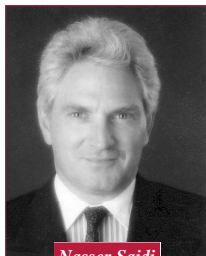


Building Bridges and Projecting Voice: The Euro-Arab Mediterranean Policy Institute

by Nasser Saidi

Dr. Nasser Saidi speaks to ERF on how a policy/research institution is created and why.



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The countries and societies of the Middle East and the Mediterranean are living the consequences of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the on-going violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the war on Iraq and its aftermath. It is no exaggeration that those momentous events and their dynamic unfolding have led to trauma and crisis in the region. September 11 led to the launching of an international, multi-faceted military, security, financial and economic war against terrorism. The focus of this war and its fulcrum is the Middle East, the Arab and Islamic world. As a result, the region faces increased insecurity and instability that may result in additional deterioration in economic and social conditions and their future prospects.

Faced with these challenges, the countries of the region, whether individually or collectively, have not developed adequate responses: neither leaders, governments, academia nor civil society have been able to respond by changing strategies and policies, addressing security and geo-strategic concerns or communicating and developing bridges and links with the West and the rest of the world. Importantly, recent initiatives –such as the Road Map, the US Free Trade zone proposal, the EU Association Agreements and various Security Council Resolutions- that aim to promote peace and prosperity and to end the conflicts that are draining the resources of the region and contributing to weakening its international economic and financial integration, have all originated outside the region. The countries and societies of the region have been passive or at best merely reactive to the various external to the region initiatives and policy proposals. The region has not developed its ‘voice’ and has not been able to project it. Clearly, official and public passivity has not been in tune or appear cognizant of their populations’ humiliation and the deep sense of frustration, of the accusatory finger of double standards and injustice pointed towards the West, and the general dissatisfaction with the low quality of governance in the countries of the region.

If we are to restore hope, build a future for our young and growing populations, address the frustration, tension and humiliation that is seething in the populations of the region, we must be pro-active, express the concerns and voice of the region and project it to the West.

Building Institutional Bridges: the Euro-Arab Mediterranean Policy Institute

The proposal to set-up a **Euro-Arab Mediterranean Policy Institute** (EAMPI) aims to deepen the links, build ties, promote dialogue at all levels and seek to increase the integration of the EuroMed partners, both North-South and South-South. It will work to stimulate debate and research on economic, financial, and political, security and other key issues in the extended EuroMed region, including the Gulf countries. The focus of EAMPI is on policy-makers and policy-making, striving to analyse, discuss and propose policies in the economic, financial, social, security and political domains, that will promote the objective of an area of shared peace, security and prosperity.

EAMPI would be a private, non-profit, non-governmental, non-partisan, regional policy research institute aiming at strengthening existing links, increasing the integration, building ties, fostering dialogue, and promoting consultation between the European, Gulf and Mediterranean partners on vital and strategic issues facing the region. EAMPI would be devoted to the study of Euro-Arab & Mediterranean economics, finance and strategic relations.

The Euro-Arab Mediterranean Policy Institute: Objectives, Instruments and Activities

The Euro-Arab Mediterranean Policy Institute’s overall purpose would be to bring together policy makers, experts and scholars with practitioners to:

- **Act as a forum** for both formal and informal meetings and consultations between policy-makers, practitioners, analysts and other interested parties to enable a dialogue concerning the region and its future. It would assist the EuroMed zone policy makers in their various tasks of meeting the challenges and risks of globalisation and increased regional and international integration.

- **Focus on the links between economics, foreign policy, national and regional securities, and cultures, and address the impact of conflicts.** It would aim at addressing the issue of conflicts and their prevention through economic means, instruments and development.
- **Analyse and advance integrated policies and reforms to meet the problems and challenges of the EuroMed zone.** EAMPI would focus on current policy issues, suggested policy changes and reforms, and be action - orientated i.e. capable of producing reports, articles and policy briefs in a timely manner, and of gathering experts for brainstorming sessions.
- **Foster the integration of the Euro-Arab & Mediterranean economies** by proposing policies and reforms to develop international trade in goods and services, improve labour mobility, international financial investment (portfolio investment), foreign direct investment, and the integration of the capital markets.
- **Assist EuroMed countries in unifying and integrating the banking and financial sector** between Europe, the Mediterranean and Gulf countries, in order to improve the Euro-Med’s banking, financial and capital market links.
- Initiate and develop the research and policy consultations aiming at increasing the **integration of the payments networks**, to reduce transactions costs.
- **Focus and address issues related to the establishment of a knowledge and information society in the region.** EAMPI would seek, in particular, to promote the use of ICT in the public sector and government, fostering e-Government.
- **Monitor and analyse the implementation of the EuroMed Association Agreements**, and other policy instruments aiming to increase the integration of the European and Mediterranean countries.

These objectives would be carried out through the following instruments:

1. **Create ad hoc Task Forces** to deal with pressing and current EuroMed regional issues in a timely, authoritative and non-partisan manner. They would explain the difficulties and describe the issues and present policy alternatives in a factual and non-partisan way and widely disseminate their conclusions and recommendations.
2. **Conduct policy-oriented research** to be undertaken by study groups focusing on the many and varied critical issues faced by the EuroMed region.
3. **Conduct regular Roundtables** to bring together experts and practitioners to exchange information and ideas in small group discussions with visiting leaders, policy makers and thinkers.
4. **Develop talent** capable of doing research and writing in both economics and related security, political, social or cultural matters.
5. **Provide training and develop the skills of policy makers and officials** involved in negotiating, implementing and managing the international opening up and integration of the region through the WTO and EuroMed Association Agreements.

Establishing EAMPI would serve two goals: (a) create and strengthen the link between policy-makers and professionals and the intellectual community, leading to more effective policy-making and implementation in the region; and (b) create a bridge and institutional link between the region and rest of the world, developing the voice of the region and fostering ‘home-grown’ policy initiatives that are more likely to be accepted and effective. The countries of the region cannot afford to waste another decade, to lose opportunities and widen economic and social divides with Europe and the rest of the world in an increasingly globalised world.

Nasser Saidi is a Lebanese national who obtained his Ph.D in Economics from the University of Rochester, USA. His thesis on Rational Expectations and Flexible Exchange Rates was published in the Garland Press Outstanding Dissertations Series. He is the former Minister of Economy & Trade & Minister of Industry and First Vice-Governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon. Dr. Saidi has served as economic advisor and director for a number of private banks in Europe and Lebanon, as well as a consultant to central banks and international financial institutions.