

### *What Can Europe Do in Iraq?\**

*Almost six years after the invasion of Iraq by US-led Coalition forces it is high time for a fundamental political debate in the European Union about the conflict, its consequences and Europe's own interests. This should lead to a consistent Iraq policy for the years to come. The process of stabilisation and democratisation of Iraq is of key importance to the region, to global security and to the transatlantic alliance. But a new transatlantic chapter could only be opened when Europe itself started co-writing the story, telling where and how to meet the United States halfway. How can the EU tackle the challenges in Iraq and help bring peace, stability and sustainable development to the wider region?*

Foreign policy leaders these days focus more on the economic crisis or more on Afghanistan than on Iraq. Iraq has gone below the “CNN threshold for violence”. There has been an unprecedented decrease in violence since 2003, provincial elections have been held successfully, there is a confident central government and no spectacular attacks have happened recently. Iraq will have a 90 billion dollar surplus in its budget which is extraordinary seen the fact that Europe and the US are in the red. Iraq has an agreement with the US on their military presence, national elections are coming up and we have seen coalitions in local councils which go beyond sectarian beefs.

Iraq is working with its neighbours and it gets visits from neighbours it works with: Iran and Syria. There are lots of challenges, and Iraq is aware of it. For the EU the theme is normalisation of the relations with Iraq. Improvements in security are there, but the situation continues to be fragile. Brussels has done quite a bit to contribute to improve the situation in Iraq. The EU's financial support to Iraq since 2003 amounts to ca € 950 million with a focus on assisting the Iraqi people in accessing basic services, furthering democracy and promoting good governance. The support has principally been channelled through the IRFFI – the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, administered by the UN and the World Bank, in cooperation with the EU's own departments responsible for financial assistance and humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup>

Following a request from Iraq and building on the European Commission's significant support during the 2005 elections, the Commission has mobilised a wide range of instruments to assist Iraq in preparing the provincial elections. €20 million have been

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/gulf-region/country-cooperation/iraq/iraq\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/gulf-region/country-cooperation/iraq/iraq_en.htm)

provided through the UN to assist the Independent High Electoral Commission for Iraq to strengthen its overall capacity including assistance from external electoral experts, assistance to enhance the role of civil society and support to election observation groups and media monitoring. Furthermore, the Commission is providing a new assistance package to Iraq of €72.6 million in support of the most vulnerable people and to help build the capacity of the Iraqi administration to provide basic services to the Iraqi citizens.

Normalisation is being realised through biannual programmes following the ICI<sup>2</sup> and the priorities of Iraq. The European Commission and the Government of Iraq will be holding another round of negotiations aimed at concluding a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) on 25-27 May 2009. This will be the eighth round of talks since negotiations started in November 2006, the most recent of which were held in Baghdad at the end of last February. During that round it was agreed to upgrade the draft Agreement from one on Trade and Cooperation to a more comprehensive Partnership Agreement.

The PCA negotiations will lead to the first ever contractual agreement between the EU and Iraq. The agreement will provide for political dialogue on bilateral, regional and global issues wherever the EU and Iraq have a shared interest in working together. Its aim is also to improve the trade arrangements between Iraq and the EU, to promote investment and to integrate the country in the international economy. Furthermore, it sets out a framework for continuing cooperation in many areas. The previous rounds of negotiations have been very productive, with many chapters already agreed in areas such as combating terrorism, countering proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cooperating on energy and promoting human rights.

It is important for the EU to increase their engagement as the US draws down their combat troops, because the transition in Iraq remains fragile: there are huge conflicts about oil distribution, the power struggle between regional governments and the state government continues and Kirkuk remains a contested question. Recently there have been standoffs between the army and various Kurdish military formations.

Important is also that Turkey remains committed to a European trajectory as long as the Turkish military feels that Kurdistan gives a safe haven to PKK fighters. It is also in Europe's interest for energy reasons to engage with Iraq because of its vulnerability to Russia's energy production. Iraq disposes of 10 percent of the world's proven oil resources and, therefore, represents a powerful ally.

## **EU JUST LEX**

The EU has done a lot to normalise the difficult relations with Iraq. More than €900 million have been spent, mostly by the European Commission, on a whole range of development activities and reconstruction efforts. Various visits have been paid to Baghdad and the EUJUST LEX (Rule of Law) mission<sup>3</sup> has been established a couple of years ago, on 1 July 2006. All these initiatives were laudable and useful, but it is simply not enough. The EU's coherent footprint has been rather limited. The EU JUST LEX mission is not very large; the training took place largely outside. Also it is focused on technical aspects. EU JUST LEX has to be bulked up substantially.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.iraqcompact.org](http://www.iraqcompact.org)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=823&lang=EN>

EU JUST LEX focuses on support of rule of law in Iraq. It started off in 2005 and it has been very dynamic and has changed over time as has the situation in Iraq. The much criticised out of country training has been organised born out of necessity but it turned out to be very successful, because it was able to show best practice to Iraqi professionals. However, now the security situation is improving it is time to change, to try to have a maximum of impact. The EU is not training basic level recruits, it has trained more than 2.000 professionals including judges and public prosecutors. The first small steps in-country are important because of Iraqi ownership and sustainability of EU training. In the end the Iraqis will have to arrive in a situation where the EU tries to respond to what they need. Training needs to be followed up by on site mentoring in a way that allows people to go outside Baghdad. That cannot be done out of Baghdad that is the only way we are going to make a difference. So far the Iraqi government has asked to continue this mission. But something more aggressive is needed like is done in Kabul.

The member states have agreed to a follow-up. However, one has to take into account that what the mission does is what is asked from the member states. The EU currently has 10 ESDP missions and JUST LEX has to be seen in connection with other missions. Sometimes member states decide to do something and then cannot deliver.

### **Regional framework**

Europe and the US should help develop the regional actors to build up a more functional and regional framework for further stabilisation. This is, however, easier said than done when one is faced with Iran's increasing drive for regional hegemony, its interest in playing off various factions against each other. But it is important to take steps beyond the technical agreements the EU has spearheaded recently. The EU should convoke a larger summit involving all the Gulf States' (GCC) heads of states and Iraqi and EU leaders on high level political footing - no such high level summit has ever taken place. It should focus on a regional security process between EU, Iraq and the Gulf states. The GCC member states are not interested in some kind of Helsinki Act process (OSCE). The EU has tried to have strategic partnerships with the GCC, but they seem to think that the EU is able to tell them to change what they do. The EU has to make sure that this is not what it is about

Within this structure it can be focused on a functional area such as border and maritime security because in that field there has been most progress in the discussion between various states. Maritime security there is both, a series of challenges (piracy) but also opportunities for cooperation. There is always the fear of an accidental clash of US and Iranian ships. This way one could establish some sort of maritime security centre ("Gulf Conflict Prevention Centre") which can help build confidence among the various actors.

How can the EU strengthen governance in Iraq and how can the Europeans work more effectively in the broader region? Without any doubt, the US is going to remain in the lead for the foreseeable future. On the political level, the UN will play a more important role. The EU could take over the NATO training mission (officers' training). The US pushed heavily for NATO involvement, but NATO is probably better served by focusing on the Afghan mission (building up Afghan security forces).

Finally, the EU should focus on border management and security. The EULUST LEX mission could be used to do this. Also, there should be a senior EU Special Representative, though it is pretty obvious that before the situation regarding the Lisbon treaty is clear, this is an unlikely thing to happen.

### **Conclusion**

Normalisation is happening and Iraq, the UN, the EU and the international community agree on the same ambitions: a unified, federal nation founded on COMPACT<sup>4</sup>. But normalisation is not enough; the stakes in Iraq are too high. The EU needs to go beyond the usual “boring” technical agreements which the EU is good at it. Looking for a structural framework which would move the EU beyond the usual PCA agreements – a Stability Act seems to be serious option. It remains a vehicle, a receptacle, the most applicable framework process the EU is already engaged in. And, finally, it is not suggested that Europeans should take over the combat troops. The Americans are now the crucial actor on the ground, they are now there for stability reasons and nothing else.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.iraqcompact.org](http://www.iraqcompact.org)