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MEDITERRANEAN DYNAMICS
IMPLICATIONS FOR EU-TURKEY RELATIONS**

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THE IMPACT OF THE IRAQ CRISIS ON MEDITERRANEAN DYNAMICS IMPLICATIONS FOR EU-TURKEY RELATIONS

by Roberto Aliboni¹

This paper deals with the impact of the Iraqi crisis on Mediterranean dynamics. Four such dynamics are taken into consideration, assuming their particular significance: (a) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, more broadly, the opposition between Israel and the Arab-Muslim countries; (b) the stability of regional regimes and their transition to democracy; (c) the development of the EU Mediterranean policies and their relevance in the region; (d) Turkey's national and regional interests.

The paper assesses the impact of Iraq crisis on each such group of questions, with a view to evaluate their influence on the EU-Turkey relations in its conclusive section.

The Middle East

The war on Iraq has been justified in many ways. The American administration assumed different motives, at one and the same time, to explain the need to change the Iraqi regime. It pointed out the existence of immediate threats to national and international security, as the danger posed by the WMD possessed by the Iraqi regime, and the possibility that such WMD are made available to terrorist groups. It called in, however, also motives more strategically relevant, as triggering a shift towards the establishment of democratic regimes in the region with a view to make peace and prosperity possible in the whole of the area.

The argument is that by forcing a regime change in Iraq and replacing it with an Iraq democratic regime, there would be a kind of domino effect in the other countries of the region. New forces and factors would be raised by a regime change in Iraq that would be able and willing to overthrow current incompetent and authoritarian regimes and establish as many political democracies in the countries involved. These democratic regimes would be bent on good governance and peaceful relations with their neighbours. Consequently, a number of intractable conflicts in the region would be amenable to some solution in the short term, whereas income growth and education would consolidate regional peaceful relations in the longer term.

In this sense, the intervention on Iraq was regarded by its promoters before the war, and is still regarded today as an instrument of conflict resolution in the shorter term, that would allow generating the conditions for implementing conflict prevention policies in the longer term. In this wide peace-building perspective, the war on Iraq should be seen as an instrument bound to turn a region of conflict, turmoil and instability into one of order and prosperity with a view to smooth over and eliminate its hostility towards the West as well as spill-over effects and attacks stemming from such hostility.

This grand design and its implementation is also predicated on the durable influence the United States would be able to exert on Iraq and, from such central location, the whole of the region. Thanks to this more direct presence and influence, the transition of the region towards democracy and peace would be watched over by the United States and defended from opposition and inimical factors. All in all, the strategy seems to be based

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on the big push towards democracy provided by the regime change in Iraq as well as the more direct presence and influence the liberation and the consequent special relationship with Iraq would secure to the United States in the very centre of the Greater Middle East.

As we have just pointed out, the argument concerns the whole of the region and a wide range of conflicts, including domestic ones. There is no doubt, though, that the most significant and immediate link between regime change in Iraq, on one hand, and the establishment of a democratic and peaceful dynamics, on the other, would regard the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader disputes between Israel and the Arab countries. In other words, the most important domino expected to fall as a consequence of the American strategy should be the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Views on how the link would work in this case are different, however. The neo-conservatives think that regime change in Iraq would strengthen Israeli security immediately; it may bring about democracy among the Palestinians at a later stage; at that point in time would foster solutions to be found and implemented between Israelis and Palestinians by themselves.

In Europe the link appears most urgent and important. For sure, the link between Iraq and Palestine is only a second best in European eyes. The European long standing view is that the key stumbling block on the road to peace in the region is the Middle East conflict, in particular that between Israel and the Palestinians.

As the Americans, the Europeans are also convinced that the establishment of more pluralistic and liberal regimes in the region is a key factor for securing prosperity and peace. Still, the average European thinking is that, first of all, nationalism must be emasculated by solving the conflict that feeds it, so as to establish political conditions more conducive to a democratic transition. (It must be pointed out that this is not France and Germany's thinking only. By and large, this view is shared also by those European countries which have sided with the United States in the Iraqi crisis, beginning with the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. The reason they sided with the United States pertains to national security rather than the Middle East.)

In sum, the Europeans would prefer the United States to commit first to an Israeli-Palestinian peace in order for the region to be resettled. With the advent of the present administration, a strategic opposition has emerged between Europe and the United States on this point. This opposition played a strong role in the transatlantic dispute before the war and is still playing a role in the aftermath of the war and the occupation/liberation of Iraq. However, once the United States decided to go to war, all the Europeans have insisted to link as soon as possible the intervention in Iraq to the peace process in the historical Palestine, even though this was regarded by many Europeans as a second best solution only.

Immediately after the war, the American administration has espoused the second-best European agenda and has lifted its embargo on the road map process. With the agreement of the Europeans, there has been a mini-regime change in Palestine by forcing the appointment of a moderate Palestinian Prime Minister, Mister Mr. Mahmoud Abbas alias Abu Mazen, and putting President Arafat on the sidelines. Nevertheless, in few months the road map process came to a dead-end with Abu Mazen renouncing its mandate and a rampant terrorism. So, the link has been made, but it did not work.

How can Iraq's impact on the Palestinian issue be interpreted? To respond to that question, a preliminary point has to be taken into consideration: the assumptions of the American strategy have not been verified so far. In post-war Iraq the situation is in flux. The implementation of an Iraqi democratic regime cannot be ruled out. Still, for the time being it cannot certainly be given for granted. If a democracy will ultimately be born in Iraq, there is no doubt that the birth will be strongly assisted and bring in itself something artificial. It may be that domestic divides will be turned into factors of peaceful and democratic competition (political parties, trade unions, NGOs and federal states). It may be, though, that they stand and worsen, thus preventing Iraq from stabilising.

There is no doubt that the ultimate establishment of a democracy in Iraq would be bound to have a positive, (although not necessarily decisive) impact on the political debate in the regional countries and eventually help democratic transitions at work, if any, and their possible emergence. This is not going to happen in a brief delay nor will it emerge without contradictions, however. While waiting for seeing the outcome of American efforts in Iraq, some response can be provided to our question on the effects of Iraq intervention on Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by referring to the current situation.

The first effect of the war on Iraq has been, as aptly argued by the neo-conservatives, an objective improvement of the Israeli security situation and a reassurance to nationalists and ultra nationalists, in the government as well as the Israeli society. In contrast, Palestinian moderates have been weakened and the coarse propping up of Abu Mazen has been regarded as the imposition of a Quisling, in Palestine as well as in the whole of the Arab-Muslim world. Nothing to do with democracy.

On the other hand, events in Iraq have emboldened Palestinian hard-liners and multiplied support from external sources, in particular from Wahhabi quarters concerned by both the American inroad in Iraq and the future of Sunnis there. Many interests in the Arab-Muslim world oppose an eventual moderate solution of the Palestinian issue.

Given these negative influences stemming from Iraq, the road map process should have been supported by the Quartet, especially the United States, more convincingly and strongly than it has in fact. It asked for a more balanced approach between Israel and the Palestinians. From time to time, Bush sounded to pursue coherently the idea of the two states he had put forward in the Rose Garden speech of June 2002. All in all, though, a presidential approach neatly distinct from the neo-conservatives influences apparently dominating the administration failed to emerge. In this sense, one can conclude that a link was there, it failed to be implemented however. This was a mistake, so much so that a success in Palestine could have worked as a positive feed back on the uncertain post-war situation in Iraq.

In the end, an evaluation is not that easy. First, the neo-conservative strategy focusing on Iraq suggests that a change in the region is a consequence of the establishment of democracy in this country and the stabilisation of a new American influence in the centre of the Greater Middle East. For the time being, these expectations are far from being implemented. However, one cannot still rule out their achievement. In this sense, it would be premature to guess that the neo-conservative strategy is wrong and failed to diffuse peace and prosperity in the region. We have to wait for developments in Iraq. With Resolution 1511 the United States obtained enough room for manoeuvre as to be

able to come to terms with the Iraqi transition. At that moment, it will be possible to understand whether the domino effect expected by the Iraqi intervention will take place or not. As we shall see in next section, evidences from the Arab world are rather mixed. Positive reactions may gain the upper hand in case Iraq will be stabilised.

Second, as already noted, the neo-conservative approach is rather neglecting Palestine. Palestine is regarded as one domino among others. It will be seized somewhere by Iraq wind of democratisation without deserving the long standing helpless and costly attention previous American administrations have devoted to it. Europe believes that the stability of the region requires a Palestinian state and, in order to make that state feasible, the international community should make up for the huge imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians. In this sense, Europe will be convinced that such neglect is less benign than malicious, as it favours Israel's most nationalist goals. This is not a question to be discussed here. Be as it may, the road map is not coherent with the neo-conservative assumptions. In their perspective, the road map looks like a helpless, maybe damaging short cut. The inception of the road map process after the war on Iraq by President Bush must be regarded less as a linkage within the American Iraqi strategy than an episode in transatlantic relations. It didn't failed because of negative influences from Iraq. It did so essentially because it took place in the old Oslo logic, amidst old controversies between Americans and Europeans about what to do (the fence, Arafat's role, monitoring, and so forth). This old logic and the state of flux still prevailing in Iraq have combined in a very negative mix and caused the attempt at creating an early and positive link between Iraq and Palestine to fail.

At the end of this analysis, one could argue that the fundamental question is Western cohesion. Neither Iraq nor Palestine can be dealt with if there are strong divides between the Atlantic allies as well as EU members. The transatlantic strategic opposition between which issue - whether Iraq or Palestine - should be given priority remains unsolved. Resolution 1511 has lifted European (and Russian) active opposition and given the United States an opportunity to pursue its priority in the Middle East. If it will succeed in convincingly democratising Iraq, maybe the Europeans will have to have a second thought on Palestine. Otherwise, it will have to be the other way round.

Arab regimes and democracy

The present administration has borrowed from the neo-conservatives not only the idea of a direct intervention in the Arab world, in the event Iraq, as a means to impress a change to the region and open the way to democracy. It has also largely borrowed the rationale for such change. The analysis of the neo-conservatives suggests that there is a direct filiation between European Nazi and Fascist ideologies and Arab nationalism, in particular the Ba'ath parties. In this view, it is because of their brand of nationalism that the Arabs have been prevented from modernising and democratising. This interpretation has been developed and substantiated by the noted historian Bernard Lewis - who is not a neo-conservative - and is now put forward anew by Paul Berman, an American liberal, in his book "Terror and Liberalism". In the latter he maintains that the broad opposition by liberals to Iraq war ignores the fact that that war is on a late and dangerous kind of fascism, in the name and for the purpose of democracy. In a sense, it should be regarded as a completion of the Second World War intervention in Europe and supported especially by liberals.

Against this background, the new administration points out that, after the end of the Cold War, the previous administrations as well as European governments have

supported the stability of a bunch of late fascist regimes as if these regimes could contribute to Western security by opposing religious extremism, whereas such contribution could only be assured by democratic regimes. In this perspective, in the aftermath of September 11, this argument has involved Saudi Arabia in particular, putting in question a pillar of the American stand in the region. The administration, especially its neo-conservative dimension, is thus maintaining that the United States and its allies should stop supporting stability vs. democracy and provide strenuous support to democracy only.

Nonetheless, Arab and European allies have opposed the war on Iraq on ground of its effects of destabilisation. It must be added that even the American administration oscillated, and at times was concerned by such possibility. These concerns have not subsided, in view of the uncertain situation in Iraq that has emerged as a consequence of the war. Iraq is presently a magnet attracting Sunni nationalists and islamists and spreading across all the Arab-Muslim world anti-American feelings and a sense of resistance and liberation struggle against the Western forces in Iraq. Concerns are rather increased. In fact, while it is true that Western policies have somehow uncritically supported less democracy than stability, the risk of the neo-conservative policy is to triggering instability even before installing democracy and making the attainment of democracy even more unlikely than before.

The Western reflection on how promoting democracy has received new healthy impulses from neo-conservative criticism. Promotion of democracy is now on the agenda of many think tanks, universities and governments. The neo-conservatives unveiled a regrettable reality stemming from impotence, opportunism and indolence in front of an objectively very difficult challenge that should have stimulated brave imagination and innovation, instead. However, the challenge remains very difficult and the West needs the time to innovate its approaches to promote democracy and determine a more convenient balance between stability and democratic change. For sure, the neo-conservatives have pointed out at the right question. However, regime change cannot be a general solution (and, even in Iraq, it remains to be tested as yet).

Against this background, transatlantic and inter-European debate, the situation on the ground is as mixed as that concerning the Middle East peace process, whether because it reflect an Iraqi situation in flux or because reactions by concerned actors are not necessarily so neat and mechanical as those envisioned intellectually.

To some extent, the Iraqi crisis has polarised Arab debate between, on one hand, those, essentially nationalists and islamists, who look for a response - in either military or political terms - to Iraq occupation and perceive the latter as an expansion of a Western neo-colonial intrusion, after Palestine and, on the other hand, those who look at the Iraq crisis as an opportunity to start the transition to democracy. The latter are not necessarily happy with Iraq occupation, still they see it as a strong signal to proceed towards a change before it is imposed from outside. They essentially reflect the NGOs community of human rights activists and are a minority, the former are definitely a majority. Within this majority, merges between nationalists and islamists are getting more and more likely, as are moderates' propensities to support and justify terrorism in the name of a resistance that seems now concerning not only the Palestinians but the Arab-Muslim world as a whole.

This trend may ease Al-Qaeda brand of terrorism, based as it is on a theory of an overall Western and Christian aggression against the Muslims. A recent analysis by the IISS

(Strategic Comments, vol. 9, issue 4), after considering the wave of attacks in non-Western countries that took place after Iraq, points out that “More broadly, the Iraq intervention should be expected to increase the inclination of some Muslims to turn towards radical Islam and potentially terrorism”.

So far, however, these reactions have not given way to major acts of destabilisation or violent opposition with respect to incumbent regimes. Recent developments, as for instance the bombing by Israel of an alleged Palestinian camp for training terrorists in Syria, have raised only very limited public manifestations. This may be the result of the regimes’ ability to suppress opposition in a more or less manifest way. It cannot be excluded, however, that it is an evidence of a changing balance between liberals and nationalists/islamists in domestic political arenas, although this sounds unlikely.

Again, the evaluation of the impact of Iraq crisis on regimes’ stability and the transition to democracy is not that easy either. According to the neo-conservatives, the outcome of Iraq democracy should be precisely the destabilisation of the regional authoritarian regimes and the establishment of as many democracies at their place. As Iraq democratisation is proving very problematic, however, the domino effect, if any, may just fail to emerge. From another point of view, the very Iraq experience is suggesting that destabilisation is not necessarily bringing about democratisation. Democracy must be promoted by adequate policies, cannot be promoted by changing regimes out of force only. Democracy promotion is not a well-developed art and in any case a very difficult objective. Efforts should concentrate on improving and diversifying democracy promotion policies.

For the time being, we know that the Iraq situation is providing the right signal to and mobilising liberals in the Arab world. We know also that it is mobilising nationalists, islamists and terrorists, however. Against this background of gathering turmoil, the regimes may not be prepared to eventually resist American attacks but look prepared to resist whatever domino effect.

EU Mediterranean policy and Iraq

Over time, many American policies used to have a divisive effect on Europe and transatlantic relations. None so strongly and visibly as the policy on Iraq carried out by President George W. Bush administration and the war that policy brought about in the spring of 2003.

After the war, many attempts are being made to mend rifts and recover both European and transatlantic cohesion. Efforts appear more successful in the transatlantic than the European framework. Resolution 1511 is evidence that transatlantic relations between Europe and the United States begin recovering. As a matter of fact, nobody in Europe wants the United States to fail in Iraq. A failure would inevitably reflect on the whole of the Western alliance. Furthermore, the US administration, by unleashing the “road map” process, has acted a decisive balancing act towards the Europeans. The European governments can now - if so they like - construe the war on Iraq as a first step in a wider process involving their long-standing and supreme interest in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For true, as pointed out in previous sections, the process is once again at a standstill. However, this is another question and does not detract from its significance in transatlantic terms.

The European split appears more complicated, instead, essentially because it combines with the difficult double transition of enlarging and deepening the EU. In fact, the enlargement overlaps with attempts at strengthening the EU “actorness”, by enabling its

institutions to make effective common decisions in the fields of foreign and security policies. The number of members that the enlargement brings about is poorly consistent with effective institutions, though, unless institutions will be able to work on the basis of majority vote. The Iraq war and the split it stirred among the European countries, however, make the latter less unwilling to yield pieces of sovereignty than it would have been likely in a different context. The Iraq crisis made clear the weakness of the CFSP. The split caused by the war will make the reinforcement of the CFSP in an enlarged Union distinctively difficult and problematic. This, in turn, will not help re-balancing EU-USA relations.

Against this broad background, the Iraq war had no direct impact on EU policies towards its southern neighbours. However, it exposed the weakness of such policies. What it put in question does not concern contents and goals of such EU policies, rather their broad geopolitical perspective. This geopolitical perspective is clearly too narrow and fragmented. This point can be considered from two complementary vantage points: the absence of a EU Gulf “culture” and the unfitness of the Euro-Med notion that presently undercuts EU Mediterranean policy, the most important and complex policy of the EU towards its southern approaches.

The Iraq war has exposed the absence of EU-Iraq relations. In June 2003, the Union’s web site candidly said that, under the 24-years Saddam Hussein’s regime, “the European Community (EC) never had any contractual relations with Iraq, and very limited and low level political relations. Iraq is not part of the EU-Mediterranean framework of association (the Barcelona process), nor is it included in the EU co-operation set up for south Asia and Southeast Asia. There is no official dialogue between the EC and the Iraqi government, and the Commission does not have a Delegation in Baghdad”. As a consequence, all the EU could do after the war amounted, so far, to EUR 730 million in humanitarian aid.

With respect to the other countries of the Gulf region - Iran and the Arab monarchies united in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) - the EU countries have set out common policies, instead. EC relations with Iran are quite ancient. With Iran there is a political dialogue in the shape of the so-called “critical dialogue”. Between the GCC countries and the EU there is a comprehensive agreement that contemplates a political dialogue as well as trade and economic relations.

Analysts consider these relations with the Gulf countries generally undeveloped and unsatisfactory. While the EU countries have developed very significant common political approaches to the Mediterranean and the Near East (the Arab-Israeli conflict), they have always maintained an extremely low profile with respect to the Gulf area. Some European countries only, namely the UK, France, Germany and Italy have developed some bilateral relations with Iran and or individual GCC countries. Still, while the UK and France have always included the region in their strategic perspective, the other European countries have just missed such perspective. The lack of strategic perception has prevented EU policies from emerging (as in the case of Iraq and Iran) or from assuming a more adequate profile (as with the GCC). The task has been largely left to the United State and to the European members of the Security Council, i.e. France and the UK.

The External Relations Council held in Luxembourg on October 13, 2003, has now pledged EUR 200 million for the Madrid conference on the reconstruction of Iraq and, most important, has “endorsed the Commission’s view that, in the light of developments

during 2004, it will be necessary for the EU to develop a comprehensive medium-term strategy for its relations with Iraq”.

This is good news. However, it is limited to a bilateral approach towards Iraq. Things will change only if the members of the EU will recognise and put in common their strategic interests in the Gulf, as oil, financial relations (in principle upgraded, with respect to the past, by their common currency, the Euro), the containment of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation in the region, and/or the setting up of a regional system of security co-operation.

The task of setting up common policies and strategic views with respect to the Gulf region is doubtless very difficult. The question, however, should be tabled with a view to start a gradual process to make the Gulf more of a communitarian policy. Step by step, issue by issue, what the EU needs is to build up a common “Gulf culture”, by upgrading Europeans’ consciousness of this area’s importance for their security and prosperity.

The other side of the same coin is the inadequacy of the “Mediterranean approach”. That approach has no geopolitical or strategic rationality. It just derives from history. The enlarged Europe includes countries from Northern Europe, which may have an interest in the strategic significance of the whole of the Arab or Arab-Muslim world, not an interest limited to the Mediterranean area. All the experience made with the security and political dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is teaching that the Mediterranean (in particular the Near East) and the Middle East cannot be separated on political and security ground. Whatever solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires a contribution from the Gulf countries, including Iran, and involves these countries. The WMD and proliferation challenges can be tackled only if the Greater Middle East is taken into consideration as a whole. In sum, it must be stressed that EU deep interest in the Near East cannot be implemented in isolation from the Gulf region. No political aims can be attained in the Near East, if the latter is de-linked from the Gulf.

The impact of the Iraq war on the EU has exposed its poor cohesiveness, in general, and the inadequacy of its “Mediterranean” approach, in particular. The lesson taught is that the EU vision towards its southern approaches should be enlarged by including a “Gulf culture”. Some timid steps towards including Iraq in EU policy are being done. On the other hand, the idea of “proximity” the EU is currently trying to build on would not fit with the need of a wider approach to the Arab-Muslim region. In fact, this notion of “proximity” retains the “Mediterranean” approach and, more broadly, sets forth a geopolitical limit of “neighbourhood” to a Union that on the contrary should be able to act as a global power. Still, it seems afraid of flying.

Turkey and Iraq

Iraq used to be a very important economic partner for Turkey. The 1990-91 Gulf War and the sanctions imposed on Iraq have proved detrimental for the Turkish economy. Since the end of the war and until the 2003 American intervention in Iraq, normal economic relations were supplanted by a smuggling economy based on Northern Iraq ambiguous status stemming from international interventions in the area to protect the Kurds vis-à-vis Saddam’s regime, the establishment of a no-fly zone on the North of Iraq and the de facto Kurdish political autonomy promoted by American as well as Turkish relations with Kurdish parties. The lack of normal economic relations with Iraq play a role in Turkish economic hardships and, for this reason, Turkey has been an early

partisan of lifting sanctions on Iraq and would like to see a strong, prosperous and united Iraq re-emerge on the regional stage.

A strong, prosperous and united Iraq is perhaps even more desired by Turkey for political than economic reasons, however. It is well known that a most important national challenge to Turkey is the perception of secessionist trends in the country as a result of the emergence of a formally independent or strongly autonomous Kurdish state consequent to a disintegrated Iraq. For this reason, Turkey's "Kurdish policy" has been and continues to be one of the most prominent chapters in the country's contemporary history and foreign policies. The war on Iraq is the most recent development in this chapter. It may happen to have a significant, if not decisive impact on that chapter, further to its economic relevance. How can this impact be assessed?

Before responding to this question, one may wonder whether Turkish fears about the attraction that would stem from an emergent Kurdish state in present Northern Iraq are exaggerated. Definitely, nobody can play down the risk of a nationalist evolution in an emerging Kurdish state. Such evolution is more likely than others and, as soon as it took place, it would interact with more or less latent nationalist and secessionist trends among Turkish Kurds and give way to a well-known escalation. This perspective is not only disliked by neighbouring countries with Kurdish minorities (essentially Iran and Syria), but also by the EU states and the West in general. EU insistence on recognising an adequate autonomy to Turkish Kurds stems from the conviction that this autonomy, besides being an essential aspect of democracy, would also be a significant counterweight to Kurdish secessionist trends and a positive policy of conflict prevention. In sum, the challenge cannot be underestimated. So, Turkey and other countries in the Middle East and Europe have a vested interest in looking at the restoration of a strongly united Iraqi nation, firmly including Northern Iraq and the Kurds, as an outcome of the Anglo-American intervention in 2003 Spring.

In this perspective, the post-war situation in Iraq is not without risks. The Americans aim at a strong, prosperous and united Iraq. At the same time, it is more and more evident that the country is deeply divided and fragmented, there are no national trends convincingly at work, and the American-led Coalition Provisional Authority-CPA is desperately trying to strike a balance between the daily security and the political reconstruction of the country. In this situation it can be tempted to rely on one faction rather than another or favour an apparently more helpful faction against the other.

It seems as if the Turks are not assured of what interests the Americans will foster at the end of the day, whether Turkish or Iraqi-Kurdish interests. The diplomatic history of the 1990s, with the Dublin, Ankara, and Washington D.C. processes (respectively in 1995, 1996, and 1998) have been resented in Turkey as the foundation of a de facto Kurdish state under high American protection. This perception may have played a role in the rejection by the Grand National Assembly to allow the American to cross the Turkish territory to attack Iraq. Furthermore, it is also clear than in the difficult post-war situation, perhaps as a result of their positive intercourse in the 1990s, there is a special understanding between Kurds and Americans. As noted, this may lead to complacency towards the Kurds and to solutions that may be regarded as destabilising factors by neighbours, first of all Turkey.

The Bush administration expects the Iraqi constitution to embody a set of principles set forth during the April 2003 U.S.-sponsored conference near the ancient site of Ur. Beside democracy, non-violence, respect for diversity and women role, these principles

contemplate a federation. Which federation, however? And what place would oil have in this federation? These institutional and economic questions are crucial to Turkish perceptions. Turkey would dislike a federation of individually strong and too autonomous states. On the other hand, oil, the fundamental economic card of the country, has to be arranged as a strictly federal vs. national asset, if it is not to disrupt the unity of the country. If oil were owned by individual states, it could constitute the basis for their independence at a later stage and bring about the end of the unitary state or a very loose, almost non-existent state. By the same token, if the federation (as distinct from individual federal states) does not own oil, this situation would sooner or later cause the break of the federation by non-oil states (in the event the Sunni Central Iraq). These key questions are not clear in the perspective of the CPA, as it is unclear the role of the Kurds in the capital cities of (oil-linked) Kirkuk and Mosul. The growing Kurdish presence and role in them is regarded by Turkey as a negative trend.

For these reasons, the Turks have resorted to a variety of policies: supporting the Turkmen minority in Northern Iraq in an anti-Kurds function; sending military supervisors along American troops in the North of Iraq, especially in Kirkuk; and reviving contacts with Syria and Iran. However these policies cannot work as decisive cards in the game. The recent offer to deploy 10,000 troops in Iraq is aimed at enabling Turkey to controlling developments on the field as well as undermining American-Kurdish alliance by offering an especially welcome aid to the United States. However, the Kurds and all the parties presently included in the Iraqi Governing Council have rejected this offer, arguing against the use of neighbours in maintaining order in the country. The argument is not mistaken and the use of Turkish troops to keep the Iraqi house in order may strongly interfere with political normalisation in the country and frustrate the American attempt at building up an exit strategy from Iraq. The Turkish move hides a delicate dilemma between the advantages of being associated to the United States in the management of the crisis and the disadvantages of complicating the crisis and making things worse.

In sum, as with the issues taken previously into consideration, even in this case the extreme uncertainty of post-war Iraq does not allow to set forth credible and well-founded assessments. So far, what can be said is that, to the extent the United States does not manage to impress on Iraq a defined democratic and integrative orientation, the regional challenge stemming from a possible nationalist and independentist Kurdistan in Northern Iraq is not averted. There are factors that may suggest that this challenge is more risky now than it used to be before the war. In fact, the extreme difficulties of post-war evolution may bring the United States to overestimate the Kurdish help and make a united and strong Iraq more difficult. The cost/benefit assessment of Turkey's forces in Iraq is also difficult to assess: they would give Turkey some control on the field and improve its tarnished relation with the United States. At the same time, they can worsen the whole of the crisis and result, at the end of the day, detrimental.

Iraq, the Mediterranean and EU-Turkey relations

As noted, Iraq developments are exposing the geopolitical inadequacy of the EU Mediterranean and Middle East policy. As a matter of fact, the Middle East policy of the EU is limited to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, because of its intergovernmental character, is not as cohesive as to be able to deal with the difficult challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and oppose or put pressure on the United States when it would be necessary. As for the Mediterranean policy, it is sharply limited

in its political and security development by limitations in the Middle East policy. When it comes to both policies, the absence of structured policies towards the Gulf and the fragmentation of the various EU approaches to that region detract from any possibility for the EU to conduct effective policies in a region where challenges are strictly linked to one another rather than separated from one another.

In this sense, Iraq has taught a clear lesson to the EU. At the same time, however, it has divided EU members and not only hindered the mechanism of the CFSP, as it stands today, but made the prospects for reinforcing such mechanism less likely. A reform of the geopolitical approach of the EU is in sight by means of the so-called policy of neighbourhood or “proximity” that comes up as a consequence of the enlargement (not Iraq). In this approach there are good and bad news. The good news is that the EU regards Turkey as a candidate country and not as a Southern Mediterranean Euro-Med partners any more. The bad news is that the notion of “Southern Mediterranean” is fully retained. Furthermore, as the new vision tends to divide the external world in neighbours and non-neighbours, the separation between the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East, let alone the Greater Middle East, is bound to increase in its significance and weight.

On the other hand, if developments in Iraq will fail to make Turkey feel reassured about the Kurdish question, Ankara may be involved in policies that risk stopping reforms in the country and hindering the current positive trend in EU-Turkey relations. Furthermore, Turkey would be more involved in the Middle East at the very moment the EU is apparently concentrating on its “near abroad (Southern Mediterranean; Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation), instead.

In sum, while the EU has a significant Mediterranean policy and only weak and fragmented pieces of policy towards the Middle East and the Greater Middle East, Turkey has no policy towards the Mediterranean and, in contrast, an important policy towards the Middle East and the Greater Middle East. This gap could only be closed if the EU developed a far-reaching Middle Eastern policy and Turkey got able to downsize its national interests in the region. As a consequence of the Iraq crisis, developments are not fostering these two trends.

In this sense, both Turkey and the EU have a high stake and interest in a positive and reasonable development of the crisis in Iraq. If the CPA and the American administration will prove unable to put this country on track, the emerging “European” trend of Turkey may regress into a nationalist policies framework; the EU may remain divided and less and less able to conduct common foreign policies; and both have more problems in their transatlantic relations.