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“The Mediterranean, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The EU and NATO’s Wider New Neighbourhood”

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Panel on “Euro-Mediterranean and Transatlantic Agendas after the American Elections”

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This contribution to the panel tries to compare current European and the American agendas of civilian and political co-operation towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

While it is well known that the EU is running a civilian and political agenda of co-operation towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East, i.e. the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership-EMP, developments in Iraq have concentrated public attention on the American military agenda towards the region. One should not overlook, though, that in American intentions this military agenda is instrumental to a political goal, namely the democratisation of the region. To that purpose, the American government put forward a Greater Middle East Initiative-GMEI at the end of 2003 with a view to promote political reform in the region. Subsequent to a long international debate on the initiative, the Sea Island June 2004 G8 endorsed the GMEI with significant modifications and under the new name of “Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa”. Beside this major Partnership agenda, one has to remember other purely American national programmes of civilian co-operation, such as MEPI (the Middle East Peace Initiative) and the free trade bilateral agreements (as those with Morocco and Jordan).

As just pointed out, the European agenda is essentially based on the EMP since 1995. The latter, in turn, is rooted in a number of long standing policies initiated in the 1970s. Thus, it is older than the American one, which began to emerge in 2003 only (albeit the GMEI and the Partnership for Progress have well-known antecedents in U.S. policy towards Latin America).

On the other hand, the scopes of the two sets of EU and U.S. initiatives overlap without coinciding. The EU concentrates on the Mediterranean - a notion largely foreign to Americans, strategically - whereas the United States is focusing on a much broader expanse, including - further to the Mediterranean (i.e. North Africa and the Near East) - also the Gulf and Central Asia countries up to Pakistan.

Despite differences in their age and scope, the European and American agendas have many points in common. In a perspective of security and political-economic reforms, numerous concepts and concerns look very close, practically the same, as the goal of promoting democracy and the use of partnership and inclusion so as to attain that very goal.

If these analogies are framed in EU and U.S. respective strategic frameworks strong differences do emerge, however. In other words, the same concepts and instruments have different meaning, relevance, and functionality when considered against the backdrop of respective European and American strategies towards the regions of the Mediterranean and the broader Middle East. While one would expect the analogies in the EU and U.S. programmes of co-operation with the region to give way to closer transatlantic co-operation, as matter of fact the differences staying behind analogies prevent such closer transatlantic co-operation from emerging. That differences are prevailing on analogies is due to the significance of existing strategic differences between Europe and the United States.

For this reason, those willing to foster transatlantic co-operation should have to hammer out strategic differences first rather than anything else. At the same time, analogies in goals, concepts and instruments are not entirely neutral or unimportant in seeking to close or narrow the gap

between strategies. Strategic differences staying behind analogies must be inquired and clarified with a view to helping curb the gap. This contribution to the panel tries to compare the current European and the American agendas of civilian and political co-operation towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East precisely with a view to helping narrow the strategic gap.

Concepts

The most important analogy between the EU and the U.S. agendas is the nexus between security and democracy. Both the EU and the U.S. programmes believe that more democracy in the countries of the region would turn into more secure inter-state relations at regional as well as international level. In the EU perceptions and policies the advent of the rule of law, respect for human rights and minorities, and democratic political institutions is regarded as factors of “structural stability”. More or less, the same is true in the American policies and perceptions. The Clinton administration didn’t fail to promote democracy, although in less systematic ways than the EU. Democracy promotion is crucial in the Middle East Bush administration’s policy as well. In President Bush’s vision, however, the nexus between democracy and security is strictly linked to the global war on terrorism and, for this reason, it is articulated in such a way as to make a fundamental difference with respect to EU’s perception of the same nexus.

In fact, the nexus is articulated as a deep-rooted relationship between terrorism and democracy: the lack of democracy and the authoritarian regimes which use to prevail in the region are - so the argument runs - at the roots of regional societies’ backwardness. This backwardness, in turn, generates terrorism. Hence, in the societies and countries concerned, the need for promoting deep changes and fundamental reforms which have to seize societies and culture even before than regimes and governments.

Thus, the current EU and U.S. policies are predicated on apparently similar, yet substantively different rationales: while EU policy of democracy promotion is essentially targeting the regimes, that of the United States is looking, first of all, at deep-rooted cultural change. This difference has been harshly resented by the interested countries of the region and has given way to strong criticism and grievances from regimes and “streets”, extremists and liberals alike.

The strategic difference can be illustrated as the difference between a prevalingly functional and institutional European concept of democratisation vs. a prevalingly value-laden American one.

The second U.S.-EU analogy that it is worth mentioning regards the nexus between economic development, democracy and security. Both visions are predicated on the principles endorsed in the Washington Consensus. The economic dimension of the Barcelona process, for instance, is definitely based on a strong liberalisation giving way to significant direct investment from abroad, fast technological progress, increased productivity and efficiency and a more significant export-led growth. In both the EU and U.S. case, democracy is a fundamental factor to assure freedom and, thus, foster economic development.

However, the United States emphasises liberalisation and globalisation, whereas the European vision, albeit predicated on globalisation as much as the American one, gives regional and inter-regional integration more importance than the United States. The EU’s emphasis on regional integration stems from security in addition to economic development. What the EU is suggesting is that regional integration is a pattern of relations that, by fostering economic growth, helps promote democracy domestically and peace in the region among the countries involved - as it has been the case with the EU itself. Thus, according to EU vision, there would be, broadly speaking, a virtuous circle between economic development, democracy and peace. The working of such circle should result strongly eased by applying the EU model of economic regional integration in a densely institutionalised context.

While not amounting to conflicting views, these EU-U.S. differences have surfaced once and again in the recent history of the EU-U.S.-Middle East triangle: the EU combination of bilateral Association Agreements in an inter-regional context of developmental relations vs. the U.S. combination of paramount bilateral free-trade agreements in the context of the global WTO perspective; the EU approach in the Middle East peace process REDWG vs. the American one; the essentially civil-society-based processes of the American-promoted Middle East Economic Summits and - as of today - the Forum for the Future vs. the strongly officially-managed processes of the EU's EMP, are as many evidences of these differences. While American regional approaches converge towards a global framework and are instrumental to strengthen the latter, the EU regional approaches, albeit not against globalisation, consider regional frameworks as significant *per se* and tend to finely balance regional and global dimensions in a perspective of both economic development and security. Again, we face a deep-seated strategic difference.

A third analogy to be explored regards the nexus between international institutions and legality, on the one hand, and democracy and peace, on the other. That the former may be neglected with a view to promote the latter is a "realist" or "hobbesian" perspective that definitely does not belong to the EU political culture, whereas it has been emphasised ultimately in the security vision worked out by the Bush administration, a difference that Kagan has expressed by making Americans come from Mars and Europeans from Venus. The co-operative attitude of the EU is partly a result of its lack of power - as Kagan points out. Partly, however, is a genuine legacy of its peculiar experience after the conclusion of the Second World War.

France and Germany insisted for linking the war on Iraq to a more convincing international legal context partly out of the wish of not being deleted as international actors and partly out of conviction. Albeit to different extents, all the EU nations have internalised the international co-operative and liberal thinking the EU has been built on. In this context they see a stronger nexus between international institutions and legality, on the one hand, and democracy and peace, on the other, than the American sole superpower and other traditional great and small powers.

Here we have another strategic difference between the U.S. and the EU. This strategic difference along with those noted above generate oppositions in transatlantic relations regarding the Middle East and the Mediterranean, even though in principle Europeans and Americans pursue the same finalities and employ similar policies.

Policies and instruments

Not only the United States and the EU employ similar concepts. They also use similar policies and instruments with a view to promoting reform in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. These policies use inducements and conditionality.

The most important positive inducement is partnership. Partnership brings about enhanced international status to less favoured partners and the benefits of political and security co-operation to all partners. It is implemented by inclusion, consultation and dialogue. Consultation, dialogue and especially inclusion are construed as positive conditionality, namely as rewards to be earned by abiding by given conditions. On the other hand, conditionality can be negative as well. Negative conditionality means that economic or political resources are denied as a consequence of behaviours that do not fit with those agreed upon by the parties or expected by parties. Partnership excludes (or keeps at bay) harsher forms of conditionality or coercion, such as sanctions and military interventions.

This system of rewards and punishments, carrots and sticks, is particularly elaborated and formalised in the EU experience. However, it is regularly applied by American policies as well. In particular, Europeans and Americans have shared the application of these policies with respect to countries in Central-eastern Europe and the Balkans within the framework of OSCE, NATO and the Partnership for Peace.

The most important difference between the United States and Europe in applying these policies and instruments is that, particularly when it comes to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the United States has acted so far in an essentially bilateral way, whereas the EU has acted by means of collective frameworks, the most recent and sophisticated one being the EMP. No doubt, collective frameworks fit much better than bilateral relations with the task of fostering partnership, consultation, dialogue and inclusion. In principle, they are more effective than bilateralism. Collective endeavours, such as the EMP, are more congruous with the broad goal of governing long-term change and reform in less developed area with a view to enhance regional and international security.

With the establishment of the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future, the United States has joined the EU in employing collective frameworks of governance with respect to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In other words, besides employing a set of analogous instruments and policies, such as partnership and inclusion, with the institution of the Partnership for Progress the United States is also employing these policies within a collective framework of governance similar to the EMP. Once again we are in front of remarkable similarities. Once again, however, convergence is hindered or attenuated by strategic differences and, as we have seen in the previous section, by the impact these differences have on concepts. Let's tackle this point more in depth.

A notable difference between the American and European programmes, as of today, is the highly integrated character of the European agenda. The so called "holistic" character of the EMP, bringing together political dialogue, migration, cultural co-operation, financial aid, and so forth, allows, at least in principle, for high effectiveness and governance. The working of the holistic character of the EMP is made possible by its high degree of institutionalisation. Common institutions, in fact, make it possible to set linkages where it needs be. The Partnership for Progress and a Common Future brings together a number of different sectors and factors. It does so in a weak institutional environment, however, and in a less extensive and integrated way than the EU.

This is a notable difference. It is not very significant, however, in a strategic perspective. In fact, the United States would not need to change its strategic perspective to bring in more integration and institutionalisation. In contrast, the different strategic inspirations and ideological inclinations of the two programmes bring about differences in employing and evolving instruments that can hardly be eliminated or attenuated. The intimate co-operative character of the EU strategy has implications on the nature and evolution of the partnership and its instruments - such as dialogue, inclusion, and so forth - which are not allowed by the more traditional and "realist" character of the American strategy.

The partnership established by the EU within the EMP has been always criticised by the Southern partners for not being really a partnership. For long, the EU has tried to sell the EMP as a joint venture among peers, but this was never bought by those assumed to be peers or partners. Nevertheless, the genuine strategic co-operative inspiration of the EU policy towards the Mediterranean has allowed the EU to gradually recognise political inequality within the EMP, consult on such issue with the partners, and put forward ways and means for such inequality to be attenuated and somehow superseded by more adequate patterns of relations. Ultimately, the co-operative logic of the EMP has brought about a fundamental reform in such pattern of relations thanks to the introduction of the principle of co-ownership. Co-ownership means that decisions will be made to the extent they will be actually owned by the partners concerned - be they from the EU as well as the Southern Mediterranean countries.

There are risks in this policy, yet also opportunities. Several decisions would be owned by all partners. More often than not what is going to happen, though, is that decisions will be owned by different groupings of countries. These groupings will have the opportunity to advance where other will have opted out, by what is called "reinforced co-operation" in the EU institutional jargon.

Differentiation will be key to making the EMP work more effectively and increasing its political significance.

In conclusion, a same instrument can work or not and can work more or less effectively according to the strategic perspective in which it is employed. The kind of instruments we have taken into consideration above look more effective in a co-operative than realist perspective. In a co-operative perspective, they are bound to have a higher effect of integration and socialisation.

Transatlantic co-operation: narrow margins

The EU and U.S. policy of long-term governance with respect to the Mediterranean and the Middle East are very similar as far as concepts and instruments are concerned, yet are bound to work in very different ways because concepts and instruments are framed by very different strategic perspectives. Moreover, instruments at hands look more consistent with the co-operative than the realist strategy. In fact, in a co-operative framework, available instruments look bound to evolve to reinforce joint action and allow for effective governance.

Chances of a synergy between American and European policies are contingent to changes in respective underlying strategies. If the EU strategy became more realist, there would be a stronger transatlantic co-operation and vice versa. At the same time, significant shifts in strategies don't look that likely. The second Bush administration doesn't look bent at all on changing concepts and goals used by the first one. By the same token, it is unlikely that the EU will change its approach. EU divisions today about the Middle East allows neither for a shift towards a more realist European strategy nor for strengthening the present co-operative strategy. All the EU will be able to do is to strengthening its co-operative strategy within the limits of the EMP. Yet, it will not be able to enlarge its policies towards the Middle East nor will it willing to work there within the framework of the US-led Partnership for Progress and a Common Future.

One cannot rule out the possibility that there will be shifts and changes on key political questions, such as Middle East regional security, Israeli-Palestinian and Arab conflicts, WMD. Such shifts and changes would strongly affect strategies and make them change or adapt themselves to new situations. For example, a higher American priority to a decent solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may contribute to narrow ongoing transatlantic gaps and allow for more U.S.-EU co-operation in democracy promotion and long-term regional governance.

As a matter of fact, changes in political priorities are key to strategic changes and EU-U.S. co-operation in promoting democracy and regional governance. However, even if concepts and strategic perspectives will remain unchanged, the transatlantic partners should not overlook that differences could be smoothed by attempts at co-operating on instruments and the way they can be used. Without prejudice of respective political finalities and aspirations, such co-operation can be set in motion and might, at the end of the day, contribute to narrow conceptual and political gaps in transatlantic relations with respect to the Mediterranean and the Middle East.