would accept greater openness. If

EU support were perceived as a threat, Arab states would protest what they regard as interference. However, the same rulers seem to have no qualms of interfering in European countries when they manage the affairs of the Islamic diasporas [across the Mediterranean]. European countries have let this happen without complaining.

**Biad:** Civil society is on the margin of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership which is mainly an intergovernmental process. Despite some efforts to facilitate participation of civil society through the Euromed Civil Forum, the results are very disappointing. Many governments feel that civil society participation in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership could undermine their sovereign power. Some of them have even created

what they called “official nongovernmental organizations” in order to discredit the Civil Forum. At the 2003 Forum’s meeting in Crete, participants adopted a useful document on the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, which stresses the need for increased participation of civil society in regional cooperation. We need to develop this dimension with a particular focus on youth and women organizations, trade unions, journalists, business leaders, universities, and municipalities.

**CTR:** Has any progress been achieved over inter-Arab integration, particularly with respect to the Agadir agreement envisaging a free-trade area among Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia?

**Biad:** There is nothing new to report at this stage. For decades, Inter-Arab integration has been more a matter of rhetoric than a reality. There is no geographic contiguity and no strong economic relations among Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan. To be efficient, a free trade area should include the whole region.

**Makdisi:** The issue here is not simply the rate of progress in implementing the free trade area among the Arab countries or any subset of these countries. The issue may also be the cost of non-integration among them when at the same time they are seeking association agreements with the EU. Under such circumstances, what does the envisaged Arab free trade area imply to the Arab countries,

both economically and politically? This is a question that has not been properly addressed.

**Rivolta:** The Arab world lives a contradiction that it shares with other regions. On the one hand, Arab countries feel that they are part of a larger Arab nation. On the other hand, they are divided over practical supra-national issues. I am persuaded that some Arab countries will achieve a free trade area among themselves. But they will have to cast aside national interests and nationalistic diffidence. The process of intra-regional integration would be given a big boost were all Euro-Mediterranean partners to agree on a region-wide free trade area by 2010, as envisaged by the Barcelona process.

**CTR:** How realistic is this timeframe?

**Rivolta:** I believe we can reach an agreement by that date. Agricultural policies are one of the main stumbling blocks. The Common Agricultural Policy will have to be reformed gradually, but Europe cannot wholly forfeit agricultural subsidies. We will have to address how to foster synergy rather than competition across the Mediterranean. And this re-evaluation should also include other sectors such as small and medium-size enterprises. We will have to muster and sustain the political will to do so, but we can make a free trade area happen in the medium term.

**Makdisi:** With reference to the

Arab free trade area, the timeframe seems realistic. But again unless more substantive steps are taken towards implementing Arab economic integration, the benefits from the free trade area, once implemented, will remain limited.

**CTR:** Are Arab states concerned that EU enlargement may slow down the Mediterranean agenda?

**Makdisi:** Possibly. But such enlargement should not raise serious concerns provided it does not detract from the European focus on the Mediterranean region, especially as it applies to aid and investments. The more the Mediterranean states can act as one group in forging cooperation with the EU, the less likely is the severity of any detraction associated with the enlargement of the EU.

**Biad:** The EU Commission’s recent proposals for a “wider Europe” new neighborhood policy are intended to answer such concerns. The economic impact of EU enlargement on Arab partners is expected in terms of direct trade, investment, and other macro-economic repercussions, but it has not been sufficiently measured. The enlargement’s main consequence will be an increasing pressure on Arab partners for further economic reforms.

**Tibi:** Arab states are very much concerned, and their perception that the EU enlargement will be detrimental to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership is

strong. They have a zero-sum view of this issue. It should not be so. I believe that both the East and the South are crucial to the EU, and that the EU will continue to deal with both areas.

**Rivolta:** Undoubtedly the EU will concentrate on its enlargement. But there is unanimity in the EU, including among the Nordic states, that the Mediterranean partnership should be kept open and should be strengthened. Whether we like it or not, the Arab world is one of our main interlocutors. It is in our best interest, and in fact a necessity, to devote energy and attention to build up that partnership. We cannot afford to lose this opportunity either in Naples or in the future.

**CTR:** Will the EU planned offer of associate country status to Syria trigger a new transatlantic rift?

**Biad:** Association agreements are now in force with Tunisia, Morocco,

Israel and Jordan and, on an interim basis, with the Palestinian Authority. Agreements signed with Egypt, Algeria and Lebanon are not yet in force. No association agreement has been signed with Syria. The EU wishes to conclude negotiations with Syria aiming at creating a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by the target date of 2010.

**Rivolta:** The EU and the US have different approaches. By engaging countries such as Syria, the EU seeks to acquire an influence that can be used to promote freedom and democracy. Recently, the messages coming from the US have sounded like ultimatums. I do not believe that a policy of exclusion pays off in the long run. In contrast, dialogue, persuasion and incentives have proved historically to yield better results, particularly with countries that might represent a security risk.

**Tibi:** I believe it will. The US regards the EU approach as undermining the US position. Arab states consider any transatlantic split as a success because they think that such divisions play into their hands. I think that the US and the EU should come up with a concerted approach where differences could be accommodated and a cooperative agenda worked out.

**CTR:** How did Arab public opinion evaluate President Bush's vision for the Middle East?

**Tibi:** With skepticism ranging from subtle to outright, depending on whether comments came from more pro-western or more anti-western sectors of public opinion. The latter represents the majority, unfortunately, and its mood is spreading. This majority rejected President Bush's approach as a cover for the pursuit of US economic interests. Moderate public opinion regarded it as the wrong set of policies and was concerned that if the US would aggressively pursue its solutions, the Middle East would end up losing once again. ■



Philippe de Fontaine Vive Curtaz of the European Investment Bank, with Italian Minister for Economic Affairs Giulio Tremonti at the meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Investment Facility and Partnership, November 11, 2003.