

On the historic date of March 08th - International Women's Day, a large number of international affairs specialists gathered for the second consecutive summit in Vienna, Austria. This leg of the Vienna Process titled: "Europe - Future - Neighbourhood at 75: Disruptions Recalibration Continuity". The conference, jointly organized by the Modern Diplomacy, IFIMES and their partners, with the support of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, was aimed at discussing the future of Europe and its neighbourhood in the wake of its old and new challenges.[\[1\]](#)

Along with the two acting State Presidents, the event was endorsed by the keynote of the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Excellency Olivér Várhelyi. The first, of the three-panel conference, was brilliantly conducted by the OSCE Sec-General (2011-2017), current IFIMES Euro-Med Director, Amb. Lamberto Zannier. Among his speakers, the first to open the floor was French Senator Pascal Allizard, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Vice President (and its Special rapporteur for Mediterranean issues). Discussing regional issues of the southern Europe, its relations with the black sea and with North of Africa, this is what Senator outlined in his intervention:

As 2021 is the ten-year anniversary of the Arab spring, Senator Pascal highlights that a decade later, the events of the Arab Spring are crucial to the problems of today. Europe should reevaluate the region through European lens. Excellency Alizard criticizes Europe, due to the fact that it tends to take a step back from the region of the North African affected area of the Arab Spring conflict as there is an abundance of issues which are unlikely to be solved with ease. One must still do its duties difficult or not to question the region. Turning a blind eye to the problems there is something that Senator says Europe tends to do to elevate their consciousness.

However, one must look at the problems head-on. The biggest concern is that there is an explosive growth in population, a rise in radicalism and the Black Sea is what separates that northern conflict region of Africa and the Mediterranean coast of Europe.

French Senator Allizard attending the Vienna Process: Mediterranean - Theatre for future Europe



Image source: Modern Diplomacy

The Mediterranean Sea is known to be one of the most crucial routes to transport illegal cargo such as drugs, hydrocarbon and human trafficking into Europe, specifically through Spain and Italy. It's crucial for Europe to have a discussion and plan for this region as it is a necessity to keep Europe safe. The different countries along the Mediterranean must come together to create a cohesive, inclusive yet firm diplomatic strategy to answer all the challenges. The region along the Mediterranean Sea is a strategic area for Europe as there are many ships that come from around the world into those ports.

Senator Pascal proceeded by stating that the eastern Mediterranean region escalated after the discovery of significant oil and gas reserves. It is also the ongoing war in Syria, and the destabilization of the region with yet unsettled situation in Libya (with presence of multiple external players which generate instability).

Senator reminded the conference audience that Europe must also mention the actors in the Mediterranean on the European side;

“The European Union is a leading player, at least for the display of its normative ambitions,

also for its diplomacy of the checkbook and its discourse on human rights. However, the EU is not a power in the state and sovereign sense of the term, and it systematically curbs the sovereign aspirations of its own member states. The EU does not yet project itself sufficiently as an international actor capable of implementing a foreign policy. The EU appears, I believe, seen from the Mediterranean at most as a soft power which, in word, watches over the balance of power in the region. And the hopes placed in EU policy dedicated to the Mediterranean have been in vain, to the extent that they do not seem effective, neither economically nor politically, at least from my point of view, insufficiently. And if on the northern shore a few countries are interested in the Mediterranean area, we can see that this is not the center of European concerns and that no common vision is really emerging.”

Unification of that region is vital, because if the Mediterranean nations do not collaborate as a union and show their strength, control of that area could fall into the hands of Turkey, Russia and China. Turkey walks bold on the so-called Exclusive Economic Zone in Euro-Med, which would - if accepted - project its power in the Mediterranean, giving it a more prominent regional political role. Russia, which is once again becoming a key player in the Middle East, in the Black Sea area, in the Mediterranean and even in Africa walks bold too. Lastly, China which mainly projects itself through its trade, investments, and its bilateral agreements is pressing on maritime space too. Lately, Chinese military navy can be also seen.

French Senator Allizard attending the Vienna Process: Mediterranean - Theatre for future Europe



Image source: Middle East Eye

The navies of the regions are preparing for a hardening of relations at sea in a strategic area where world trade flows, but also now, for the exploration, the exploitation of hydrocarbons. This is why questions of sovereignty are once again emerging, naturally in the sense of our concerns.

Hopefully the new US administration will also pay attention to the Mediterranean Sea and not just the Indo-Pacific.

The only way to establish more of a grip in the Mediterranean theater is cooperation. This is also the key to success for all the European nations gathered around unified code of conduct and rule of law.

Concluding, Excellency Pascal stated that the European Union must recognize realities of unresolved conflicts that are interwoven, as well as to understand the new challenges that can threaten the very fabrics of the Union: security, demography, unregulated immigration. If not equal to these challenges, the universalist European model might lose its grounds beyond point of return - warned Senator.

****the above text is based on the informal French language transcript as per conference recordings, which may have nonintentionally caused minor omissions or imprecisions in the reporting.***

[1] This highly anticipated conference gathered over twenty high ranking speakers from three continents, and the viewers from Australia to Canada and from Chile to Far East. The day was filled by three panels focusing on the rethinking and revisiting Europe and its three equally important neighbourhoods: Euro-Med, Eastern and trans-Atlantic (or as the Romano Prodi's EU Commission coined it back in 2000s - "from Morocco to Russia - everything but the institutions"); the socio-political and economic greening; as well as the legacy of WWII, Nuremberg Trials and Code, the European Human Rights Charter and their relevance in the 21st century.

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