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I. DEALING WITH ISLAMISTS: ENGAGEMENT OR ISOLATION?

1. The 12th Mediterranean Dialogue seminar of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Mediterranean Special Group (GSM) took place in Istanbul on May 2-3 2006. The seminar took recent political events in the Middle East as a starting point and sought to explore, on this basis, the terms of future dialogue and co-operation between communities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the "West". The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was at the centre of the discussion as well as the debate around how to deal with Islamist movements. Participants also seized the opportunity to learn about the Turkish views on the current regional dynamics.

2. Reflecting on the general state of relations between the Muslim world and the "West", **Mehmed Aydin**, Minister of State, reminded participants of the need for genuine dialogue and emphasized Turkey's role in facilitating such dialogue. He stated the lack of existential commitment and authentic dialogue to enable a common space in the Mediterranean. In order to overcome this situation and the "clash of ignorance", he called on participants to "move from discourse oriented dialogue to action oriented dialogue". GSM Chairman **Jean-Michel Boucheron** (France) added that dialogue has entered a difficult phase not only between countries but also within countries as has become evident through the debates around immigration in Europe. **Vahit Erdem**, head of the Turkish delegation to the NATO PA reinforced Turkey's importance as a bridge between Europe and the Muslim world and emphasized Turkey's recent progress in economic and political reforms.

II. DEALING WITH ISLAMISTS

3. Dialogue and engagement with Islamist political groups has come onto the agenda of policy makers after the recent successes of Islamist groups and parties in elections throughout the Middle East and North Africa. **Alastair Crooke**, founder of the London-based NGO Conflicts Forum, in his keynote presentation, warned that the West does not fully appreciate this new reality and is unable to deal with it. The main failure lies in cutting ties with those Islamist movements that Mr Crooke qualifies as "revivalist", i.e. that are willing to engage in a political process and promote good governance. They have embraced the nation state, which opens the way to pragmatism and country-specific solutions. While hugely successful with public opinion, they also find themselves under immense public pressure to perform. These movements are currently struggling with "revolutionary" groups who want to "burn the system" and are running on the platform of ending all forms of colonialism. By failing to notice the changes within revivalist groups and refusing to engage with them, the West is "pushing the pendulum towards the revolutionary groups".

4. According to Mr Crooke, the consequences of this policy pose a serious risk for European countries since conflict with the Muslim world sparked off by the various regional crisis will not only play out on the level of states, but also between and within movements and communities. The growing sense of a Muslim community within a community in Europe and the feeling that Europe is moving away from its traditional empathy for the Islamic world are serious developments in this respect. In order to "pull the pendulum back from the revolutionaries", dialogue with pro-system groups must urgently take place. A starting point for this dialogue would be to move the Western language out of the military into the political sphere. Whereas Islamist movements talk in a language of ethics, politics and dignity, Western discourse is characterized by a language of force, power, and military. As long as the debate takes place in different spheres, it cannot seriously tackle the issues of mutual understanding and disagreement.

5. The feeling that the West and the Muslim world are currently talking "across each other" was echoed by several participants especially with regard to the challenges in resolving the crisis with Iran and the Hamas-led Palestinian government. **Emin Bilgiç** (Turkey) noted that current

institutional structures cemented the feeling of superiority in the West towards the Islamic world and this prevented balanced thinking about the possibility of an Iranian nuclear program. **Saad Abdallah** (Tunisia) reported on the perception of Western policies in the Arab street, which does not understand why Israel is allowed to have a nuclear programme but not Iran and why a democratically elected Palestinian government is not recognized by those who promote democracy in the region. **Mohammed Halaiqah** (Jordan) said that there is a sense that Europe is being "kidnapped" from the region by those who have an interest in promoting the idea of a clash of civilizations and the question is how to reinvigorate and how to reinforce the friendly ties between Europe and the Middle East.

6. **Mr Crooke** called for a renewed emphasis on diplomacy, which has recently seemed to have ceded its traditional place in conflict resolution. The diplomatic options for resolving the dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme have, according to him, not yet been exhausted. The conventional wisdom in the US, since the early 1960s has been that there could be no meaningful separation between peaceful and military use of atomic energy. This has to so far been taken for granted and has not been questioned enough in dealing with Iran. He ominously predicted that military action by the international community or a single state would lead to a devastating conflict throughout the region, definitely involving Israel and Lebanon.

7. The discussion over dialogue with Islamist movements culminated in the concrete question of how the international community should relate to the Palestinian Hamas-led government with its Islamist but also national liberation movement credentials. In Mr Crooke's view, the victory of Hamas constitutes a revolution both within the Palestinian authority (PA) and the region. The elections can be seen as the "rupture of Palestinian trust that the international community will finally do something for the Palestinians" and the move towards a self-reliant approach to relations with Israel. Whereas Fatah saw institution building as the consequence of the establishment of a Palestinian state, Hamas thinks that once the PA is well and competently governed, it will be difficult to ignore it. The interplay between revolutionary and revivalist movements is very clear in the Palestinian context. If we fail to engage with the revivalist movement Hamas, we will be faced with revolutionary movements like Al-Qaida as an alternative. There is already evidence in refugee camps in surrounding countries that these movements are gaining a hold.

III. ONE MAN – ONE VOTE – ONCE?

8. In her presentation on Islamist movements, **Meliha Altunişik** (Turkey), Chair of Department of International Relations at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, placed the rise of Islamist movements in the historical context of political reform processes in the region. The reform processes of the early 1990s, induced by a crisis of legitimacy and political economy factors, were also stalled because of the threat of rising Islamism. The Algerian example has been a vivid deterrent for those advocating increased openness. In the meantime, Ms Altunişik reiterated that there has been an increasing diversification among Islamist movements, differentiating between "neo-Islamists" as those who participate in the political process and "neo-fundamentalists" as those who adhere to a destructive approach. In Algeria, Yemen, Morocco, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan, Islamists are allowed to form political parties. In Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories they are part of the government. They are banned in Egypt, Bahrain, and Kuwait but candidates compete as independents.

9. In order to evaluate the effect of Islamist participation on political reform, Ms Altunişik raised two critical questions about Islamists' participation in the formal political process. First, their programmes remain vague in addressing the critical questions of state society relations and social policy. This might be due, on the one hand, to their historical evolution but it might also be due to convenience. This led to the second point, in which Ms Altunişik referred to the fears of religious

and sectarian minorities about Islamist policies once they are in a position to set rules. This point was also raised by **Salwa Terzi** (Tunisia) who warns not so much of dialogue, but what ensues if Islamists come to power. There are concerns that groups use the democratic process to come to power and then show their real face, for example curbing women's rights. Facing the options of either continuing the failed policies of the past by supporting the existing regimes or encouraging more open systems that also incorporate Islamists, Ms Altunişik argued that the West did not really have a choice but to include Islamists. Past experience has shown that any opposition that has a chance to govern is likely to behave responsibly. In the medium run, however, policy must focus on eliminating the economic conditions that give rise to Islamist movements and on resolving the regional conflicts that fuel their arguments. Moreover, the political openings created by Islamist movements would also benefit secular opposition groups that will surely re-emerge in the region. Mr Crooke noted that the present situation was characterized by "one man – no vote – ever" and thus the bet of "one man – one vote – once" was worth taking. There is no experience so far as to whether Islamists are truly committed to the democratic process and will continue to contest power in elections but there is also no evidence to the contrary. Hizbollah was the first movement that entered government and it has submitted itself to elections several times.

10. **Cendiz Çandar**, Senior Columnist and Political Analyst for CNN-Turk, reminded participants that Western historical trajectories cannot simply be applied to the Middle East. This perception and the perception that there is an inevitable trajectory towards democracy characterized Western thinking about the region and democratisation in the region. The changing perception of Arab elections between the revolution in Lebanon in early 2005 and the Iraqi and Palestinian realities in early 2006 are a case in point. The peaceful upheaval and mass action in Lebanon that led to elections without Syrian tutelage were qualified as the Cedar revolution by the West. The analogy with the "fancy colour" revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia reflected this Western optimism about spreading democracy at that time. The misperception became, according to Mr Çandar, evident in the choice of the term Cedar revolution that in Lebanon was seen rather as an Intifada, an uprising. Nowadays, some commentators draw analogies between recent Arab elections and the ascension of the Nazi regime in Germany, which was elected democratically. Even if it is true that democracy consists of more than just elections, these careless comparisons are too often made simply because Western policy makers are not happy with the unintended consequences of democracy promotion efforts.

11. Mr Çandar emphasized that the phenomenon of political Islam was not a new phenomenon but has always been a part of the political culture of the Muslim world and it is one in constant evolution. Its current prominence was also due to a certain "Zeitgeist", the accumulation of resentment of Muslims. In order to answer the question of possible dialogue, **Bert Koenders** (Netherlands) enquired further about the distinctions between Islamist groups and whether the criterion of non-violence was enough to distinguish moderate groups. All speakers differentiated between movements by methods the movements employed and their organizational structure, i.e. participation in the political process and renunciation of violence. Mr Çandar warned that a salafi-jihadi background did not necessarily mean radical as was evidenced by the Iraqi Islamist party of Tariq al-Hashemi. Ms Altunişik emphasized that even the notion that Islamists want to apply the Sharia is in flux and being reinterpreted so that a new definition is being sought. Whereas the Tunisian participants warned of the "absolutist discourse" (Mr Abdallah) of Islamists, a Jordanian participant (**Hisham Muheisen**) reported that the Islamic Action Front in Jordan has been successfully included in the political process. Its delegates provided ministers and the speakers of parliament for the last three years and have both a pro-government and opposition record.

IV. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN POLITICAL REFORM

12. Robert Springborg, Director of the London Middle East Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies, painted a mixed picture of the role of parliaments in the Arab world. On the one hand, parliaments lack both centrality and capacity. There is a void between the executive and the proverbial "Arab street" and parliaments are unable to provide the missing link. At the same time, their capacity is restrained and they lack staff and resources. Constituency offices, for example have to be supported by the members of parliament themselves and are not financed by the institution. The culture of decision-making has yet to develop. On the other hand, the recent past has seen a re-emergence of parliaments. Whereas the region was the one most deprived of parliaments in the 1990s, there are only three countries today without an elected assembly: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Libya. In addition, cynicism of parliaments can not be taken as the single indicator for their performance since people in the Arab world are not alone in their critique of parliaments. In 2004, less than 20% of Palestinians responded favourably when asked about actions of their parliament. Mr Springborg contrasted this with an only 28% approval rating of the US Congress at the time of the president's (until then) all time low of 38% in March 2006. Donors currently focus on increasing capacities of parliaments in the Arab world and the legislative community is growing.

13. The emergence of Islamist parties is, in Mr Springborg's view, the "single greatest cause for the increase in the role of parliaments". They are well aware that their performance is closely monitored and the Algerian example stands out prominently as the example not to follow. An example for the pressure to perform is a recent booklet, issued by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, on the performance of its deputies until the 2005 elections.

14. In assessing the possible future of democratic credentials of Islamist parties, Mr Springborg painted a nuanced but overall more optimistic picture. On the critical side, the question of sovereignty is one of the most decisive issues for the future reconcilability of their programmes and democracy. In traditional Islamist thought, God is the sole source of sovereignty whereas in democratic societies sovereignty lies with the people who delegate decision-making to their representatives. In analogy to the "CNN phenomenon", Mr Springborg also detects a "Ulama phenomenon" which means that the Ulama remains the single and most important source of information about public policy which is problematic for truly informed decision making. There also remain serious questions about the internal organisation of movements and the practice of trading votes for basic commodities. The diversity of the movements and the country specific context make it difficult to paint a uniform picture about their future integration in the political process. On the more encouraging side, it has become evident that the rhetoric of movements has not been matched by their actual behaviour. This reinforces the predictions that are based on historical experience: that the closer groups move towards power the more likely they are to moderate. And the more experience they gain with democracy the more likely they are to endorse it just like the communist parties in post-war Europe. Mr Springborg also reminded participants that the political economy and social conditions that led to the rise of Islamist parties are changing. If the prospects for the rise of more secular movements are rather bleak at the moment, this might very well change in the future.

15. The increasing prominence of parliaments and their broader inclusiveness bears consequences for interparliamentary dialogue. Mr Springborg emphasized the importance of such dialogue as a means to exchange information and improve accountability in the field of foreign policy. Since it is much easier for executives to coordinate than for legislatives, citizens have long been deprived of representation in foreign and security policy. A prerequisite for successful dialogue is yet for parliaments to become more independent of their executives. Another recommendation from the speaker was for dialogue to focus more on the concerns of parliaments than on the concerns of the executives.

V. ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS AFTER TWO ELECTIONS

16. In an in depth discussion of the new situation after the Israeli and Palestinian elections, participants evaluated the possible strategies for the international community to deal with Hamas and the future of the peace process in light of the new Israeli government's policies. They made clear that the case of Hamas occupies a specific place within the context of the discussion of engaging with Islamist groups. Mr Çandar compared the dynamics of the conditions on Hamas with the PLO's evolution rather than with the process of moderation of other Islamist movements. The PLO only eliminated the call for the destruction of Israel from its charter in 1996, well into the Oslo process.

17. Mr Crooke warned of the isolation of Hamas, which had already undergone a considerable evolution and was determined to build up functioning governmental structures in the Palestinian Territories. In his view, Hamas is not trying to enforce Islamic policies on its "citizens" and he quoted Hamas members stating they "do not want an Islamic state without Muslims in it". Rather than cutting aid and establishing the dangerous structure of a parallel government, the international community should thus focus on constructive ways to help solve the conflict. A start would be for the European Union to recognize Palestinian rights and to refer to US President Bush's declarations of May 26, 2005: "Any final status agreement must be reached between the two parties and changes to the 1949 Armistice lines must be mutually agreed to."

18. Asked by **Jan Petersen** (Norway) about the probability of survival of the Hamas government, Mr Crooke said that Hamas is on its way to sorting out its financial difficulties by making payments directly from external banks to employees in the territories. Furthermore, Hamas was "committed to making parliament an instrument for transparency and accountability" with high priority given to the reform of the security services. Functioning oversight of the security sector requires a judicial system, which does not exist yet. Hamas is also trying to improve relations with the rest of the Arab world. It shows strong commitment to national unity and is "quietly confident" that they will succeed. This was supported by the fact that Hamas had been planning to win the elections and was not surprised by its high scores as it was often portrayed in the Western media. According to Mr Crooke, this has sent a signal throughout the Muslim world, that if you "plan and organize, you can change societies."

19. **Sharon Pardo**, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of European Politics and Society at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, analysed the future of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians in light of the newly elected Israeli government. The vote in Israel can according to him be interpreted as a vote for an inward looking policy and the 19 seats for the Labour party and seven seats for the Pensioners party reflect the importance that people attribute to social and economic factors. Ehud Olmert has not achieved the results he was hoping for which makes the implementation of the unilateral convergence plan more difficult. Ironically, to implement this policy, Olmert "needs a weak and isolated Hamas government". This gives Israel more room for manoeuvre than if it were the case that it had a widely accepted negotiating partner. Prime Minister Olmert outlined Israeli policy in his speech after the elections. It sees the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the major step to be undertaken by this government, which aims to establish permanent borders by 2010. It will negotiate with the Palestinians but only with President Abbas and carry out its unilateral convergence plan if this is not possible.

20. In Mr Pardo's view, these developments mark the definite failure of the roadmap, which was inevitable because one of the key players, Israel, never recognized it. The Israeli government had voted in favour of the Road Map, but subjected it to no less than fourteen reservations. The prerequisite of an absolute quiet for the process to begin and the exclusion of any issues relating to the final settlement emptied the plan of its content from the Israeli side. At the Aqaba summit in 2003, Sharon reportedly only invoked the road map once to say that it had been adopted by the

Israeli government. He subsequently pursued the policy of unilateral pullout from Gaza. The Quartet's policy, which Wolfensohn qualified as a "grand illusion" upon leaving as the US special envoy, must, in Mr Pardo's view, be fundamentally revised. This is especially so because the conditions set after Hamas' victory were set too quickly and have tied the hands of the Quartet in its future dealings with the PA.

21. In order to extricate itself from this deadlock, Mr Pardo recommended that the Quartet "pay more attention to what Hamas does than to what it says" since the three conditions "go against the very ideological grain of the movement" and are unlikely to induce change in the immediate term. The Quartet should sign a memorandum of understanding in which the Palestinian Authority renounces violence and assumes responsibility for not violating previous agreements. In return, donor countries should resume their financial aid. As was the case in negotiations surrounding the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, the formal recognition of the state of Israel could then wait until the end of the process. The Quartet, according to Mr Pardo will also need to sign a memorandum of understanding with Israel to guarantee some kind of symmetry and commit Israel to the Road Map. Part of the MoU should be the resumption of Israeli transfers of Palestinian tax and customs money. The Quartet must, in his view, "either redefine the rules of the game or drop out."

22. Participants agreed with Mr Pardo that the creation of parallel institutions posed considerable danger for the security situation and stability in the occupied territories and in Gaza. **Hugh Bayley** (United Kingdom) emphasized that there must be a way to continue aid to the Palestinians while at the same time ensuring accountability to European citizens that their aid is going to the right places. **Gianni Nieddu** (Italy) confirmed that in his view Hamas had proven to be a sophisticated political force and not a group of religious fanatics. To the contrary, it had clearly distanced itself from Salafist movements. He warned that given these realities, withholding funding from the Palestinian Authority might "become a boomerang for the EU and the US" and Hamas might look for support elsewhere. Mr Erdem said all participants "have a responsibility to find a positive ground" and support the Palestinian Legislative Council's wish to engage with the international community.

VI. THE ROLE OF RELIGION

23. The recent cartoon crisis has focused the debate around dialogue on the necessity of engaging in a dialogue between the different religious communities. Religion is, as **Professor Ali Bardokoğlu**, Head of the Turkish Religious Affairs, pointed out, "a source of collective identity" and it is being taken increasingly seriously throughout the world. The participants therefore took a great interest in the remarks on interreligious dialogue by three religious leaders in Istanbul – Professor Bardokoğlu for the Turkish Muslim community, **His Holiness Bartholomeus** for the Greek Orthodox community, and **Rabbi Rac Isac Haleva** for the Jewish community. All three related the role of religion to current events and pointed to the socio-economic dimension as an important element in relations between communities. On the issue of dialogue, they agreed that more must be done than issuing statements. Rabbi Haleva lamented that the doors of genuine dialogue seem to be closed at the moment and called for a true multidisciplinary approach for this crucial long-term project. **Kenan Gürsoy**, Dean of the Science and Literature Department at Galatasaray University, emphasized the role of Sufism that takes an important place in Turkish culture and promotes the idea of unity and tolerance.

24. Professor Bardokoğlu emphasized that Islam embraces democracy, human rights, and - like all religions - condemns terrorism. Noting that Islam had been used to legitimise political order in some countries, he stated that violence rises when people do not have other channels for their grievances and when inequality on ethnic, economic or social grounds rises.

His Holiness Bartholomeus related religious dialogue to the current geopolitical situation. Since its enlargement, NATO now included more orthodox Christians from Bulgaria and Romania. The enlargement of the EU and the integration of Turkey is in his view important to strengthen institutions in Turkey. He also referred to increasing economic integration between Greece and Turkey, which would have been unthinkable a few years ago. Turkey can also help with mediation and economic development in the Middle East and Central Asia and he implored that "instead of ships full of soldiers let us see ships full of cars and computers cross the Bosphorus". He concluded on an optimistic note by saying that there was more that "unites the community of men than what divides them."

25. Participants from Mediterranean partner countries emphasized the need for further dialogue and in particular the need for justice as the basis for human interaction and understanding. Mr Saad quoted Ibn Khaldoun saying that "Justice is the basis for civilisation". He was seconded by Mr Halaïqah who pointed out that the proponents of a "clash of civilisations" use this phrase to describe a conflict between Islam and the West and that unfortunately the moderate forces have not yet managed to be the leading voices in shaping the discourse. **Cherif Ahmed Ould Mohamed Moussa** (Mauritania) considered it a paradox that in a globalised world there was a division between an Islamic world and "the other world" due to a misinterpretation of Islam and a failure of the education systems to enhance understanding, for example through comparative religious education.

VII. TURKEY'S UNIQUE GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION

26. It became clear throughout the seminar that Turkey plays an important role in facilitating religious dialogue but also helps face the challenges in relations with its Southern and Eastern neighbours and their economic development. The highly topical debate on energy security illustrates the special geo-political position of Turkey, as was highlighted by **Mihat Rende**, Minister Plenipotentiary at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in his presentation on energy security and geopolitics. The situation of Turkey within the international system is thus an important determinant of its policies and orientations as was made clear by **Ersin Kalaycıoğlu**, President of Işık University.

27. As a member of NATO, Turkey plays a particular role in the outreach activities of NATO and its relations with Mediterranean partner countries. **Alberto Bin**, Head of Regional Affairs Section, Political Affairs & Security Policy Division at NATO, provided participants with an overview on NATO activities in the Mediterranean and the Gulf region. For the Mediterranean area, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is currently evolving into a structure similar to its Partnerships for Peace, which reflects the growing need for co-operation in security issues like failing states, terrorism, and instability. Further decisions on the future of this programme could be expected from the upcoming NATO summit in Riga in November 2006. At present, the Mediterranean Dialogue is following a two-fold approach: on the political level, NATO is holding multilateral summits with its partners like the one that took place in Taormina in February 2006, and Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has visited all partner countries personally. On the practical level, there are numerous activities like co-operation in interoperability, assistance in defence reform, upgrading, and modernization of armed forces, and public diplomacy events. Israel, Morocco, and Egypt participate in the operation Active Endeavour which is a concrete example of successful co-operation.

28. Unlike the Mediterranean Dialogue, NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative for the Gulf countries relies on bilateral co-operation. This new initiative has by now been joined by Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. Both initiatives share a fundamental reliance on the principles of joint ownership and inclusiveness. All countries receive the same treatment. The third

principle is progressiveness both in form and in content. Mr Bin made it clear that NATO seeks to complement initiatives of the European Union in areas where NATO could contribute added value, like in the area of security and security policy. He also warned of excessive expectations. NATO could not give security guarantees for the Gulf region. It would also not be involved in the Middle East peace process and NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer had made clear that if NATO became involved, this could only be once a comprehensive peace agreement has been concluded.

29. An issue of increasing importance to NATO member countries is the security of energy supplies. Mr Rende presented Turkey's plans to act as a hub for the transport of oil and gas from Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe. This was all the more important since almost 80% of transportation currently goes through sealine choke points and this poses a formidable challenge to securing uninterrupted transport. The European Union had in his view not yet managed to draw up a common energy policy and has not properly reflected on the role of Turkey. Turkey remains well aware of the growing energy demand (growing by 7% a year) and the need for increased transport capacities within the next twenty years.

30. In his view, the most important challenges for the future are a diversification of energy sources, a diversification of transport routes, more transparency and enhanced demand elasticity. Transport through the narrow and winding Turkish straits poses a problem for the city of Istanbul and its cultural heritage as has been shown by the almost catastrophic fire on a tanker on the Bosphorus in February 2006. A web of alternative pipelines for oil and gas transport is being developed from Turkey's East and South to the Mediterranean outlet Ceyhan. The Samsun Ceyhan pipeline from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean is intended to alleviate pressure on the Istanbul strait. The most important pipeline, the Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan pipeline is expected to become operational on 27 May 2006. **Mihail Lupoi** (Romania) suggested that Turkey might be perceived as a monopoly holder to which Mr Rende replied that Turkey is expected to move one seventh of the 700bn cubic meters in oil and gas that are predicted as consumption for 2010 by the International Energy Agency. It will thus not have a monopoly but will provide a secure and reliable transport route.

31. The fact that Turkey is a key for regional stability was illustrated by **Mr Kalaycioğlu**, who vividly pictured Turkey's role in the surrounding conflict areas of the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East. Turkey has so far "been coping with turbulence and managing volatility" and it was crucial for regional stability that Turkey continued to act as a buffer for conflicts emanating from these regions. Turkish connections with these regions go back to the historical legacy of the Ottoman period and its function as an Empire. Moreover, migration has deeply connected Turkey with many countries and Turkey is itself a nation of immigrants. The European Union is well aware of Turkey's role and should take this into account in the reflections on Turkey's accession. Mr Kalaycioğlu also made clear that the EU should not expect Turkey to automatically act in its interests and as its agent if accession is refused to Turkey.

32. In the Middle East, the Iraqi question is the formidable challenge and Turkey is directly concerned through its links with the Kurdish community. Kurdish nationalism is pushing Syria, Iran, and Turkey to co-ordinate their policies as a partition of Iraq will entail a protracted civil war beforehand that directly concerns its neighbours. Mr Kalaycioğlu estimates that a Kurdish state is very difficult to sustain if it has no amicable relations with its neighbours, which at present seems highly unlikely. If the borders of Iraq are changed, "Turkey will live with it", but it will not be able to prevent or control a civil war. If anybody can, then it is the US. The Iraqi question has tainted the relations between Turkey and the United States, which were always characterized by ups and downs. At present, there is a rising sentiment in Turkey that the US is targeting Sunni Muslims focussing not on its long-term goals but on the means it chooses to achieve them. Turkey shares the American goals of achieving democracy, the rule of law, and modern market economies but it opposed the intervention in Iraq. Turkey also has a different point of view on the policies towards

Iran that stems from the long historical experiences of unsuccessful armed conflict with the Persian Empire but not from a lesser apprehension of Iran's nuclear ambitions. The two conflicts were, in Mr Kalaycioğlu's view connected, since Iran has achieved a bigger space of manoeuvre through the US interventions against its neighbours Iraq and Afghanistan with whom it had difficult relations before.

33. In conclusion of the seminar, NATO parliamentarians agreed that they wished to continue playing a constructive role and providing a forum for dialogue with their colleagues in the MENA region. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly would also continue to offer its support in contributing towards an understanding between Israelis and Palestinians, as was mentioned by NATO PA President **Pierre Lellouche** (France). There was no agreement, however, on how to pursue the Assembly's relationship with the Palestinian Legislative Council, due to the presence of Hamas in its ranks. The issue will be further discussed by the NATO PA Standing Committee when it meets in Paris at the end of May.

