

AMERICA'S "GREATER MIDDLE EAST" AND EUROPE: KEY ISSUES FOR DIALOGUE

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Reform in the Middle East ranks high on the trans-Atlantic agenda. Europe's approach to the region will continue to differ, at least in part, from the American one. In the following, I will sketch some of the key issues that will dominate the debate about a common policy on the "Greater," now "Broader," Middle East and describe what I see as the German and European positions in this discussion. I will argue that a high capacity for coordination and even for fruitful cooperation exists. The "Quartet" and its Roadmap for peace in the Middle East are cases in point. We cannot ignore, however, that key U.S. and European players differ over a number of primary political assumptions about the region. This concerns, among other things, the relevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process for change in the wider region, domestic political developments in Iran, and the value of comprehensively multilateral engagements with the states of the region.

EUROPE'S CAUTIOUS WELCOME FOR THE GMEI

Beginning with the Afghanistan war, the U.S. administration has embraced the cause of bringing a "new order" to what it calls the Greater Middle East. It has underscored this by announcing a Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), for which it sought trans-Atlantic approval at the June 2004 G8, U.S.-EU and NATO summits. The G8 Summit's declaration of a "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa" is diplomatic in tone, and it does not simply adopt the U.S. initiative. But there is little doubt that within the next few years, if not over the next few decades, the Middle East will become the focus of international geopolitics and thereby largely determine relations between Europe and America. Originally, the U.S. initiative comprised a series of political, military and economic programs. These included multilateral and bilateral measures to democratize Middle Eastern

countries, offers of free trade to individual countries, the geographical extension and deepening of the OSCE (Organizations for Security and Cooperation in Europe)-Mediterranean partnership, and a program of military cooperation akin to NATO's Partnership for Peace. Unhappy with the way the GMEI was communicated – or, rather, not communicated – to the states and societies in the Middle East, as well as because of what many Europeans saw as omissions or problematic assumptions underlying it, public opinion in Europe did not react enthusiastically when it first appeared. There were two reasons, however, for European policy makers to react in a critical but generally welcoming manner to the initiative. First, the GMEI reflected a much more cooperative approach – with regard to the Europeans and other G8 partners at least – than most of what Europe had seen from the Bush administration during the first three years of its tenure. Many European leaders therefore saw it as an initiative that could help to heal trans-Atlantic relations that had been badly strained before and during the Iraq War. Second, the initiative reflects a rethinking of sorts on the part of the Bush administration: a growing awareness, in the wake of the war in Iraq, that in the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), it is not enough to make military threats to unfriendly regimes or to topple them. Belatedly, Washington has realized that externally enforced “regime change” is not enough and that structural problems in the region need to be tackled.

Europe should continue to expect quite assertive demands from Washington to take part in a reorganization or restructuring of the “Greater” Middle East. This will

be the case not only under a Republican administration. Even a Democratic administration is likely to make the reform and remaking of the Middle East part of its own, as well as a trans-Atlantic, agenda.

At the same time, America's GMEI is still far from worked out to the last detail. In fact, the grandiose geopolitical concept embodied in the title of the initiative partly conceals a lack of fresh ideas. This situation constitutes an opportunity for Europe. Instead of merely tagging along with (or rejecting) U.S. initiatives, it can – and should – play a prominent role in shaping the debate about a comprehensive trans-Atlantic strategy towards its southern neighborhood. Differences will certainly remain about some of the key issues that are sketched in the rest of this paper.

THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES

The United States and the EU agree that a democratic transformation of the Arab world or the wider Middle East is a goal that should be pursued. Europeans will likely remind their U.S. counterparts that Europe pursued this goal even before September 2001 and has not merely “discovered” the lack of democracy in the Arab world in the context of its struggle against international terrorism. As a matter of fact, building democracy and supporting civil society, the rule of law and human rights have been key elements of the political and security chapter of the Barcelona process (the Euro-Mediterranean partnership) in both its multilateral and bilateral dimensions (i.e., the Barcelona Declaration and individual association agreements). From a European viewpoint, therefore, what is needed is not a “forward strategy of freedom” (George

W. Bush), but a common perspective for political, economic and social change in Europe's neighborhood that builds on the potentials in these countries and takes their societies on board, respects their dignity, and realizes the linkages that exist between political and economic underdevelopment, on the one hand, and unresolved territorial conflicts, on the other.

In the trans-Atlantic debate, Europeans may also have to point out that democratization is not a linear process but rather a lengthy, complicated undertaking full of contradictions, political battles and setbacks. The United States tends to cite the democratic deficits of governments that oppose Western interests in the region and threaten them with punitive measures such as sanctions (and even the possibility of an externally imposed regime change). European policy makers will likely try to support reform-minded forces within the countries in question and nudge existing regimes towards reform through dialogue, material support and forms of conditionality.

These different approaches become particularly obvious with regard to Iran. Despite shared trans-Atlantic interests (not the least of which is the abandonment of Iran's nuclear-weapons program), the United States and Europe continue to regard Iran through fundamentally different prisms. This will no doubt continue to stand in the way of any joint policy. Washington still considers Iran to be a "rogue state" whose regime refuses to adapt the country's domestic and foreign policy to Western (and probably popular domestic) demands. Europe sees Iran as a problematic partner but also as a complex society with enormous possibilities for progressive domestic policy developments. It also views Iran as the most pluralistic system in the Gulf.

Europe's pragmatic efforts to foster democratization often entail embracing the unsatisfying principle of "taking countries from where they are" and banking on good examples set elsewhere, best practices and dialogue rather than on threats of regime change. European policy makers may well be prepared to support minor reform steps (education, administrative reform or economic policies) in a country like Syria, even if the speed of political development in that country lags way behind what Europe would like to see. At the same time, they criticize countries like Tunisia, Palestine, Lebanon or Israel for deficiencies of democratic development or human-rights violations that may be comparatively less serious. One of the lessons of the Barcelona process is that it may be wise to break up the concept of democracy into its constituent elements such as the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, transparency, accountability, strengthening of civil society, and so on. This may make it easier to bring the elites of these countries along and create common interests rather than fears of externally enforced regime change.

However, shortcomings in Europe's policy of trying to further the cause of democratization should not be ignored. Indeed, neither Berlin nor Brussels has discussed the issue of the conditionality of economic aid and political relations in satisfactory depth, let alone operationalized it.

DEMOCRACY AS AN OBJECTIVE, NOT A PREREQUISITE

While the democratic transformation of the Arab states is clearly a goal, it cannot from a European perspective be considered a precondition for political engage-

ment, especially not for a serious engagement in the Middle East peace process. Occasionally, American or Israeli commentators claim that only democratic states can make peace, and that it would be premature, therefore, to resume serious peace efforts in the Middle East unless major Arab states turn democratic. Practically, this claim serves as a pretext for those who do not want to resume serious peace talks. Moreover, it is certainly empirically wrong. The first Arab state that made peace with Israel, Egypt, is not exactly a model democracy; yet the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement has been stable for a quarter century. The reverse, however, is true: peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors would enhance regional and external efforts to bring about a democratic transformation (see below). Tying Western attempts to broker peace to the democratization of Arab countries, however, would merely exacerbate the lack of credibility of U.S. and Western policies in the region and could even obstruct positive domestic developments over the long term.

WHERE IS THE “GREATER MIDDLE EAST”?

To develop policies for a particular region of the world, it is important to know which countries one is actually talking about. A sensibly targeted policy can only be developed if sufficient consideration is given to regional conflicts and their linkages, to the self-perception of individual states and societies, and to those transnational political, sociocultural and economic relations that make people feel that they actually belong to a particular region. Participants in the U.S. debate on the Greater Middle East as well as some of their European colleagues associate the

concept with very different geopolitical notions. Phrases like “from Marrakech to Bangladesh” sound good, but they are not particularly clear. In a preparatory working paper for the June 2004 G8 Summit, the U.S. administration has defined the Greater Middle East as including the Arab states, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some pundits go further and include all of Central Asia or the Caucasus. Yet, at the same time, analysts often refer to the Arab countries alone when they start identifying specific problems.

To find a definition that is useful for Europe’s foreign and security policies, the aforementioned factors – transnational relations as well as the reach of regional conflicts – will have to be taken into consideration. On this basis, it makes sense to define the wider Middle East as including the Arab countries, Israel, Iran and Afghanistan, but not to extend it beyond these countries.

Of course, regions are never sharply delimited. Some political dynamics link the countries mentioned here with others, such as Turkey, Pakistan, the Caucasus or Central Asia. However, an excessively broad definition of the region hinders the development of political strategies. Thus, European policy makers should consider Turkey to be a NATO partner and potential EU member. A conceptional “Middle-Easternization” of Turkey could have undesired political consequences, including its turning away from Europe. Also, unlike Afghanistan, the Caucasus countries (much the same as Bosnia-Herzegovina) cannot be viewed within a Middle Eastern framework; they should rather be seen within a post-Communist European setting. Not without reason did the Georgian opposition rely on Serbia’s experience as a

role model. The examples of Arab or Iranian protest movements would have been of little help to it. Pakistan is involved in Afghanistan, and its nuclear program has benefited from Saudi financial aid. But if a suitable policy vis-à-vis Pakistan is to be developed, one has to fully appreciate the centrality the conflict with India has for the country. Middle Eastern developments, in contrast, have little relevance for Pakistan's policies. Likewise, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, unlike the potential arsenals of Iran or Libya, has nothing to do with the Gulf or with conflicts with Israel and should also play no role if one day the creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East is on the agenda. Even if a Wahabi Islamic group were to gain power in Islamabad, which would be seen as threatening by Iran's Shiite leaders, Pakistan's government would probably see its nuclear and missile programs primarily as a means to deter, threaten or put pressure on India. The populations of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia are mostly Muslim; however, in political terms Russia remains far more important to these countries than the Near East or the Arabian Peninsula. And while Afghanistan does not like being treated as a "post-Soviet" region (a fair number of the Afghan elite studied and lived in Cairo, Riyadh or Jeddah), Central Asia's elites have largely been socialized in a Moscow-centered environment. Western policy makers will have to take into account such backgrounds if they want to build partnerships with these countries, convince their societies of the value of such relations, and support the establishment of regional structures.

It may be wiser, therefore, to continue to speak of, and devise policies towards,

the Middle East and North Africa or MENA region, as the World Bank, among others, defines it – a region comprising the Arab states of North Africa, the Mashriq (Levant) and the Arabian Peninsula, as well as Israel and Iran – than to define a far-reaching "Greater" Middle East. Even within the MENA region, differences in socioeconomic structures, economic resources and geopolitics have to be acknowledged. For instance, the Gulf monarchies are much less concerned with Israel and its capabilities than with Iran. Both the Gulf monarchies and Iran are skittish about Iraq's future sociopolitical and military development, whereas Egypt is not worrying overly much about possible future territorial threats from a revamped Iraqi state but quite concerned with Israel, its policies towards the Palestinians, its military capacities, and its potential position in the region once a settlement is achieved. Algeria and Morocco, in contrast, watch each other with more concern than they watch Israel, Iraq or Iran.

THE EU AS A REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

German Middle East policy is embedded in a European framework. Consequently, coordination with the European partners should, in case of doubt, take precedence over trans-Atlantic coordination. Having said that, it would be advisable to improve the exchange between the EU and the United States regarding initiatives associated with the region and the practical problems arising from them. For instance, in many respects the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative launched by the Bush administration's foreign-policy team at the end of 2002 resembles a geographically more extensive, but less extensively funded

and more bilaterally inclined version, of the Barcelona process (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) that has existed since 1995. Admittedly, the fact that Barcelona and Europe's experience with this long-term, multilateral and multidimensional process was barely acknowledged and responded to by Washington is partly due to the fact that the EU has shown no interest in allowing the United States, whose role as a security-policy actor in the Mediterranean cannot be ignored, any form of participation, not even as an observer.

The EU, in fact, already has a defined and well-instrumentalized common policy in place regarding a large part of the region. In addition to the Barcelona process, which led to the conclusion of association agreements with most southern and eastern Mediterranean states, and a Common Strategy for the Mediterranean region, Europe's approach also includes numerous common positions toward the Arab countries, Israel and Iran, a cooperation agreement with Yemen, regular consultations between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the still unfinished, highly politicized negotiations concerning a trade and cooperation agreement with Iran. Recently, these more subregionally focused instruments were complemented by the Wider Europe-Neighbourhood Programme and the European Security Strategy.

The Wider Europe-Neighbourhood Programme was first outlined by the European Commission in March 2003 with the purpose of avoiding a one-size-fits-all policy vis-à-vis the EU's neighboring regions in Europe, North Africa and the Near East. Designed for countries that do not have the perspective of membership in the European Union, the program explicitly aims at creating a "ring of friends" around

the Union. These countries will be offered a stake in the Internal Market, participation in EU programs, and the prospect of benefiting from the "four freedoms" (free movement of persons, goods, services and capital) that otherwise go along with EU membership.

The European Security Strategy adopted in December 2003 defines the risks that could emanate from Europe's geopolitical environment, as well as European principles of action, and delimits a common approach regarding the use of military force. As "key threats" it mentions terrorism (recently mostly linked to "violent religious extremism"), the proliferation of WMD, regional conflicts ("above all in the Middle East"), state failure (with Somalia and Afghanistan mentioned as examples) and organized crime. Little doubt that many of these risks and challenges emanate from or are in one way or other a feature of Europe's southern neighborhood, i.e., the Middle East. The Strategy also makes clear that military means will not suffice to address any of these risks. Instead it emphasizes the need to consider the complex causes of problems like terrorism and state failure and combine political, economic and (where needed) military means.

In stark contrast to this plethora of dynamic, evolving and connected set of European programs, the only existing trans-Atlantic framework for political initiatives towards parts of the Greater Middle East is NATO coordination with regard to Afghanistan. The NATO and OSCE "Mediterranean Dialogues" are of limited relevance in practice and certainly do not constitute a framework within which joint initiatives toward these countries could be developed. While the OSCE can and does

make a contribution in the field of democracy building (election observation, campaigns for press freedom, etc.), it is not a strong organization, and it can hardly offer promising incentives for states in the Middle East and North Africa. NATO has potentially more to offer: training, joint exercises, support for border security or cooperation in peacekeeping. These benefits are likely to be of some interest for a couple of countries in North Africa and the Middle East. A partnership for peace (PfP) built on the model applied to Eastern and Central Europe after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc would certainly find takers. However, it might also create unrealistic expectations, such as eventual membership in NATO, which the United States and Europe do not necessarily wish to create. Finally, with regard to issues such as those that stand in the center of the GMEI and the G8's offer of partnership – such as empowering women, fostering civil societies, and improving education – NATO does not really have much to offer.

COMPLEMENTARITY RATHER THAN COMPETITION

The Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process in particular have shown how important it is for the United States, on the one hand, and the EU and its member states, on the other, to coordinate their positions, preferably with the United Nations and Russia, as has been the case with the Middle East Quartet. No progress will be made in the peace process as long as regional parties can play the Americans and Europeans off against each other. In this context, the EU speaks quite rightly about complementarity, which is shorthand for saying that both parties have specific

comparative advantages which enable them, with their respective instruments, to perform certain tasks better than others.

To give but two examples, Washington holds greater sway with Israel, while the Europeans enjoy greater credibility among the Palestinians. Also, the United States is in a better position to bring military pressure to bear and to offer security guarantees, while Europe can hold out the prospects of association and integration, which also exert a normative force at the political level.

This being the case, Europe and the United States should use this range of different political resources to achieve common objectives, including peace in the Middle East, the strengthening of democracy and human rights, the thwarting of terrorism, and the limitation of regional arms races. This does not imply that Europe should simply follow the U.S. lead, but rather calls for close coordination in major policy areas. Coordination, of course, implies that Europe also not only criticizes the U.S. administration for not doing enough or not doing the right thing in the peace process, for example, but comes up with ideas and initiatives of its own. And it also implies that the United States will actually listen to its allies and accept, at least partially, European descriptions of the geopolitical situation and Europe's political and economic strategies for the region. This would entail, among other things, a more balanced U.S. approach toward the Israel-Palestinian peace process and toward Iran and the chances of a pluralistic system emerging from within.

MULTILATERALISM AND AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

The Middle East Quartet and its Roadmap for the Middle East peace

process clearly exemplify a multilateral approach even though the plan has not yet been implemented. Multilateralism allows for full use of the specific relations and instruments at the disposal of the individual actors in their relationship with Middle Eastern countries. The Roadmap was drawn up in Berlin and other European capitals, but Europe has good reason not to claim ownership. Its adoption by Washington and its labeling in the U.S. media as the “American Roadmap for the Middle East” is just fine from a European viewpoint. What really matters is whether the plan is implemented or not.

U.S. leadership in this context is indeed vital, not least because of Washington’s greater influence over Israel and the fact that Israel trusts the United States but does not trust Europe. The EU, on the other hand, enjoys much more trust among the Palestinians. Indeed, Europe demonstrated its influence by providing energetic assistance when the Palestinian Authority conducted its largely successful internal reform.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

The European Security Strategy quite rightly stresses the key importance that a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli (and above all Israeli-Palestinian) conflict would have for the political evolution, security policy and economic development of the region. It has therefore defined the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as “a strategic priority for Europe.” Without such a resolution, the Strategy continues, “there will be little chance of dealing with other problems in the Middle East,” i.e., such European goals as democratization and liberalization, regional economic coopera-

tion, the establishment of a free-trade zone, and regional security cooperation will likely not be achieved. The U.S. debate, in contrast, all too often ignores the relevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process for developments in the wider region.

This is not to say that reforms in the Arab world should not or could not be pursued as long as the Arab-Israeli conflict continues. There are several reasons, however, why the unresolved conflict constitutes a barrier to positive processes of political and economic change in the region. Among other things, several Arab regimes are continuing to hide behind the conflict with Israel, with the elites in power rejecting internal reforms by pointing to the state of war and conflict. Were the conflict resolved, this pretext would no longer apply, and authoritarian structures would be de-legitimized and weakened. The continuation of the conflict is also underpinning the role of the military – in the Arab states as well as Israel – and bolstering the acceptance of military solutions. The ongoing conflict legitimizes a continued misallocation of resources, with defense budgets taking precedence over such matters as educational reform. Peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, in contrast, would most likely help the spread of democratic values and strengthen civil society. A mutually acceptable settlement of the conflict would also reduce the appeal of religious and nationalist extremists not only in Israel’s neighboring Arab states but also in Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the unresolved conflict constitutes a barrier, sometimes in fact a physical one, to many of the regional cooperation projects that the EU and others have for a long time tried to pro-

mote. Consider, among other things, the project of a coastal motor- or railway connecting North Africa to the Levant (or Europe, via Turkey and the Levant, to Egypt); or the project for a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability, that was supposed to be adopted under the Barcelona process but was eventually shelved after the outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian war of attrition in the fall of 2000.

These are not the only considerations that U.S. policy occasionally overlooks. It also often fails to acknowledge the extent to which the West's credibility in the region depends on the seriousness of American and European efforts to find a fair peaceful solution of the Middle East conflict. And while Europe may enjoy somewhat more credibility in this context, that credibility does have its limits. A large proportion of the general public in Arab countries and Iran has become convinced that Europeans only put on a friendlier face, while ultimately hiding behind the United States so as to avoid any concrete action in practice.

BUILDING REGIONAL STRUCTURES VS. REORDERING

Conditioned by colonial experiences, European policy makers tend to be somewhat sceptical about wide-ranging plans to bring a "new order" to the Middle East. They tend to favor instead the establishment of regional structures that can help to reduce the potential for interstate conflict and increase the prospects for change within the countries in question, rather than relying on the threat (or actual implementation) of regime change from outside. Accordingly, Europe in general advocates the institutionalization of cooperative relations that would enhance security for

all parties and facilitate the processes of domestic transformation. European thinking is largely informed in this respect by the historical experience of the CSCE – a multilateral, multidimensional negotiation structure that served both to preserve stability in Europe and encourage the quest for change by the peoples in Eastern and Central Europe. Lessons learned within the CSCE process can indeed provide useful points of departure in the Middle East and North Africa.

Not only authoritarian-regime elites, but important segments of the societal elites in the Middle East consider the perspective of a "re-ordering" of the region from abroad a serious threat. At the same time, these elites have an interest in containing the potential for regional conflict and enhancing regional security. The idea of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME) was first raised by regional actors such as Jordan's former crown prince, Hassan bin Talal. Most probably, it is still too early to launch and implement such a comprehensive project that would include the entire region from Morocco or Mauretania to Iran. Ultimately, a CSCE-type process for all of the MENA region will only be crowned with success if the territorial conflict between Israel and its neighbors is resolved, or if a solution is in sight.

However, this does not exclude the possibility of establishing subregional confidence and security-building measures or even CSCE-type negotiations and institutions. Both in the Western Mediterranean and in the Gulf, there are good prospects for establishing certain more limited forms of security-policy cooperation in which the United States, the EU and other actors from outside the region should

also be involved. It would make sense, for example, to set up a “Six-plus-four-plus-one” contact group for Iraq (comprising Iraq’s neighbors, the four members of the Middle East Quartet, and the new Iraqi government) as a forum for the discussion and coordination of matters of common concern, such as border security, terrorism, arms and drug trafficking, and organized crime. As such, it could over time develop into a basic mechanism for confidence and security building in the Gulf region. Chances are that such a coordinating institution would transform Iraq’s neighbors, who are interested parties to begin with, into stakeholders in Iraqi reconstruction and stability.

STRUCTURES VS. PERSONS: THE EXAMPLE OF PALESTINE

In dealing with the Middle East as well as other regions, Europe generally puts more emphasis on institution building, while the United States focuses more on the persons in charge. This is partly a reflection of the different structures of both political entities. In the United States, politics is much more personalized, and the prime decision maker is much more important. In Europe, with its complicated institutional structure, individual persons do not make so much of a difference (compare a presidential phone call from the White House and a call from the president of the European Commission).

The clearest example for this difference in approaches can be seen in the EU-U.S. debate about how to deal with Palestinian president Yasir Arafat. U.S. and EU policy makers may agree about Mr. Arafat’s personality. But, while the U.S. administration has decided to boycott him, the EU maintains relations, stressing

the importance of maintaining institutions that Europe and the United States have themselves helped to create. The Palestinian presidential elections in 1996 were supported and monitored by EU and U.S. officials. Rather than demanding a change in the Palestinian leadership, the EU concentrates on strengthening the Palestinian legislative branch and supports wide-ranging administrative reforms. Arafat, after all, is the most democratically elected Arab leader. The European approach does not necessarily reflect sympathy for Arafat or the Palestinians, but the conviction that one cannot ignore the choice of the Palestinian people if one’s calls for “Arab democracy” are to be taken as seriously.

TURKEY’S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU

In principle, the German federal government and the U.S. administration agree – albeit for somewhat different reasons – that Turkey needs to be given the prospect of EU membership. European and German policy makers should be aware that the way in which the EU and Europe deal with Turkey and its desire to join the Union will be of great importance for Europe’s mid- and long-term relations with Middle Eastern countries.

Turkey’s membership in the EU would radically alter the geopolitical parameters of Europe, as Syria, Iraq and Iran would then become direct neighbours of the EU. But one need not consider Turkey as part of a “Greater” Middle East to reach the conclusion that its internal developments and the manner in which it is treated by Europe will have a considerable impact on political debates and developments in the countries of the Middle East. Offering Ankara a serious prospect of EU acces-

sion would also bolster the credibility of European policy vis-à-vis other Muslim countries.

Whether or not the EU will allow the integration of a big Muslim-populated state into its constitutional space will have an enormous bearing on the general perception of Europe in other Muslim countries. Forget the intra-European debate about a reference to God in the European constitution – Turkey's ruling AKP would have no difficulty in subscribing to such a formula. The question is rather whether or not European policy makers would refuse the integration of Turkey on the grounds of the EU's supposedly Christian identity.

A successful integration of Turkey would clearly indicate that Islam can really be a part of Europe's culture. It would at the same time destroy the myth of an inevitable clash of civilizations. Moreover, Turkey's integration into the EU (and even the process leading to it) will have an impact on domestic political developments in other Muslim countries, if only because it will show that democracy and pluralism, the rule of law, political modernity and so forth are not exclusively "Western" characteristics or properties. Eventually, the impact of a successful Turkish EU accession process will probably be greater than the domino effects that some U.S. quarters expect from American transformation experiments in Iraq.

SHARED INTERESTS IN IRAQ

Irrespective of the differences regarding the need for, and the legitimacy of, the war in Iraq, as well as the analysis of threats that was used to justify it, the EU and the United States share a keen interest in seeing a stabilized Iraq and the establishment of a sustainable pluralistic regime in

Baghdad based on the rule of law and, preferably, on democratic participation. For reasons of geographical proximity, Europe's interest in the transformation of Iraq into a participatory, pluralist state is probably even greater than that of the United States. Anyone who doubts this should be aware that the territorial integrity of Iraq – a key prerequisite for regional stability – can only be maintained today if the new Iraq has federal structures and a representative political system that guarantees participation and minority rights.

For Europe, this interest translates into a European responsibility for promoting the economic and political reconstruction of Iraq. That responsibility will also have to be reflected in financial commitments, including the willingness to cancel debts and provide financial support for the country's economic and social reconstruction. Bearing in mind Iraq's potential economic clout, a new kind of Marshall Plan will be required under which the country, once back on its feet again, passes on the subsidies it receives today.

IRAQ IS NOT AN AID TO U.S.-EU THERAPY . . .

At the same time, decisions on Germany's and Europe's policy on Iraq – regardless of whether they pertain to financial and technical support, police training or military contributions – should not be measured by whether they help to heal trans-Atlantic wounds. Rather, they should be judged by whether they serve Europe's interests in Iraq and the broader region, not least the stabilization and democratization of Iraq itself.

This means that requests for a possible NATO role can hardly be turned down if they originate from a truly independent

Iraqi government and are based on a clear U.N. mandate. Whether and how individual NATO member countries will become involved in such a situation ceases to be a matter of principle and becomes a question of possibilities, capacities and the acceptance of the troops of particular nations by the Iraqis.

For the time being, however, dispatching NATO troops or putting certain sectors in Iraq under NATO command would hardly be a good idea. NATO units would not be regarded any differently from an American or coalition occupation force. Instead, what should be considered is to set up, ideally from or even before June 30, 2004, a small but effective international security force exclusively charged with protecting the U.N. mission. This force might have a special-police rather than a military character. Countries demanding a strong and leading U.N. role in Iraq, such as France, Russia, Germany and some Arab states, could prove their commitment both to the United Nations and to the stabilization of Iraq by way of participating in such a force. Effective protection is vital for the success of a U.N. mission. However, its chief and personnel should not be forced to move around the country under the guard of U.S. tanks, giving the impression that they are a mere extension of the occupation authority.

. . . AND NOT A ROLE MODEL

Finally, it is particularly important not to overburden the Iraqi experiment. Iraq should be treated neither as a model for Middle Eastern democracy, nor as a bridgehead for external projects to reorder the region. Deposing a regime by military force and even putting a new government in place is relatively easy. Building a model

is far more difficult, and the attempt to do so would probably be asking too much of the Iraqi actors. Moreover, making Iraq a bridgehead for regional projects would be a sure-fire way of prompting unfriendly reactions on the part of its neighbors, instead of including them in efforts to stabilize the country.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

Despite all differences over Iraq or the Middle East peace process, the United States and Europe (the EU and its members) share key interests with regard to the Middle East. Europeans and Americans want stability in Iraq; a two-state solution whereby Israel and Palestine can live peacefully side by side; a halt to the proliferation of WMD; better governance in the states of the region; terrorism to be delegitimized and fought; closer regional cooperation; and finally, an improvement of economic and social conditions in the states of the region. Also, as any comparison between the U.S. National Security Strategy and the European Security Strategy would reveal, assessments of global threats and of threats and risks in the Middle East are not too far apart. Differences persist, however, about what approaches to follow in order to achieve these goals and avert such risks.

Geography plays a role here. Europe, given its geographical proximity to North Africa and the Middle East, has always been more interested in preserving regional stability and preventing, among other things, large inflows of migrants or the direct import into Europe of civil wars and interstate conflict. The EU and its member states have been more prepared to seek multilateral and comprehensive arrangements with all or almost all regional play-

ers, and they have been prepared to offer more financial support than the United States for the purpose of economic and political transformation in the region. EU grants and soft loans extended to the Southern partner countries under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership now amount to around 3 billion Euros a year. The United States has been more prepared to use force. Compared to Europe, its concern for stability in the region has been limited, and it has often favored engaging regional states bilaterally rather than through multilateral frameworks.

Still, the June 2004 G8 summit has reflected common trans-Atlantic concerns with regard to the region. This includes an increased realization that the political and socioeconomic status in most of the countries of the region is untenable and that the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a priority issue. The international Quartet and the Roadmap provide an institutional framework and an agreed blueprint for the resumption of the peace process and eventual settlement of the conflict. Willingness to cooperate with regard to Iraq, mainly in the context of a U.N. framework, has also increased.

Regarding the common interest in promoting domestic political and economic reform in the countries of the Middle East, different instruments are in place in Europe (mainly the Barcelona process and the Wider Europe-Neighbourhood Programme)

and the United States (the Middle East Partnership Initiative). Given differences of approach, priorities and instruments, it may be advisable for the trans-Atlantic allies to proceed in a "complementary, but distinct" manner, as it goes in a recent EU "Interim Report on an EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East" (March 2004). European projects and programs could in fact suffer a loss of credibility if they were to be seen as extensions of, or as too closely associated with, U.S. policies in the Middle East. This is particularly so since the credibility and legitimacy of U.S. action in the Middle East have been severely undermined due to the human-rights abuses at Abu Ghraib prison. It is hard to see how the United States can push for a largely domestic-reform-oriented GMEI – women's rights, civil society and political empowerment – at the same time that most citizens and leaders in the region view the United States as denying these very values in its occupation practices in Iraq. And it would be very difficult for EU policy makers to launch joint programs with the United States for the promotion of human rights or the rule of law in Arab and other Middle Eastern states as long as the United States maintains its detention practices in Guantanamo or refuses to re-sign the convention for the International Criminal Court.