Analysis

WHAT PRECONDITIONS FOR A CSCE-LIKE APPROACH FOR THE REGION?
Walter Posch

Much time and a lot of heated debates have been spent to discuss what the EU and the US can do to transform the Middle East towards more democracy in order to fight threats emanating from the region.[1] The region is clearly in crisis and needs change to overcome its apathy. Most of the debates understood the region as passive and in need of benevolent intervention, that may be economic aid, military intervention and – dialogue. This paper tries to focus on the crisis in the region in general; suggest new definition of the Middle East and divides it into five sub-regions based mainly on geography and ethnicity and finally tries to evaluate how far the CSCE-OSCE experience could serve as a model for confidence building in the region.

1. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CRISIS

The social, economic and political underdevelopment of Arab countries or the Muslim world in general has been object of many debates and conferences. Yet this debate is not new but started in general in the 19th century or even earlier and several nationalistic and socialist reform attempts in the region have failed. Today, almost any observer Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim alike agrees that there is a tremendous need for reform in the region; the lack of democracy and good-governance are main obstacles for further development and pose a serious potential threat for the EU and the West in general. One of the most important contributions to the debate was the UNDP's "Arab Human Development Report AHDP" first issued in 2002 the second in 2003.[2]

Arab and other governments admitted the importance for developing the human and social conditions even before the first AHDR was published. But their aim was rather to enhance their own legitimacy and to maintain domestic stability[3] than genuine political reform. But times change! Serious steps for reform have been undertaken in many countries, the most courageous in Iran and the most surprising in Saudi Arabia. There are however serious doubts whether the Muslim world in general and Arabic countries in peculiar can deliver.[4] The backlash after the last elections in Iran, which is still one of the more democratic countries of the region, is just one example.

1.1. Integrated West Asian Crisis

Powerful family clans and "mafia"-like political/economic networks hold their grip over many aspects of their societies and are in varying degrees able to extend their power into the circles of political decision making. Social structures like clan and tribal bindings, but also ethnic and sectarian strive, have contributed to what Fred Halliday calls the "integrated west Asian crisis", a serious weakening and even collapsing of the state

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[1] The EU's Security Strategy cites terrorism, proliferation of WMD, regional conflicts, state failure and organised crime as key threats. EU-ISS: *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy,* Paris December 2003, p. 8f.

[2] http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/ UNDP, *Creating opportunities for future generations AHDR 2002, and Building a Knowledge Society AHDR 2003.*

[3] SOLTAN, Gamal A. Gawad: "Security Perceptions in the Arab World and Euro-Med Relations," in: *The International Spectator,* p. 9.

[4] Turkey's successful democratisation and her relative success towards liberalisation of her society and economy is another reason why she shall be excluded from the Middle East.

as it happened in Lebanon and Afghanistan in the 1970 and 1980s or more recently Pakistan and Yemen (seriously weakened) and Somalia (almost non-existing), "where significant areas are free of government control or where the government seeks to humour radical groups."[5] Typical regions out of government control would be the pashtun-speaking borderland between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Baluchistan (the triangle between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran), to mention only two of them. In most cases ethnicity (Baluchis and Pashtun) and/or tribal bindings mix with ultra-sunni fanaticism and drug production. In addition one may cite other state-failures like Palestine and as it seems to happen soon – Iraq. Another side of this crisis is the successful mingling of historically distinct conflicts like Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq and viewing them as one and the same struggle of the faithful Muslim against the infidel/imperialist invader – the war in Iraq was for many in the region (and even in Europe!) just the final proof of US-Israeli hostility towards Islam.

1.2. **The debate within Islam**

But the real struggle is within Muslim societies themselves: in short it is about two interdependent conflicts, the struggle for participation on political power of an emerging islamist middle class in the big cities, which is mostly rural in origin and the question whether democracy and Islam are compatible or in clear contradiction (the radical tradition following the Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb d. 1966). Muslim fundamentalist movements embrace radicalism in their infancy, as soon as there is a real possibility to run for free and fair elections, they participate in the electoral process and become part of the political system and loose much of their radicalism. The Turkish experience is a point in case, but even the parliamentary system of a rather weak democracy like that of Lebanon was strong enough to have a moderating impact on the Lebanese Hizbullah; Algeria however is an important example to show what exactly not to do. Radicals and extremist remain nevertheless: Ultra-sunni Islamist groups (*jihâdî*), mostly extremists with *wahhabi* or *salafi* background like the "al-Qa'ida" are decided enemies of the Shiites, the West and their own governments, which are often described apostate (following the tradition of *takfîr wa hijra*).

The inner-Muslim debate on Islam and democracy has started more than two decades ago in Iran and continues to this day. As a recent example one may mention the former general secretary of the "Organisation of the Islamic Conference – OIC", Abdelouahed Belkeziz, who has formulated Muslim self-criticism and the need for democratisation (a *shari'a*-based democratisation, to be precise) and mobilisation of the economic and intellectual potential of Islamic countries to challenge both extremism and terrorism that are falsely attributed to Islam on one side and underdevelopment and backwardness on the other.[6] Both tendencies: Islamist terrorism and serious attempts for democratisation exist among scholars, politicians and the faithful alike – it is solely up to the Muslims to solve this problem! EU and the US however are able to assist and to help in the fields of democratisation and good governance as well as in the economy; various programs for strengthening democracy including the delicate issue of supporting NGOs are conducted and shall be continued and even extended. But any western support makes only sense when democracy or at least parliamentarism are not viewed as un-Islamic interventions (*bid'da*) or imperialist concepts.

Acceptance of democratic and human right principles has to be the first precondition for any dialogue and even more for formal relations. This precondition is generally met, at least in theory, by all states the EU cooperates with. But a dialogue is based on reciprocity: no attempt however shall be made on behalf of the EU to define "moderate Islam".[7] This term should rather be strictly avoided since it is simply not up to non-Muslim observers to decide on religious matters and therefore arrogant to do so. It is also misleading, since strictly observant Muslims can be good democrats.

The social and economic underdevelopment of the Muslim world and its interdependence with the deficit of democracy and state failure is nowadays unlike in earlier times not only widely accepted as a matter of fact, but also seen as a result of own shortcomings rather than of colonialism or neo-colonialist conspiracies. Nevertheless, governments may still be tempted to hide behind the Israel-Palestine conflict and the post-war

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[5] See Chapter 1 at Halliday, Fred: *Two Hours That Shook The World: September 11 2001: Causes and Consequences,* London 2001. One may add Turkey's near-collapse during the 1970s and the insurgency in South-East Anatolia in the 1990s.

[6] *Keynote Speech of H.E. Dr Abdelouahed Belkeziz Secretary General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the International Symposium on "Enlightened Moderation",* Islamabad, 1-2 June 2004 (www.oic-oci.org /press/english/june%202004/moderation/htm and *Speech of H.E. Dr. Abdelouahed Belkeziz, the Secretary-General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, before the Thirty-first Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers,* İstanbul 14-16 June 2004 (www.oic-oci.org /press/english/june%202004//SG-istanbul.htm.

[7] It should be mentioned that "Islam" as a religion and culture and Islamism as a political ideology are all too often confused.

fiasco in Iraq for missed opportunities and undone reform-work. Israel, on the other hand, seems to be less interested in a peace solution, which would include a viable Palestinian state, but is rather decided to impose any solution on its own conditions. Be this as it may, neither EU and US nor the region can escape dialogue; if so: who shall talk to whom and what region are we talking about.

2. DEFINING THE REGION

One of the most surprising facts in the debate on the "Greater or Broader Middle East" is how ill defined in geographical terms it is. What exactly is "greater" or "wider" or simply "other" than the traditional definition of Middle East that includes the Arab states,[8] with three non-Arabs: Turkey, Iran and Israel.[9] The problem of the definition lies in the fringes of the region; do Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Somalia belong to it? Is it the much-cited zone of insecurity between "Marrakech and Bangladesh" or even to the Philippines? Or should one just refer to CENTCOM's "area of responsibility", that is all countries between Egypt and Kenya in Africa and Kazakhstan in Asia? Or would the term "Islamic or Muslim World" more aptly apply thus open the way for a quasi-Huntingtonian (Islam against the West) and quasi-Islamist (the West against the *ummah islamiyyah)* approach and predicting conflict between these two entities.

But even if the "Greater Middle East" should not include the Islamic world as a whole it is still big enough to define some sub-regions within the GME, each of them has its own crisis that may or may not be related with other zones of conflict. Some of the sub-regions described below have a more geographical character others are defined rather on the base of ethnicity.

2.1. North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean

A consensus has been reached, that Arab countries form the core of the (Greater) Middle East. The classic Arab division in eastern *mashraq*/Middle East or the old fashioned Levant and western *maghrab*/North African countries with Egypt as pivotal state forming the centre may offer some help. Maghrab i.e. North African countries are for example much more concerned with their internal security situation (Islamist radicalism etc.) than say Syria, where – like in most *mashraq*/Levantine countries of the Eastern Mediterranean (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq, the latter to be discussed) – the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is of much higher importance. It makes therefore sense to define an "*Eastern Mediterranean sub-region*" consisting of Israel/Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon i.e. the states, which are most affected by the conflict and which had to be engaged for any viable solution of the conflict in opposite to the "*North African sub-region"* (Morocco/Sahara, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya). Finally, one must not forget that the role of Iran must be taken into account, due to her staunch support of anti-israeli groups, her alliance with Syria and most important her intensive relations with the Lebanese Hizbullah and the Shiites in General.

2.2. Persian Gulf, Arabian Peninsula

Southeast of the Eastern Mediterranean we may define the "*Persian Gulf sub-region*" plus the Arabian Peninsula with its abundant oil and gas reserves and the USA's strategic interests. Given the specific character of Iraq's southern provinces, one has to add this country to the Gulf sub-region too. Arab states of the region have formed the Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC, which is by far the most, sophisticated of all intra-governmental frameworks of Arab states. Yemen and Iraq however are not members of this framework. The Arab countries on the southern shores of the Gulf are monarchies ruled by Sunni autocrats. All of them, with the notable exception of Oman, have sizeable Shiite minorities or even majorities that are largely excluded from the circles of power. Iran tried on several occasions (mostly in the 1980s after the revolution) to incite unrest among her co-religionists in the Gulf-monarchies and in Iraq, but plays a more positive role in the last years (at least with regard to the Gulf monarchies). In general, Shiites of the Gulf seem to realize that they, given their numerical strength, would benefit most of democratisation in their countries. The Shiite population is therefore any longer a serious security concern for the Gulf countries what concerns are the

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[8] The 17 are: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait and Iraq. Somalia and Mauritania are no Arab states in the strict sense of the world although they have long-standing and intensive connections with Arabian states and societies. Somalia is even a member of the Arab League!
[9] Halliday, Fred: *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation,* London 1996 p. 27.

activities of ultra fundamentalist Sunni *jihâdi*-groups like Al-Qa'ida. This is especially the case in Saudi Arabia where radicals openly threaten to bring down the house of the al-Sa'ud.

2.3. The Persian-speaking world

Iran has however made clear that it supposes herself to be the dominating power in the Persian Gulf (or rather to become so after the US have left) and has occupied a group of small islands, disputed between Iran and the UAE. Iran is with no doubt the most important country of a sub-region we may call the Persian-speaking world (Fragner: "*Persophonie*" or the "reign of the Persian language"[10]), which includes Afghanistan and Tajikistan but thanks to cultural and historical traditions may also be extended towards Pakistan. Tajikistan – though with no doubt a persophone country – should be excluded from being part of any Middle East conceptualisation, since its history and its elites have been shaped by the Soviet Union.[11] In this region, tensions between Shiites and Sunnites (some of them connected with groups supporting Al-Qa'ida or sharing their world view, like the Taliban) are extremely high and form a major security concern especially for Pakistan but also for Iran in her eastern Provinces.

2.4 Kurdistan

Iran is also entrenched in another sub-region: *Kurdistan*, which to our understanding is definitely part of the Middle East, although a caveat might be posed for the Kurdish regions of Turkey. The lack of a widely accepted geographical definition of Kurdistan is part of the problem. Secessionist movements among the Kurds have been a major security concern for all states involved, Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey alike. Unrest in Iraqi-Kurdistan however, seems to be very likely since the Kurdish population of Iraq is deeply estranged by what they see as the total ignorance of their legitimate claims for autonomy by the International community and the newly formed Iraqi government. One should not forget the importance of these claims, which have caused bloody unrest and civil war for more than two generations in Iraq.

The question of Kurdistan (and its ability to control the water flow for Syria and Iraq) brings Turkey definitely into the Middle East arena, but doesn't make her necessarily part of it given her various and deep-rooted connections with the West. NATO and the application for EU-membership delineate it clearly from the Middle East; although cultural, economic and historical ties remain valid. And Turkey has of course well known and outspoken security interests in Iraq: one is to prevent the dissolution of the country another one is secure that no independent state of Kurdistan may emerge.

2.5 Five Sub-Regions

Finally I suggest to amend the classic Middle East formula Arab states + 3 non-Arabs (Turkey, Iran, Israel) to the (Greater?) Middle East into Arab states, two persophones (Iran and Afghanistan) and Israel and to divide the Middle East to five regions, North Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, Persian Gulf-Arabian Peninsula, the Persophone world and Kurdistan. The EU has relations with each of these regions, as long as there are nation states, hence the exception of Kurdistan. The Euro-Med Partnership includes most of the North African and Eastern Mediterranean states; relations with the GCC, Iran, Iraq and Yemen are on bilateral basis; relations with Afghanistan are in the framework of the 2001 Bonn agreement following the end of the Taliban.

As a first conclusion, several adjacent countries and regions have to be excluded from concept of Middle East: Turkey due to its European and the ex-Soviet countries because of their Soviet legacy.[12] Pakistan whose security dilemmas and conflict potential is perhaps most intensively connected with the Middle East, should nevertheless be dealt with in the context of India, given its nuclear capability, the Kashmir conflict and last but not least its history. Other regions like South-East Asia, Somalia and the Horn of Africa and all non-Arab Muslim states of Africa are to my understanding rather recipients of Middle East conflicts than active contributors and therefore only loosely connected. Such a conceptualisation does not deny the

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[10] Fragner, Bert G.: *Die „Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens (ANOR 5),* Halle Berlin 1999.

[11] See Perthes, Volker: "Geopolitische Grundlinie im Nahen und Mittleren Osten," in: *Blätter für deutsche und Internationale Politik,* 6/2004 p. 687.

[12] This does not say, that for example Uzbekistan may not become part of the Middle East one day. This depends to whether future elites will be educated in the Middle East or elsewhere.

interdependence of conflicts in, say, Pakistan with Middle East countries like Iran or Afghanistan, but it helps to precise broader concepts like "Islamic World" or a supposed "Marrakech and Bangladesh"-region.

2.6 **Role of Iran**

Another conclusion concerns Iran: being involved in all sub-regions with the exception of North Africa is proof for her importance for the Middle East and resembles the historical role Persia had played for centuries or rather millennia. Relations with the EU are still friendly (but expected to worsen) and its Shiite denomination makes it a decided enemy of the al-Qa'ida-type Sunni Jihadists – in this case the West and Iran could even be natural allies! On first sight, Iran even seems to be in a relative strong position. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have ended the rule of old enemies like Saddam Hussein and the Taliban. But this geographical and cultural proximity is also an impediment: the mullahs simply cannot disengage from the Gulf region, notably Iraq or from Kurdistan and Afghanistan, even if they would like to do so. Any crisis and conflict in its vicinity touches Iran's security interests – most notable the sensitive issue of ethnic and confessional minorities (Kurds, Baluch, Sunnites etc.)

Iran is clearly competing with the US for power and influence in Iraq and Afghanistan; US presence effectively bars Iran from playing a dominating role in the Gulf region and elsewhere. Hence both sides seem to be eager to avoid open confrontation. Tensions and distrust remain high, however and an escalation is still possible.[13] Iran's attempt to acquire nuclear technology and its alleged connections with international terrorism is one reason for US (and not only US) distrust, US-Iranian history (Islamic Revolution, hostage crisis) and Israel's security concerns, are other reasons. Given Iran's relative might[14] and influence in the region a further worsening of the status quo concerning the USA and Iran could have destabilizing effects and repercussions especially in regions with notable Shiite minorities (Lebanon, Iraq, Gulf). Better relations on the other hand may cause the opposite. If so, one has to keep Iran engaged, even when its nuclear program turns out to be more serious than expected. At least a viable *modus vivendi* between the USA and Iran, since a rapprochement between them seems extremely unlikely, is a further precondition for any CSCE like process.

3. **TOWARDS A "CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST – CSCME"**

The Middle East Region has been identified as a region of major concern for the EU, the threat posed by al-Qa'ida, the general poverty and further population pressure cannot be ignored. The Barcelona-process, the focus the new EU Security Strategy gives to the region, new neighbourhood policy, contacts with the GCC, Iran and Yemen and last but not least EU financial support for Afghanistan and its commitment to Iraq, are witness for the EU's awareness of its responsibility. But both sides have to prove their commitment for a successful dialogue in order to meet the basic requirements for a dialogue that may lead to a possible peace process. First, the EU should restrain in defining Islam of what kind of Islam it wants to deal with (style matters!), second Middle Eastern partners have to be sincere about their respect of Human Rights and basic democratic principles; third, a serious escalation between the USA and Iran must be avoided and ways for confidence-building measures between the USA, Israel and Iran have to be found. Complicated and difficult as this is, it will be almost impossible to be initiated with a nuclear Iran.

3.1. **Can the CSCE serve as a model?**

As it is well known, what later became the CSCE and now is the OSCE started with a Soviet initiative in the 1950s. After serious setbacks (i.e. crisis in Hungary and East-Germany) and some preliminary work in the 1960s, the first "Conference on Security and Co-operation" (1973-75) could take place. The now famous three "baskets" dealt with confidence building measures in military affairs, economic and humanitarian issues. Neither of these baskets seems to be suitable to be copied immediately on a one to one basis. The situation in the modern Middle East is simply too different from cold war-Europe. One difference is that in the 1970s the Europeans, who have taken the initiative to organise the conference, were eager to involve the main outside powers (USA), whereas now, the initiative would be brought from outside to the region and Middle Easterners would certainly add such an initiative just to the long list of western interventions starting with the Crusades (or Alexander the Macedonian, for the Iranians). The principals guiding the mutual

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[13] See Friedman, George: "U.S. and Iran: Beneath the Roiled Surface," in *Stratfor Weekly* 23. June 2004.

[14] A discussion on Iran as a "winner" of the Iraq war see at Halliday, Fred: "America and Arabia after Saddam," www.openDemocracy.net 13 May 2004 p. 4f.

relations according to the Act of Helsinki I, II and V (*I Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty, II Refraining from the threat or use of force, V Peaceful settlement of disputes*) seem nowadays rather futile after regime change in Iraq – but almost anyone in the region would hurry to sign chapter VI (*Non-intervention in internal Affairs*).[15]

Some paragraphs of the "Document on confidence-building measures (…)" seem to be more promising at first sight: prior notifications of major and other military manoeuvres and military movements and the exchange of observers for example. But reality seems to be rather sobering; at last for the foreseeable future one shall not expect Israeli military observers invited for a special warfare exercise of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (*Pâsdârân*) to give just an obvious bizarre example.

3.2. **Regional Partnerships and initiatives**

League of Arab States
It has been often overseen, that regional experiences in international Organisations and confidence building measures exist. The most famous organisation is of course the "League of Arab States". Due to its pan-Arabic ideology and dedication to the Palestinian cause, its contribution to solutions for other conflicts in the Middle East Peace remains limited. It has however supported a discussion on the Arab Human Development Report and thus contributed to such important fields like the necessary reform of Arab societies and the democratisation in Arab states. The League's capabilities to force any of the Member States to reform are of course non-existent. The Arab League seemed further seriously weakened after the postponement of their last summit in March 2004, which was a telling example for Arab disunity. As an Arab League it wouldn't have covered the Iranians anyway.

Organisation of the Islamic Conference
The "Organisation of the Islamic Conference" offers a much broader panel.[16] OIC enjoys wider respect among Muslim member states than the Arab League. Founded in 1969 it serves ever since as a financier of Islamic scholars and Muslim education. Engaging OIC may be promising; albeit not being a security or policy related Organisation per se it has substantial influence. Heads of state visit its annual conference and the organisation's secretary general has apparently access to all heads of Muslim states. Its various committees address main shortcomings of the Muslim world, like the lack of inter-regional trade (Committee on Economic and Trade Cooperation) or social affairs. OIC even addresses marginalizing of women in a positive way. On behalf of an initiative of Pakistan's General Musharraf, it openly discusses religious extremism and fanaticism as an internal threat; and deals with it on muslim-theological base. It therefore tackles Islamist extremism of "al-Qa'ida" in a way no outsider could ever do. OIC is now in a phase of self-criticism and reshaping its agenda, major restructuring is to be expected. Much will depend on its new secretary general the Turkish Prof. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, head of a scholarly foundation in İstanbul.[17] It is obvious that the Turkish model i.e. that Islam and democracy are not contradictory but rather complimentary is the last "fashion" in the Islamic discussion and outdates the Saudi model.[18]

The OIC may offer a promising additional framework that one-day (hopefully) may add valuable contributions to the fight against terrorism on the ideological front and win hearts and minds over to the principle of democracy. It also may be able to mend or ameliorate fences of distrust between Muslim states and facilitate economic cooperation. But it is too early to tell any success now.

Gulf Cooperation Council
The "Gulf Cooperation Council - GCC"[19] as mentioned above is the most sophisticated of all Arab inter-state cooperation frameworks. Its members have signed an agreement on economy[20] and cooperate in security, military and many other important matters.[21] It was originally founded as an uneven partnership between the powerful Saudis and their neighbours on the littoral shore of the Persian Gulf directed primarily against revolutionary Iran. Nowadays the Saudis have lost a lot of their influence and the Emirates and Kingdoms can show more profile. A Cooperation Agreement between EU (EC) and GCC was signed in 1988, annual

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[15] Conference on Security and Co-Operation: *Final Act*, Helsinki 1975.

[16] http://www.oic-oci.org/ and http://www.oicistanbul2004.org.tr/news2.asp?id=26.

[17] On him see and http://www.oicistanbul2004.org.tr/news2.asp?id=26.

[18] Gent, Amalia von: "Saudischer Islam out, türkischer Islam in", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 24. June 2004; OIC was originally a Saudi-run organisation, Turkey's new role seems a promising change.

[19] Http://www.gcc-sg.org.

[20] Http://www.gcc-sg.org/Economic.html.

[21] Http://www.gcc-sg.org/cooperation.html#coop2.

joint meetings are held ever since. The EU plays in spite of its relative longstanding relations with the Gulf countries a less important role than in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. Geography is one reason, another reason is the wealth of the Gulf countries – they simply don't need economic aid; but the main reason is the fact that the Persian Gulf region is a zone of special interest for the USA.

Internal dissent in GCC countries on behalf of the Shiite population is definitely declining. This happen thanks to the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia: either side has ceased inciting the religious minorities in the other country (Sunnis in Iran, Shiites in Saudi Arabia). By the end of the 1990s, both have given up their rivalry on the leadership in the Muslim world and focused more on their own internal relations.[22] This general rapprochement made other steps possible like the solution of Saudi Yemeni border conflicts.

The positive example of Saudi-Iran détente is just one side of the coin. Iran poses still a threat to smaller Gulf countries; for today it is not the fear of Iranian meddling among the Shiite minorities, but rather Iran's strength and the re-emergence of Iranian nationalism, which perceives the Persian Gulf sub-region also as his own "zone of special interest". The Iranian occupation of three Gulf Islands and Iran's unwillingness even to discuss this matter, gives a telling example for her nationalism. This could pose a chance also: Persian Gulf states are interested in security, Iran in international recognition. The CSCE's first basket (confidence-building measures in military affairs) may be a viable start for engaging Iran positively. Such a start is of course only possible with a nuke-free Iran.

"Iraq-6" Consultations

Iraq remains the most pressing issue for the time being. The possible brake-down of the country seems to have initiated a sober and constructive atmosphere and a viable consultation mechanism among Iraq's neighbours. There is rarely any information available about the topics discussed and the conclusions drawn but it seems clear that the question of Kurdish autonomy is on the agenda. As much as is known, these talks are on ambassador level (civilians, military and security). Turkey and Iran have perhaps the longest experience of intervention in Iraq and divergent interests, they managed to this day to check their obvious differences and avoid open confrontation. Transforming the permanent consultations of the "Iraq-6" might form the nucleus of a CSCE-like process. Since its initiative comes from the region it may have a real chance of success. A positive effort of Iraq's neighbours may contribute to its stabilization and to the stabilization of the Kurdistan sub-region as a whole; whereas a breakdown of the security situation may provoke unrest in Iraqi Kurdistan with spill over effects to Kurdish populations elsewhere.

Although the suggestion of extending these talks to a 6 + 4 + 1 formula (neighbours, Quartet and Iraq) as suggested by Perthes,[23] sounds logical, there seems to be less sympathy for it on the side of Iraq's neighbours. It is obviously an attempt to talk seriously *entre nous* without foreign participation. On the other hand, the CSCE has begun also as series of conferences and one should hope that the "Iraq-6" consultation mechanism maybe somehow institutionalised. Keeping, say the OIC or the Arab League informed on Iraq, would create more transparency and offer an institutional framework for the Near East Quartet or others to learn about what the "Iraq-6" have decided, at least as long as they are unwilling to accept the 6+4+1 formula or a similar one.

4. **CONCLUSION**

I have named two preconditions for initiating a CSCE-like process (or even a CSCME): no more deteriorating of US-Iranian relations and the sincere will to begin with the implementation of democratic reforms. To many, it seems clear however, that without touching the Israeli-Palestine conflict a comprehensive CSCME shall never be possible. But it is also obvious that a solution, at least one satisfying the Palestinians and in due course the Arabs and Muslims as a whole is far from being achieved. Here one should not be too enthusiastic and without any false hopes: the Israeli-Palestine conflict will simply continue for the foreseeable future, demanding its solution, as a precondition is therefore a no-starter. On the other side it is clear that the democratisation of states and societies in the Middle East will not happen overnight but be rather a long process. In both cases backlashes are to be expected.

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[22] The bitter state sponsored rivalry between Sunnites and Shiites however continues to this day especially in Pakistan albeit privately financed.

[23] Perthes, p. 685.

OIC and Arab League may support the inner Islamic or Inner-Arab discussion on reform issues and may indeed offer a genuine structure for consultation and confidence building among the Arab and Muslim neighbour states, tangible results shall not be expected too soon however. But confidence-building measures can be started on a bi- and/or multilateral basis between the GCC and Iran immediately – and have to include the US in due course in order to achieve a viable peace structure. The same is true for Afghanistan, where Teheran's cooperation is as necessary as it is in the framework of the Iraq-6. In theory one could suggest the following (optimistic) model: existing dialogue – most notable Euro-Med but also GMEI continues of course; Afghanistan, Iraq and the Gulf local confidence-building measures pay off and a framework of consultations on sub-regional basis in which the USA and Iran are involved, emerges. This may lay the foundation for a more comprehensive structure in which finally, Israel and Palestine may also be included. In an ideal world, this mechanism could be what the European Security Strategy wants: "international organisations, regimes and treaties to be effective in confronting threats to international peace and security" but still there would be no possibility of sanctions when rules were broken.[24]

Having said this, the chances for such a structure seem rather meagre; if one takes Teheran's nuclear program into account and observes the mutual distrust between Iran the USA and Israel. A likely deterioration between Teheran and Washington could lead not only to a breakdown of the "Iraq-6" mechanism and contribute to further insecurity in Iraq, it certainly would lead Tehran to a more negative policy in Afghanistan and may ignite unrest among the Shiites in the Gulf region and lead to a confrontation between Hizbullah and Israel. It would be "a great tragedy where no one will win" to cite the Iranian parliamentarian and co-founder of Hizballah, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pour. Bearing Teheran's nuclearization attempts in mind, one has to conclude that a deterioration of the strained US-Iranian "non"-relations will most certainly happen.

Selected Biography overleaf

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[24] EU-ISS: *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy,* Paris December 2003, p. 15.

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