

NATO, the Mediterranean Dialogue
and the Broader Middle East Region
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The 'Internet Summit' in Tunis;
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NATO, THE MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE AND THE BROADER MIDDLE EAST REGION

BY NICOLA de SANTIS*

On 10 February 2006, NATO Defence Ministers convened in Taormina on the island of Sicily with Ministers and Government representatives from the seven Mediterranean Dialogue countries. The meeting was part of the enhancement of the political component of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), decided by the Alliance's Heads of State and Government at their June 2004 Istanbul Summit. It was the second Ministerial meeting which took place under the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue, following the December 2004 Brussels first meeting of the Foreign Ministers from NATO and the Mediterranean Dialogue countries.

The Mediterranean Dialogue was established by NATO

Foreign Ministers at their December 1994 Brussels meeting.

Nearly ten years after its establishment, Allied Foreign Ministers decided during their December 2003 meeting to undertake political consultations with MD countries, in order to consider, jointly, options for the further enhancement of the Dialogue.

The Deputy Secretary General of NATO, Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, conducted during the first fortnight of May 2004 high level consultations in MD capitals to discuss the possibility of establishing a more ambitious and expanded framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue.

At the same time he conducted, at the end of May 2004, political consultations in Brussels with Ministers from individual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to discuss the possibility of launching a new initiative reaching out to interested countries in the broader Middle East region.

Following those consultations, NATO's Heads of State and Government at their June 2004 Istanbul Summit, launched two progressive, complementary and individualised processes: A More Ambitious and Expanded Framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, reaching out to countries in the broader Middle East region.

These complementary, and yet distinct, processes represent the beginning of a long-term cooperative endeavour whose success will require the active participation of Mediterranean and broader Middle East countries, in a spirit of joint ownership.

Upgrading the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)

The Alliance's Mediterranean Dialogue was launched in December 1994, reaching out to non-NATO nations in the Mediterranean, willing and able to contribute to security and stability in the region. The overall aim of the Dialogue was and still remains today; to contribute to regional security and stability; achieve better mutual understanding between NATO and its Mediterranean Partners; dispel misperceptions about the Alliance among participating countries; and promote good and friendly relations across the region.

Additionally, it complements other international initiatives towards the region, such as the Euro-Mediterranean partnership of the European Union, the Mediterranean Initiative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Five plus Five Initiative.

NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue was since its inception characterised by a phased approach, with the number of participating countries growing from the five initial members: Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, to the inclusion of Jordan in 1995 and Algeria in 2000, which has also allowed the content of the Dialogue to evolve throughout the years, according to its progressive character.

Over the years, the Mediterranean Dialogue was progressively enhanced.

At their 1997 Madrid Summit, NATO leaders established



* Nicola de Santis
Head, MD & ICI Countries
Section, NATO PDD

Mr. Nicola de Santis is the Head of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Countries Section in the NATO Public Diplomacy Division, a position he was appointed to by the Secretary General of NATO

Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

Mr. de Santis joined the Brussels NATO Headquarters' International Staff in November 1991 and, following a number of international competitions, he served under five Secretary Generals in different communications and policy positions in the Office of the Secretary General, Office of Information and Press, in the External Relations Section, in the Outreach Countries Section and in the NATO Press Service of the Public Diplomacy Division; being responsible for the organisation and management of a large number of high level NATO projects, extending the Alliance's ties to opinion makers, political leaders, parliamentarians, academics and the international media, from NATO, PIP, Balkan, Mediterranean Dialogue and Middle Eastern countries.

He was the first NATO official in charge of outreach and public diplomacy activities for the countries of the Mediterranean Dialogue, since its establishment in 1994.

a political body, composed of political counsellors from all NATO nations, the Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG), having the overall responsibility for the Mediterranean Dialogue, under the supervision of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) which is NATO's highest level political decision making body.

Since 1997, measures for practical cooperation between NATO and MD countries are laid down in an annual Work Programme, which aims at building mutual confidence through active cooperation in security-related areas. This Work Programme comprises a wide range of activities including public diplomacy; civil emergency planning; science and the environment; crisis management; defence policy and strategy; small arms and light weapons; global humanitarian mine action; initiatives on WMD proliferation; and a sound programme of military cooperation.

While the practical cooperative dimension is primarily bilateral (NATO+1, or 26+1 as it is termed, as well), the MD also allows for multilateral political consultations (NATO+7, or 26+7) and bilateral political consultations (NATO+1, or 26+1), at Ambassadorial level under the Chairmanship of the NATO Secretary General, or at working level under the Chairmanship of a representative of NATO's International Staff.

In January 2002 and in June 2002, the North Atlantic Council agreed on a number of measures aimed at strengthening the MD in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks against the United States, including consultations between NATO and MD countries on terrorism.

In July 2002 the North Atlantic Council agreed that the strengthening and deepening of the Mediterranean Dialogue was among the highest priorities of the Alliance.

In November 2002 at the Prague Summit, the Allies agreed a number of measures to upgrade the MD, including an inventory of possible areas of cooperation. At that time NATO also offered the possibility to have (in addition to 26+1 and 26+7 meetings) 26+n meetings involving at least two MD partners at working level - or the level that is considered the most appropriate by NATO and MD countries - with the aim of discussing security matters of common concern such as, for example, terrorism and border security.

All of the aforementioned documents, in an effort of transparency, have been made public by NATO and can be consulted on its official website.

At their June 2004 Istanbul Summit, Allied leaders offered to elevate the Mediterranean Dialogue to a genuine partnership with the following objectives: enhancing the existing political dialogue; achieving interoperability; developing defence reform; contributing to the fight against terrorism.

These objectives could be achieved through enhanced cooperation in a number of practical priority areas listed in the policy document "A More Ambitious and Expanded Framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue", released by NATO at the Istanbul Summit.

These include: explaining NATO's transformation and cooperative efforts through joint public diplomacy initiatives; promoting military-to-military cooperation through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities, thereby improving the ability of Mediterranean Partners to contribute to NATO-led operations, consistent with the UN Charter; promoting democratic control of the armed forces and facilitating transparency in national defence planning and budgeting in sup-

port of defence reform; combating terrorism via effective intelligence sharing and maritime cooperation such as participating in Operation Active Endeavour; contributing to the Alliance's work on threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery; promoting cooperation where NATO can add value in the field of border security; enhancing cooperation in the area of civil emergency planning.

The Mediterranean Dialogue's political dimension may be enhanced by a number of measures.

The Secretary General of NATO, Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, has travelled to all seven Mediterranean Dialogue countries for high level consultations with the political leaders of these countries. It was the first time a NATO Secretary General conducted official visits to the capitals of the seven Mediterranean Dialogue countries, as a result of the enhancement of the Dialogue's political component.

Increased consultations at working and Ambassadorial levels in multilateral (26+7) and bilateral (26+1) formats, as well as through the organisation of ad-hoc meetings at ministerial level, such as the two which took place in December 2004 and in February 2006, the first one at Foreign Ministers and the second one at Defence Ministers level, or even at the level of Heads of State and Government.

In addition to existing tools such as the annual Work Programme, the Mediterranean Dialogue's practical dimension will be strengthened by the agreement of individual cooperation programmes (ICPs) between NATO and each country.

Additionally, it could be further strengthened by also making use of a series of mechanisms originally developed within the framework of the Partnership for Peace. This includes the possibility of support through NATO Trust Funds. It will also include action plans covering a wide range of themes that would form the basis for practical, issue-specific cooperation; the use of existing PfP activities and tools to improve the ability of Alliance and Mediterranean Partners' forces to operate together in future NATO-led operations; enhanced participation in appropriate PfP exercises; and enhanced cooperation in scientific and environmental fields.

In the context of NATO-led operations, one Mediterranean Dialogue country, Morocco, had until recently troops deployed in the NATO Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina and currently has them deployed in the Kosovo Force in Kosovo, while two more, Egypt and Jordan, also contributed forces to the NATO-led operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past.

At the Istanbul Summit NATO also offered Mediterranean Dialogue countries to join Operation Active Endeavour (OAE), the Alliance's maritime mission to detect, deter and disrupt terrorist activity in the Mediterranean. Three countries: Algeria, Morocco and Israel have indicated they will participate in OAE.

"...the North Atlantic Council agreed on a number of measures aimed at strengthening the MD in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks against the United States, including consultations between NATO and MD countries on terrorism."



Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) aims at enhancing security and regional stability through a new transatlantic engagement in the broader Middle East region, by promoting practical cooperation with interested countries, in areas where NATO can represent an added value.

NATO offers to achieve that through a number of areas for practical cooperation, all of which are laid out in the ICI official policy document, made public by NATO in the wake of the Istanbul Summit, including: by contributing to NATO-led operations, fight against terrorism, stem the flow of WMD materials and illegal trafficking in arms, and improve countries' capabilities to address common challenges and threats in cooperation with NATO.

A number of priority areas have been identified as well: providing tailored advice on defence reform, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations; promoting military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance in contributing to NATO-led operations consistent with the UN Charter; fighting against terrorism including through information sharing and maritime cooperation; contributing to the work of the Alliance on threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery; promoting cooperation as appropriate in the

field of border security, particularly in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons, and the fight against illegal trafficking; and promoting cooperation in the areas of civil emergency planning.

Countries may observe and, if they so wish, participate in selected NATO/PIP exercises or even contribute to NATO-led peacekeeping operations. Indeed, one GCC country, the United Arab Emirates, has already

made a significant contribution to the NATO-led operation in Kosovo. In addition, countries are offered the possibility to join Operation Active Endeavour. And they may take advantage of NATO-sponsored programmes and training opportunities developed by NATO, such as, for example, in the framework of the Partnership for Peace.

Based upon the principal of inclusiveness, ICI is opened to all interested countries in the region who subscribe to the aim and content of this initiative, including the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

NATO has had talks for the moment with six individual members of the GCC: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

At present four countries: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have joined ICI.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Mediterranean

Dialogue are separate yet complementary programmes, serving the same purpose, namely to build strong cooperative ties with countries in the Mediterranean and the broader Middle East. Additional countries could be invited to participate in both programmes.

A number of principles are common to both initiatives. Firstly: non discrimination. All MD and ICI partners are offered the same basis for cooperation activities and discussion with NATO. Second: self-differentiation, which allows for a tailored approach to the specific needs of each of our partner countries in the Mediterranean and in the broader Middle East, through the bilateral dimension. Third: the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative are "two way" initiatives. NATO seeks partners' contribution for their success. There is no imposition. NATO does not wish to impose anything to our partners in the region. NATO has no wish to get involved into the domestic dynamics of MD or ICI countries. The Alliance is simply offering our several years' experience in the different areas of practical cooperation in the security field proposed at the Istanbul Summit. MD and ICI countries are free to choose the pace and extent of their cooperation with NATO.

Public Diplomacy

During the political consultations of the Secretary General of NATO in MD countries and of the Deputy Secretary General of NATO in both MD and ICI countries, it became clear that the successful implementation of both the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue and the brand new Istanbul Cooperation Initiative required a public understanding of NATO, its policies, as well as the aims and content of MD and ICI, in the countries concerned.

NATO Allies, MD and ICI countries agreed that the best way to achieve this would be by developing a joint public diplomacy effort.

Such a public diplomacy programme is currently aimed at providing a better understanding of NATO's transformation, its policies and goals and especially the aim and content of the Mediterranean Dialogue and ICI; increasing the awareness of the positive elements that a partnership with NATO can offer; achieving better mutual understanding and dispelling any misconceptions about NATO in Mediterranean Dialogue and ICI countries; stressing the cohesive character of the two processes, taking into account the specific needs, priorities and sensitivities of the countries involved.

Clearly, the fact that NATO and each MD and ICI country cooperate together in practical activities will per se have a much more positive impact on the perception of NATO in MD and ICI countries, than even the most effective communication campaign could achieve.

At the same time, the Alliance has a very positive story to tell as a political-military Organisation.

During the Cold War, NATO was mostly known by the general public as a defensive Alliance. But since its establishment in April 1949, NATO was more than simply a military alliance. It was a political Alliance with political goals, as stated in the Preamble and in articles 4 and 2 of the Washington Treaty. That political dimension continues to be enhanced today.

With the end of the Cold War, NATO has profoundly transformed and adapted to meet the challenges of today's fast-changing security environment.

"..... forces to operate with those of the Alliance in contributing to NATO-led operations consistent with the UN Charter; fighting against terrorism including through information sharing and maritime cooperation;...."



Family Portrait of the Heads of State and Government at Dolmabahçe, Istanbul

At its November 1991 Rome Summit, NATO adopted a new and cooperative approach to security, moving from confrontation to cooperation in the security field, through the establishment of new partnership relations. The Alliance reached out to new partners in Central and Eastern Europe, in the successor States of the Former Soviet Union, in Russia, in Ukraine and, since 1994, in the Mediterranean region.

NATO is the only existing political and military multilateral, inter-governmental Organisation. It couples political-military capabilities to manage, successfully, unpredictable crises, to build new partnerships through a new cooperative approach to security, while continuing to provide for the security of its members.

The Atlantic Alliance has undertaken new missions to manage successfully the crises threatening international security, stability and peace. From Bosnia, to Kosovo, to Afghanistan, NATO has projected and continues to project security and stability, providing a secure environment in which the political, economic and social reconstruction of these countries can take place, in concert with other international organisations, with direct benefits for the large Muslim populations living there.

The venue identified by NATO for its 2004 Summit, which gave the name to ICI, is somehow a symbol of what NATO itself is. At the crossroads of civilisations, cultures and religions, Istanbul is a bridge between countries and continents.

It is indeed by multiplying the occasions of dialogue and frank exchange of views with people and governments in MD and ICI countries, taking advantage of the richness of our diversity, that we can work together to overcome misunderstandings and build trust. This will be an important basis to work together in order to address the security challenges we both face today, through a multilateral and cooperative approach to security.

This is why NATO has focused its public diplomacy efforts towards the region on opinion leaders, whose influence in their societies can help NATO's messages reach wider audiences. NATO's Public Diplomacy Division is working with key opinion leaders in Mediterranean and in the broader Middle Eastern

countries, organising cooperative projects with institutes of strategic and international studies, academics from universities, think tanks, as well as with parliamentarians and journalists.

It has also invited high level opinion makers and journalists to the NATO Headquarters in Brussels and co-sponsored a series of international conferences in MD and ICI countries. Moreover, once a year since 1995, NATO has organised an international brain-storming conference on security in the Mediterranean region, involving Ambassadors from both Mediterranean Dialogue and NATO countries, as well as international scholars. These Ambassadorial conferences have recently been extended to participants from ICI countries and are being also organised in MD and ICI countries.

Most notably, in May 2004, the NATO Public Diplomacy Division organised an Ambassadorial conference at the NATO Defense College in Rome, bringing together the North Atlantic Council with participants from government and academia from NATO, Mediterranean Dialogue and ICI countries. In March 2005 the NATO Public Diplomacy Division organised again at the NATO Defense College in Rome the first Ambassadorial conference bringing together the North Atlantic Council and representatives from government and academia from NATO and ICI countries. Throughout the year 2005 a number of other events were co-sponsored by the NATO Public Diplomacy Division in MD and ICI countries, such as for example in Algeria, Jordan, UAE and Qatar. Others are scheduled for 2006.

Significantly expanding NATO's public diplomacy efforts towards Mediterranean Dialogue and broader Middle East countries is crucial, since it is, every day, more evident that the success of NATO's cooperative activities with MD and ICI countries requires a correct understanding of both initiatives by the publics both in the Mediterranean and in the broader Middle East region. ■

The author's views are expressed on a personal basis and do not necessarily represent the official view of NATO and its member countries.