

## **TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

In a few days time American President George W. Bush will travel to Brussels to meet with the European Union member states and institutions. This will be the first visit to the EU by President Bush since taking over at the White House in 2000 and also his first trip to Europe since being re-elected in November last year.

All eyes will be carefully monitoring the visit in an attempt to identify whether an improvement in transatlantic relations is actually in the offing after the recent years of a significant rift in American-European relations.

Differences in transatlantic relations emerged after George W. Bush's State of the Union address in January 2002 when he referred to Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the "Axis of Evil". The escalation of coercive diplomacy against Iraq throughout 2002 and the decision to launch a military campaign in March 2003 split the United States from a large number of its traditional allies in Europe, especially France and Germany. The gradual process of nation building culminating in national elections in Iraq at the end of January 2005 has so far not succeeded in attracting the comprehensive European support that Washington desires.

The first visit to Europe by America's new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has somewhat signaled a more cordial tone in American foreign policy posturing. Skeptics however remain to be convinced that America is prepared to commence a new chapter that favours multilateral rather than unilateral foreign policy actions. If transatlantic divisions are to start to be seriously healed President Bush will have to put on a convincing performance in Brussels by stipulating that America is ready to share in both the decision-making and action taking phases of global relations in future.

The decision by the EU to take over the NATO SFOR mission in the Bosnia-Herzegovina last December with the launching of Operation Althea is a clear example of the interoperable type of strategy that transatlantic relations should be seeking to achieve on a global scale.

There is no shortage of global issues that the Commander in Chief of the United States and leaders of the EU and its member states must address in a concerted manner if stability in international relations in general, and regional relations in the wider Mediterranean area to be restored.

First, Europe and the United States must agree upon a comprehensive reconstruction plan for Iraq. It is clear that the piecemeal American effort of the last two years is not going to deliver the desired results anytime soon. Differences over the decision to go to war must not be allowed to prohibit a collective effort when it comes to creating a democratic and stable Iraq. No one doubts that this is in everyone's interest.

Second, Europe and the United States must project a common approach when it comes to the issue of nuclear weapons and Iran. Diplomatic steps taken so far demonstrate that this

can take place. Washington needs to make it perfectly clear that it is prepared to continue working closely with Europe to convince Teheran against pursuing the nuke option.

Third, and most important, the United States and Europe need to speak with one voice vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. References to the Road Map will not be enough to convince everyone that the international community is prepared to support a permanent solution to the six decade Middle East war. President Bush and his European counterparts must offer specific political and economic incentives to both sides and in return request rapid implementation of the Road Map with a focus on final status negotiations as soon as possible. Everyone is aware of the main stumbling blocks that prevented the creation of a Palestinian state after the collapse of peace talks in Camp David in July 2000. Seeking a compromise on such issues as the right of return of Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, water rights and boundaries is where transatlantic muscle needs to be directed if the window of opportunity that has emerged in the Middle East is not to be lost.

Malta's participation at this important international gathering is further evidence of the upgrade that Malta's foreign policy has experienced since joining the EU last May. Malta's geo-strategic credentials as an active actor in Euro-Mediterranean affairs is respected by everyone at a transatlantic level and the meeting will allow Malta to once again voice its concern at the escalation of violence throughout the Middle East. A positive outcome of the American-EU summit in Brussels is essential if relations across the Euro-Mediterranean area are to improve in the months ahead.

**Dr. Stephen C. Calleya**  
**International Relations Analyst**

**(Dr. Calleya is author of *Evaluating Euro-Mediterranean Relations*, just published by Routledge, UK).**

January 2005