

EVENT SUMMARY

The EU-GCC Partnership – Security and Policy Challenges

Workshop held in the framework of the Al-Jisr Project

March 16-17, 2010
Berlin, Germany



BertelsmannStiftung



Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All



In the framework of the Al-Jisr Project on EU-GCC Public Diplomacy and Outreach Activities, the Bertelsmann Foundation with the support of the Gulf Research Center conducted a two-day workshop on March 16-17, 2010 in Berlin, Germany on the subject “The EU-GCC Partnership – Security and Policy Challenges.” The workshop brought together over 50 representatives of the academic and policy community from both the EU and GCC member states, including members of the European Commission and numerous policy planning departments.

The objective of the workshop was to take a close look at the status of regional security cooperation in the critical Gulf region, to highlight the main current security challenges, and to outline a series of steps that could be taken to improve or even help establish more institutional security cooperation among both the regional and external actors that have a stake in a stable regional security environment. To help in starting the discussions, a background paper entitled “Gulf Security: Between Balance of Power and Regional Cooperation,” which provided an overview of the political as well as academic proposals for organizing cooperation and security affairs in the Gulf, was delivered at the outset of the meeting. The accompanying presentation questioned the existence of a so-called culture of regional security and highlighted the need to overcome the zero-sum understanding of regional politics and broaden the security debate as such from the simple application of military security to the more inclusive concept of human security.

Despite the numerous proposals that have been put forward concerning a new regional security architecture, the key questions to be answered in this context remain open: Who should participate in such arrangements? What type of institutional structure would appear as most appropriate? And what kind of process should accompany the implementation of the required structure? In all of these instances, an underlying notion that was also put forward was whether the security environment in the Gulf region was indeed ripe for resolution given the current circumstances. .

In the following sessions, regional – from the GCC, Iran, Iraq and Yemen – as well as international – from the United States, Russia, India and Europe – perspectives were provided given that the Gulf region is affected by a variety of security interests of both domestic and external actors. There was a level of consensus in terms of the fact that the region is probably more in crisis at the current moment than since the Kuwait War of 1990-1991 and that, in addition, the complexity of the situation has increased. Contributing factors include the lack of consistency in US policy, a degree of foot-dragging by the European Union when it comes to putting forth the necessary political will, the absence of a dialogue across the Gulf where states can better articulate their interests and concerns vis-à-vis one another, and the failure to make any sort of progress on the Arab-Israeli peace process. What emerged out of these two sessions was that while there was general agreement on the types of challenges that need to be confronted – from the Iranian nuclear program, to the stability of Iraq and Yemen, to the security of energy supplies, to proliferation concerns, to the more general need for a sustainable economic and political development process – there was much less agreement with regard to the type of policy tools both available and required that could be applied to begin to tackle some of the challenges. While countries like the United States, for example, tend to take more of a military approach and try to build up a consensus among the GCC states only for a regional security architecture, the European Union, India and Russia argue for more inclusive arrangements and a greater emphasis on the political process. In addition, as pointed out in the discussion, all external actors have their shortcomings and as such there might be a need to look to other countries, such as Turkey, Brazil, South Africa and Japan, to play a role.

The second part of the meeting began with four separate working groups tasked with providing three concrete recommendations each that could be put forward to policy officials in Europe and the GCC to enhance regional cooperation. The working groups focused on the socio-economic potential for regional cooperation; maritime security; energy, the environment and nuclear issues; and soft security issues. As far as socio-economic areas were concerned, working group participants suggested the need to promote mobility between the EU and the GCC, for example, through student exchanges as well as increase the visibility of the EU in the region. It was further suggested to establish EU-GCC vocational training centers and to promote better intra-GCC Research and Development programs. In terms of maritime security, the need to break the issue down into specifics was mentioned as there are different aspects such as trafficking, piracy and criminality to be considered. In addition to promoting better regional cooperation, which can be done by focusing on issues of common concern, it was also suggested that overlaps in current existing structures be removed, and more effort be

placed into working out a proper legal framework for action against disturbing the maritime security environment.

Energy, environment and nuclear issues are other potential fields for cooperation, and although here specific proposals have been put forward in the past, what has been lacking are adequate mechanisms for the implementation of recent initiatives. Certainly, one key challenge is water resource management and it would be of consequence if the EU would show greater interest in such projects as the Water Desalination Center located in Oman. For energy production, the German contribution for the DESERTEC project was lauded and it was felt that further effort in this field would be advantageous. Finally, the establishment of a regional agency for the enrichment and production of nuclear fuel was suggested. In the final working group on soft security issues, a broad array of items was identified on which action would be necessary. This includes all aspects concerning trafficking (drug, human, smuggling), terrorism and its root causes, water resource management, border security, cyber crimes and network security as well as demographic imbalances. On most of these fronts, the GCC states are in need of capacity building and it was suggested that the EU draft a catalogue of expertise that could be made available to GCC governments from which these states could then pick and choose according to the urgency of the issue and their respective national interests. A working group to look into water management issues was also suggested.

In the final session on the role and expectations of the European Union, it was mentioned that while the EU-GCC relationship has significantly added more substance to bilateral ties than in any other period so far, more dynamism along with a re-assessment of the existing processes was required to ensure that the current momentum can be translated into concrete progress. From the European perspective, there was a call for the GCC states to be clearer about what they sought from closer ties with Europe, i.e. a reference to the GCC states taking greater ownership of the relationship. It was also stated that the capability-expectations gap which has hampered relations in the past might in fact increase under the new Lisbon Treaty as the new EU diplomatic service would initially focus more on structure rather than substance thus leading to a possible re-nationalization of foreign policy in Europe. While there are numerous fields in which the EU can add value vis-a-vis the challenges faced by the Gulf, the impetus on moving forward should come from within the GCC.

The workshop concluded with the realization that there are two distinct areas to work on: firstly, how to improve the workings of the EU-GCC relationship, and secondly, how to promote better regional relations among the littoral states of the Gulf in order to promote a more stable Gulf security environment. While many ideas have been put forward, the fact remains that these proposals remain largely on paper and little active implementation has taken place. This is mainly due to the fact that the discussion is focused too much on the end product, i.e. the structure and institutions of regional security cooperation, rather than on the process itself whereby the constituent elements engage with each other to determine the proper mechanisms to be considered that could in the end resolve issues of misperceptions and mistrust. Whether the EU as an actor in its own right can promote such a process remains an open question, although it was clear that only a combination of

local regional engagement alongside acceptable outside involvement would work to overcome the current stalemate regarding regional security issues.