

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the joint visit of
the 79th Rose-Roth Seminar and
the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM)**

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

**Marseilles, France
May 11-13, 2012**

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its report on the visit of the 79th Rose-Roth Seminar, held in Marseilles, France from May 11 to May 13, 2012 and the visit of the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM) which was held jointly.

Canada was represented by Senator Raynell Andreychuk

OPENING SESSION

Michel Vauzelle, Chairman of the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, welcomed participants of the meeting and noted that the destinies of the northern and the southern flanks of the Mediterranean region are intertwined. The northern Mediterranean should not be regarded as a frontier between two civilisations, but rather as a part of a broader Mediterranean region. He also praised the role of the NATO as a defender of our common values. Mr Vauzelle additionally noted that the current French leadership's decision to revisit France's place within NATO, as outlined by former President Charles de Gaulle, was perhaps too hasty. France's global role, particularly vis-à-vis North Africa, could have been more productive if the country was not exclusively seen as an integral part of one political-military bloc, Mr Vauzelle said.

Loïc Bouvard thanked Mr Vauzelle for hosting the seminar and expressed appreciation for his frank remarks. While views on the scope of France's participation in NATO structures may differ among French politicians, the important role of NATO is unquestionable. Mr Bouvard also noted that one could hardly find a better place than Marseilles to discuss the developments in the dynamic Mediterranean region. Throughout its rich history, Marseilles has been and remains France's door to Africa and the Middle East.

Mr Bouvard highlighted the value of modesty when dealing with the MENA region. The fact that our experts could not predict an event of the Arab Spring's calibre shows that we have still much to learn about this region. The ultimate goal of the seminar is help identify areas where the Euro-Atlantic community – and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in particular – could provide assistance to the countries of the region facing formidable transition challenges.

Dr Lamers thanked the region of the Alps, Provence and Cote d'Azur for all its support for the seminar. He noted that this is the first time ever that a Rose Roth seminar had been organized in conjunction with the GSM Seminar. Dr Lamers noted that the Middle East and North Africa has been a key priority for his Presidency.

The President of the Assembly paid tribute to all those who believed that a better life was possible and had demonstrated the courage to act on that conviction. The people of the region are the ultimate arbiters of their fate, he said. The international community may be asked to help, politically, economically – and perhaps even, as was the case in Libya, militarily. What kinds of assistance should be extended must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Dr Lamers also joined Mr Bouvard in urging his Assembly colleagues to be humble, to listen carefully and understand the complex sensitivities of the MENA region.

The President of the Assembly also used the opportunity to call on the Syrian regime to accept the terms of the UN plan and put an end to senseless violence.

Fayez Al-Tarawneh, Member of the Jordanian Senate, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. He noted that both PAM and the NATO PA share the same values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Mr Al-Tarawneh stressed that PAM, a forum gathering parliamentarians from 28 countries of the Mediterranean region, stood with the peoples of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and mobilized its network of parliamentary diplomacy in order to provide immediate and long term humanitarian assistance, as well as legislative expertise, to facilitate democratic transition processes through constitutional reforms and fair elections. In particular, the Assembly has sent a high-level field mission to Tunis where it met with the President of this country at the onset of the Jasmine Revolution. In close collaboration with the UN Secretary General, H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, PAM maintained a channel of communication with Libya in the midst of the conflict, facilitating UN missions to the country and securing a humanitarian corridor to Misrata. The PAM Secretary General is also in contact with Kofi Annan as well as other important actors in the Syrian crisis. PAM has also provided a forum in which the Vice Presidents of the Knesset and the Palestine National Council (PNC), who are both also PAM Vice Presidents, meet regularly, thus facilitating the Middle East Peace Process. Thanks to the commitment of its parliamentarians, PAM has become a fully operational Mediterranean parliamentary tool devoted to promoting the welfare, safety and stability of Mediterranean citizens, Mr Al-Tarawneh said.

The seminar's keynote speaker Caroline Dumas, from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spoke on "Arab Springs: Opportunities and Uncertainties". She stressed that the wave of events in the MENA region have triggered far reaching changes in the region, including shifting regional balances and alliances. This has many implications, she said, and has added even more complications to achieving comprehensive peace in the Middle East. She also discussed the changing role of some key actors in the region, including the United States, the EU, France, Iran and Turkey.

While traditionally Western policy makers stressed stability as a fundamental policy aim, support for the status quo ultimately proved destabilizing. Pervasive corruption, oppressive and unrepresentative governments, mounting economic problems and rapid demographic changes had laid the foundations for a politically explosive situation. Some governments have managed to survive the ensuing maelstrom by promising reforms, others, however, resorted to repression violence and several of these, of course, have subsequently fallen.

The wave of revolutions has created an historic opportunity for the people of the region to become protagonists in fulfilling their economic and political aspirations; yet, uncertainties remain. New leaders, sometimes with little political experience, are faced with formidable challenges. The normal challenges of governing are further exacerbated by sectarian and/or ethnic tensions. It has yet to be seen if the rise of the parties emphasising Islamic values jeopardise the original goals of these revolutions. Ms Dumas concluded by arguing that despite uncertainties, the region's transformation represents an opportunity to mobilize new talent and build more prosperous and democratic societies. It also provides an opportunity for Europe to deepen partnerships with the region.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND ISLAM

The session was chaired by Senator Antonio Cabras (Italy), Chairman of the NATO PA Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group.

The speaker, Mr Fadi Hakura, Head of the Turkey Project at Chatham House, characterized Turkey's international role as aspiring to serve as a friend of the oppressed people and a beacon of democracy and freedom. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, he noted, is probably the most popular foreign political figure in the region. The speaker suggested, however, that the reality is more complex, and Turkey's foreign policy is also driven by other factors, including personal relations between Mr Erdogan and leaders of MENA countries as well as certain sectarian considerations.

Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has demonstrated that a party emphasising Islamic values can also be democratic. Mr Hakura argued, however, that the Turkish model is cannot easily be applied to Arab countries in transition. The Turkish model relies heavily on party leaders. The AKP also harbours significantly different economic views than most parties in the Arab world; the AKP is much more pro-business, while the Muslim Brotherhood is somewhat suspicious of free markets and foreign investors. He noted that many Egyptians, for example, now see Saudi Arabia as a model rather than Turkey.

Mr Hakura argued that Turkey nevertheless has a distinctive role to play in the region. He argued that Ankara's foreign policy is most effective when it enjoys good relations with all the key parties, including the Gulf Arab states, Egypt, the United States, the UK, Israel, Germany, Russia and Iran. Turkey's democratic credentials are the most effective instrument for exercising Turkey's influence in the region, the speaker concluded.

During the ensuing discussion, members of Turkish delegation to the NATO PA dismissed the idea that Turkey is backsliding in terms of democratic norms and human rights. They stressed that Turkey is a democratic and stable country in what is an unstable and volatile region. Turkey does not want to interfere in internal affairs of neighbouring countries, but merely wishes to play a role as an honest broker in order to promote democratic institutions and stability across the region. Turkey can also serve as an example of how Islamic values and democracy can be complementary, the Turkish parliamentarians said. Several participants also noted that one must be careful using the term "secularism", since it is a very toxic word in this part of the world and is often understood as atheism.

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN THE MENA REGION

The session was moderated by Senator Raynell Andreychuk, Rapporteur of the GSM.

Bernardino Leon, European Union Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean, discussed the changing EU perspective of the MENA Region. In Europe, the Arab Spring has essentially been understood as a positive phenomenon, even though events in Syria are very worrisome. Although the region may be shaky at the moment, eventually it should become more stable precisely because it is opening up. Authoritarianism was hardly a formula for long-term stability, he noted.

Those orchestrating the transitions will confront daunting political and economic challenges. International support is essential. The EU has a special role since it is the only actor that can be a partner in all three major pillars of transformation: security, development and human rights. Other international actors are also welcome to contribute, Mr Leon said. He particularly stressed that closer coordination of various international efforts is key to success.

The EU is living up to its responsibilities, Mr Leon argued. The EU's financial contribution to the region has increased from 6 to 11 billion Euros. The EU has created task forces to develop efficient cooperation with several countries in the MENA region. The EU's economic support to Tunisia's transition is particularly important; the EU is now working on increasing support to Jordan, Egypt and Morocco. The EU is also considering how it can best assist democratic transition of Libya and Algeria. Mr Leon noted that most of regional economies today are in a very bad shape, and more assistance to those countries is essential.

Sujata Sharma, discussed the evolving US perspective of the MENA region. She said that President Obama in his Cairo speech as well as the Secretary of State Hilary Clinton have made it clear that dictatorships in the MENA region have no future. While the United States, contrary to some allegations, had no role in triggering the protest movements, it firmly supports the demands of the people of this region for basic freedoms, human rights, gender equality and political democratisation. These are universal values, Ms Sharma stressed.

She also noted that the US is prepared for dialogue with the new regional leaders and is reaching out to all political parties, including to groups with which it has some disagreements. The United States is not deterred by the label "Islamist" bestowed upon some political parties in the region, as long as these parties demonstrate their commitment to human rights, gender equality and the rule of law. Ms Sharma also stressed that all international actors – the US, EU and others – have a role to play supporting legitimate aspirations of the people of the MENA region. Efforts should be redoubled to engage not just with governments, but also with entrepreneurs, civil society, academia and religious leaders.

The next panellist, Mr Gabriele Cascone, an analyst with the NATO Emerging Security Challenges Division, presented his personal views on strategic developments in the MENA region. He pointed out that reform and democratisation processes will be long and difficult, but they should eventually lead to a more democratic MENA region.

It is important to bear in mind that the situation across the region varies greatly he said. A tailored approach towards each country is needed. NATO is well aware of this and devised its Mediterranean Dialogue and ICI programmes accordingly.

Mr Cascone noted that the Arab League supported the UN-mandated NATO mission in Libya. This represents a fundamental change: until recently no one could imagine NATO being called upon by the Arab countries to support those challenging a government in the region. This does not mean that NATO has a role to play in regional security crises in the future, but clearly the Alliance is now seen as a much more prominent actor in the region. The Alliance has always been extremely careful when offering its support to the MENA countries. Yet given the Arab League's encouragement for a NATO role in the Libyan

operation, the Alliance might become less reluctant to offer its services and assistance in the reform process, Mr Cascone suggested. While the NATO Chicago Summit is expected to review the Alliance's strategy towards the region, in the speaker's view, NATO is not likely to become a major security player in the region and is more apt to play a supportive role, focusing its efforts in the region primarily on security and defence sector reform.

During the subsequent discussion with the panellists, participants asked how the EU intends to assist the MENA countries faced with formidable economic challenges, including high unemployment. Mr Leon replied that many of these countries have relatively strong economies and noted that the Euro-Atlantic community is not positioned to serve as a central catalyst for developing these economies. Direct financial aid is certainly less important than the opportunities that the West can provide, such as access to European markets and facilitating travel to Europe, especially for scientists, entrepreneurs and students. Assistance in recovery of assets of former dictators and their entourage is more than just a symbolic political issue: it also has a tangible economic value for the countries of the region, Mr Leon said. Mr Al-Tarawneh (PAM) noted that international financial assistance is not necessarily without negative consequences: accepting the IMF support, for example, generally compels recipients to make changes in economic and fiscal policies that they would otherwise not be willing to undertake.

ECONOMIC EXPECTATION GENERATED BY THE ARAB SPRING: A CHALLENGE FOR THE NEW ORDER

The session was moderated by Hugh Bayley (United Kingdom), Vice-president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

The first speaker of the session, Ambassador Richard A. Boucher, Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD), discussed economic conditions and social change in the MENA region. According to the speaker, changes that have occurred in the Arab world have exposed many of the region's problems, but also present new opportunities to carry out substantial reforms that could spur future economic growth. The most significant challenge the region confronts is the disproportionate weight of the state in national economies and the lack of space for the private sector. Several countries are overly susceptible to oil and food price fluctuations. The labour market is inflexible, making it difficult for new people to find a job and contributing to the growth of shadow employment. Women and youth are clearly underemployed. 80% of women are excluded from the work force, which means that these countries are missing out on an enormous pool of talent.

On the positive side, the potential for economic growth is significant thanks, in part, to the proximity to European markets and the abundance of young, dynamic and relatively well-educated people in these societies. In addition, the region is rich in energy resources: not just oil and gas, but also solar energy – a resource that ought to be more fully exploited, Ambassador Boucher said. Tourism is another potential growth sector, not least because the region is geographically easily accessible to Europe.

Ambassador Boucher described the ways in which the OECD is assisting MENA countries in developing economic reform programs. He stressed that international assistance and co-operation programmes should focus on economic liberalisation designed to unleash

private initiative and supporting professional re-training projects. Bloated governance mechanisms should be reduced and modernised, in part by employing modern information and communication technologies and by tackling corruption. If systemic reforms are implemented, these countries could position themselves to become “world-class economies”, Ambassador Boucher noted.

The second panellist, Mats Karlsson, Director for the Center for Mediterranean Integration, focused on transformation and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area. He suggested that while the MENA countries have a formidable political and economic reform agenda ahead of them, they will not succeed without a concurrent integrational agenda and without linking their national economies to international value chains. These countries trade very little with the outside world: if one excludes hydrocarbons, their combined exports are comparable to that of Switzerland alone. He suggested that freer access to European markets would contribute significantly to the development of competitive and diversified economies in the southern Mediterranean region.

The MENA countries also need to remove intra-regional trade barriers as the level of intra-regional trade is negligible. It is critical to promote freer movement not only of goods, but also services, labour and capital across the region. The MENA region has much to learn from the integrational experiences of other regions including Europe. Job creation directly correlates to a higher degree of international integration, Mr Karlsson argued. Furthermore, regional economic integration would only reinforce the need for structural economic reforms across the region and would effectively counter the negative image of free market economy, which, under the old regimes, was far too often associated with “crony capitalism”.

An ambitious reform agenda requires fiscal space which can be acquired only by revisiting old subsidy policies, particularly fuel subsidies. These supports consume an estimated 3-5% of GDP in many MENA countries, and their economic effects are highly distorting and undermine the region’s growth prospects. Both Mr Karlsson and Ambassador Boucher criticised the universal character of fuel and food subsidies which have failed to distinguish those in need from those who have no need for subsidies. They both recommended that the region’s governments switch to more targeted subsidies to assist the weakest members of society.

During the discussion, Said Chbaatou (Morocco) pointed to significant philosophical differences between the Western and Islamic worlds: the West views economic matters only through the lens of certain macroeconomic indicators, while people of the MENA region are likely to consider other, less measurable, aspects of economic life. Given the on-going economic difficulties in the Western world, Mr Chbaatou believed the Western model had serious flaws, and therefore should not be copied blindly. Mr Karlsson partly agreed that there are different ways to gauge economic success and he cited the Chinese model as an example. That said, all of these models are “integrational” and based on the system’s capacity to facilitate the exchange of goods, services, capital and labour. He challenged the MENA region to embrace this “integrational” approach and, in effect to become a “new BRIC”.

SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

The seminar continued the next day with the session dedicated to the developments in the Middle East. The session was chaired by Jean-Michel Boucheron (France), former Vice-president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and former Chairman of the GSM.

The first speaker, Professor. Eric Hooglund from the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University, discussed the Iranian perspective on the Arab uprisings through the lens of the Iranian media. He argued that several narratives have emerged in the Iranian media reflecting markedly different perspectives. Mr Khamenei expressed the 'official' Iranian interpretation of these events in April 2011, when he stated that the uprisings embodied 'Islamic objectives and orientation'. The Iranian leadership saw these events either as inspired by Iran's own revolution in 1978-79 or as a reaction to Western-imposed dictators. At the same time, non-official narratives have also emerged, claiming that the uprisings were inspired by the 2009 protests in Iran and represent a genuine popular yearning for freedom and democracy. For different reasons, the Iranian media has largely welcomed the Arab uprisings. It has approached events in Syria in a very different manner. Dr. Hooglund suggested that there is no consensus, among the Iranian leadership as to whether Alawis should be considered legitimate members of the Shia sect or heretics. Dr. Hooglund concluded by saying that Iran has not become a model for the countries of the region due to the distinction between Arab and Iranian nationalism as well as sectarian factors in Iran's foreign policy.

Dr Alan George, discussed developments in Syria and their impact on the Arab world. He noted that the case of Syria is more complex than that of Libya: the former is much more heterogeneous than the latter in terms of ethnic and religious composition. The legacy of 'Greater Syria' should also be taken into account: the current Syrian borders do not conform to what many Syrians consider their historic borders and many leaders in Damascus have never fully accepted the separation of Lebanon and other territories from their sovereign control. It is important not to compare the situation in Syria with that of Libya. Bashar al-Assad had – and still has – more allies than Gaddafi, including Iran, Hezbollah, Russia and China. Bagdad is also increasingly well disposed towards al-Assad as a result of closer relations between Iran and Iraq and a common enemy – Sunni Jihadist fighters moving across the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Taking all these factors into account, Dr George said that it would be mistaken to expect the armed conflict in Syria to end any time soon. Both sides view this conflict as a matter of survival; each side fears annihilation should the other prevail. At the time of the seminar, the conflict had resulted in the deaths of an estimated 13 thousand people, with roughly 220 thousand Syrians incarcerated and 65 thousands missing, according to the Syrian opposition. Instability is providing fertile ground for jihadist extremists, and a humanitarian catastrophe is almost inevitable unless the international community takes action. Dr George called for an "intelligent international intervention" which would shorten the conflict, make it less bloody and 'less Jihadist' in character. Several participants, however, worried that the Syrian opposition was too fragmented and that an intervention might only trigger further instability.

The next speaker, Lahcen Bijjeddigen, Vice-president of the Assembly of Councillors, Morocco, praised the Arab Awakening as a manifestation of the people's determination to

take their future in their own hands. The Moroccan people, he suggested, believe in the wisdom of their Tunisian, Libyan and Egyptian brothers, and hope that these countries will develop into true democracies in a peaceful manner. The Moroccan government, he said, has undertaken serious measures to meet the demands of the people, to strengthen democratic mechanisms and to protect human rights, including gender rights. Mr Bijjeddigen also expressed his deep regret concerning the drama unfolding in Syria. Morocco supports the 'Annan plan'. The speaker also called on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to help implement the Arab League's resolutions on Syria. He noted, however, that security cannot be achieved by force alone; civil society should play a bigger role in transition. Mr Bijjeddigen also stressed that one should not overlook other threats in the region – the problem of Palestine and Israel's continuing violation of existing agreements.

The seminar continued with a discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The two guest speakers –Sammy Ravel, and Ilan Halevi,– both called for efforts to break the current stalemate in peace talks. The discussions, however, highlighted the profound divergences between both sides on key issues relating to the delineation of borders, Israeli settlements, the return of Palestinian refugees, internal divisions among Palestinians and the role of Hamas, among others.

Mr Ravel warned that his country faces myriad threats including rockets attacks from Gaza, terrorism inside its borders and an existential threat arising out of Iran's nuclear programme. Despite these challenges, there is a political consensus in Israel that any final settlement ought to include a two-state solution, he assured participants. He also stressed that the Arab uprisings provide an opportunity to build peace in the region and reiterated Israel's support for all those who seek democracy and dignity. Uncertainties exist however, and the stability of the region will depend to a large extent on the outcome of the on-going struggle between democratic and radical forces in the Arab world. The international community should be open to dialogue with new governments in the region as long as certain red lines – including protection of minorities, gender rights and observation of peace accords with Israel – are not violated.

On the question of Palestine, Mr Ravel reiterated Israel's willingness to compromise. All parties in Israel support creation of a Palestinian state. Israel has imposed a moratorium on settlement building. It also launched a number of economic development projects, believing that a strong economy is an essential precondition for peace. Palestinians living in Israel enjoy all fundamental human rights and freedoms. Unfortunately, Mr Ravel said, Palestinian leaders are still not ready to recognise the state of Israel. The speaker urged the Palestinian authorities to resume negotiations with Israel without preconditions.

Palestinian representatives strongly disagreed with some of the points Mr Ravel made. In particular, they challenged Israel's human rights record and commitment to democratic norms that do not seem to apply to Palestinians living there. They also argued that the rise of Hamas is a result of Israel's reluctance to settle issues through negotiations. Mr Al-Tarawneh, President of PAM, said that the Arab world is prepared to fully recognize the state of Israel, but within borders determined by earlier international treaties.

Some members of the Assembly, however, urged Israel's neighbours to respect its right to sovereignty and security. They regretted that the rhetoric used the Palestinian media with

regard to Israel which is often extremely hostile. They also noted that the Euro-Atlantic community and Israel share the same values.

Mr Halevi fully agreed that negotiations are the only way forward, but said that for talks to be fruitful they should be based on earlier international agreements, including the Oslo Accords. The Israeli settlements in Palestine are not only illegal from an international legal perspective, but they also constitute a major obstacle in the negotiations – something that the US Administration fully recognises.

Mr Halevi indicated that the government in Palestine is dedicated to the goals of non-violence, improved governance, economic development, bringing the West Bank and Gaza under one jurisdiction and strengthening diplomatic outreach. Mr Halevi mentioned Palestine's recent achievement of becoming a member of UNESCO. The key, he said, is to exert non-violent pressure on Israel. He also called on all sides to refrain from demonising their counterparts. Although he is a representative of Fatah, Mr Halevi maintained that reconciliation with Hamas was necessary for the sake of a unified and pluralist Palestine. Ignoring Hamas would be counterproductive, particularly as this organization has now adopted a more moderate stance and the majority of its members support the principle of non-violence, Mr Halevi said.

The speaker ended his presentation by calling for NATO to secure the borders between Palestinian lands and Israel, even prior to any final delineation of borders produced by an eventual peace settlement. Mr Halevi conveyed this proposal on behalf of President Abbas, who, he said, believes that, were NATO to undertake such a mission, it would make a genuine contribution to peace in the Middle East.

THE ARAB SPRING: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

This session, chaired by Senator Nathalie Goulet (France), a member of the French delegation to the NATO PA, featured a presentation made by Fatiha Dazi-Héni, who spoke on the impact of the Arab Spring on the Gulf countries' regional policy.

Ms Dazi-Héni noted that the fall of President Mubarak and his 'abandonment' by his principal ally the United States had traumatized leaders of other US allies in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, in particular, began raising questions regarding its status as one of the key pillars of the US foreign policy in the region. When threatened, the six Gulf monarchies tend to tighten links among each other– hence the recent initiatives to transform the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and endow it with a stronger voice on matters of defence and security.

The speaker mentioned the proactive role that Qatar has been playing. This is a small country, but it sits on the world's third largest reserve of natural gas. Using diplomacy, financial power and Al Jazeera, Qatar is able to punch above its weight in the Arab world. It is partly filling a vacuum created by Egypt's current inward focus. Qatar is helping to articulate the ambitions of the Arab Spring, which is ironic because it is one of the more autocratic countries in the region.

Ms Dazi-Héni also discussed the failed uprising in Bahrain, where the Shia majority feels that it suffers discrimination. She argued that the uprising has socio-economic and political rather than sectarian roots. However, Saudi Arabia saw the insurrection in Bahrain as

reflecting, at least in part, Iranian ambitions in the region. Saudi Arabian leaders feel that the US has partly abandoned them and so they have pushed for a stronger GCC as a tool to counter Iranian ambitions. The GCC was also employed to settle the conflict in Yemen. The consolidation of Saudi- and Iranian-led blocs in the region is an important if not fully appreciated consequence of the Arab Spring, Ms Dazi-Heni argued. The tension between these two blocs is increasing, particularly as a result of the Syrian conflict.

According to the speaker, Saudi Arabia's internal situation ought to be watched closely. As long as oil prices are high, that country will have sufficient capital to buy off discontent and focus its energies on the region. However, some worrisome structural problems are building up in the country's economy and society. Unemployment is rising and Saudi Arabia's young people find it increasingly difficult to pursue meaningful careers. The use of modern communication technologies is growing, spreading awareness among the people of the opportunities they might be missing under the current political system. While regime is still very strong and a mass protest movement is unlikely in the near future, the underlying trends should not be neglected and potential instability in Saudi Arabia should not be ruled out, Ms Dazi-Heni said.

CHANGING SOCIAL DYNAMICS: WOMEN, YOUTH AND NEW MEDIA

The session was chaired by Senator Joëlle Garriaud-Maylam (France), member of the French delegation to the NATO PA.

The presentation of the first panellist, Dr Maria Holt, Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster, was titled "Women and the Arab Spring". She said that the Arab Spring has challenged the stereotypical view of Arab women as 'veiled, homebound and uneducated': women's role in the uprisings has been consequential. However, it is not yet clear if women's activism will translate into enhanced political power. Dr Holt stressed that women's participation was not a new phenomenon but rather a continuation of female activism in the Arab world.

The speaker also argued that it is the tradition of patriarchy, not Islam, that lies behind the oppression of women. Many women in the Arab world have been nervous about appearing in the public space for fear of social disapproval or even physical violence. She noted that in order to improve their status in the society, some Arab women prefer to adopt Islamic discourse instead of Western feminist jargon.

Dr Holt regretted that although there has been some progress, women in most Arab countries lag behind men in terms of literacy, participation in the work force and presence in the political sphere. The representation of women in national parliaments in the Arab states is around 10% - the lowest figure in the world. Only 2% of the members of the new Egyptian parliament are female. The virtual absence of the female voice in state affairs is a common feature in the region.

The speaker also criticised Western policies toward the region prior to the Arab Spring. These policies did little to make the MENA region more democratic, and their support of autocratic regimes contributed to consolidation of forces that tend to exclude women. Dr Holt urged Western countries to learn from these mistakes and to support the choices Arab women make, even if these choices have Islamic connotations.

The second panellist, Lin Noueihed, journalist and Middle East specialist with Reuters, focused mostly on the media situation in the region. She argued that the media space has been opening up slowly already prior to the Arab Spring, despite the old regimes' attempts to control the media through censorship or by owning media outlets.

Independent satellite TV stations have mushroomed in the region. The role and popularity of Al Jazeera is difficult to overestimate. These developments have recast the way people consume news and perceive politics in their own countries. According to surveys, 85% of population in the MENA region rely on TV for information, and 78% watch Al Jazeera.

The Internet has become an important source of information. It is difficult for governments in the region to control the myriad bloggers and individual users exchanging information online. The use of smartphones has also grown remarkably, allowing people to receive up-to-date information anywhere. These trends began years before the Arab Spring, especially among the youth – the majority of the Arab population who already grew up in the world of satellite TV and the Internet.

Social media did galvanise activists as well as instantly and cheaply reaching significant numbers of people all over the world and it exposed government sponsored violence. Nevertheless, Ms Noueihed questioned the use of terms such as “Twitter” or “Facebook revolutions” in reference to the Arab uprisings. In 2010, Facebook penetration in the region was only 6%. Even in Tunisia, only 17% of the public used Facebook by the end 2010. Drastic measures to shut down the Internet were taken during the uprisings, but the demonstrations were not undermined. One should not therefore overestimate the role of the Internet and social media, the speaker said.

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN THE MENA REGION

The session was chaired by Julio Miranda Cahla (Portugal), Vice-president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Security sector reform is a burning issue for the majority of the counties in the MENA region, according Barah Mikail, Senior researcher DCAF. The sense of insecurity in the region is growing, and the role of the military in this context ought to be closely monitored. With the exception of Libya, Iraq and Bahrain, the military is often the only force that can act in order to ensure public safety at the times of profound transformation. In a democratic society, the army should withdraw from politics as soon as it is possible. However, it remains to be seen if the armed forces of the Arab countries will lower their profile as transition progresses.

The speaker predicted that military will remain a significant factor in foreign and domestic politics of most of the Arab countries. The Euro-Atlantic community should continue to cooperate with them on a number of issues ranging from military training to logistics, but co-operation projects must be executed in a prudent manner taking into account the sensitivities and tensions between the military and some segments of society.

Mr Simon Lunn, asked if the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's experience in supporting democratic oversight of the armed forces in Eastern and Central Europe might offer potential lessons for relations with the MENA region. He noted that transitions of the CEE and MENA countries are entirely different in time, circumstance and geography. It is worth

noting as well that the countries of the region are not aspiring to NATO membership. This is a crucial distinction as it determines the degree to which these societies are prepared to embrace Western offers of advice and assistance. It is also important to remember that in several countries in the region NATO is viewed with deep suspicion. There are nevertheless certain similarities and areas of commonality.

The most obvious potential parallel with the Assembly's experience in the 90's lies in the requirement for defence and security sector reform. The countries of the region face similar problems in civil and military relations insofar as their armed forces have developed apart from the societies they protect. They have each in their own way occupied special roles and positions in which democratic oversight and accountability has been entirely lacking and unwanted at least by the military. There is also the same dearth of qualified civilians with defence experience and parliaments with very limited powers of scrutiny and oversight, and even less experience and expertise to exercise it.

Mr Lunn noted that there is always room for parliamentary diplomacy, i.e. reaching out to the parliaments of the region, including them in regular activities and facilitating contacts and dialogue. But this requires diplomacy and sensitivity to local and regional sensibilities. Mr Lunn also highlighted the importance of co-ordination with other international organisations in providing assistance in order to avoid duplication and maximise the effectiveness of the contributions.

Mr Lunn noted that it is possible to identify a role for the NATO Assembly in which it would make available its collective resources to these countries and their parliaments during this crucial period of transition by facilitating their closer involvement in regular or special activities. As in the 90's, an Assembly approach could support or reinforce NATO's own partnership programme, in this case the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Gulf Cooperation Initiative, particularly those aspects which relate to soft security. This could follow the experiences of the 90's adjusted or tailored to the specificity of the region and to the particular countries.

The situation in the MENA region is one of fluidity, change and opportunity. Progress will ultimately depend on the creation of a stable and secure environment. The Assembly's experience in helping create the conditions for such an environment could again be relevant. Some form of response would be in the interests of all concerned and to do something would in this instance be better than to do nothing, Mr Lunn said.

CLOSING SESSION

The final session of the seminar was chaired by Senator Antonio Cabras (Italy).

Dina Mehlem, representing the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), discussed what Europe can do to provide assistance to the parliaments of the MENA region. She stressed that prior to the Arab Spring, democratic assistance to MENA parliaments was a challenging task because most parliaments lacked real pluralism and acted as rubber stamp for their governments. Following the Arab Spring, the role of parliaments has increased considerably. Most parliaments are engaged in reform processes to ensure that they live up to their citizens' expectations.

The region's parliaments face a number of challenges, including the high number of inexperienced new MPs having to deal urgently with an overloaded agenda. The lack of properly trained parliamentary staff is another serious issue.

The organisation Ms Mehlem is representing – WFD, funded by the British government – is managing a large number of projects in Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. For instance, WFD helped to establish advisory units in the parliaments of Iraq and Lebanon designed to support MPs with expert analysis and studies. WFD also helps the parliaments of the region to develop consolidated parliamentary ethics systems in order to enhance transparency and fight corruption. WFD programmes also help these parliaments to develop and strengthen their oversight and accountability mechanisms.

In her concluding remarks, Ms Mehlem stressed that parliamentary assistance programmes must be designed in close consultation with MENA parliaments and tailored specifically to the needs of the countries concerned. These programmes also require understanding of the overall governance context. Good political analysis needs to be undertaken in the planning phase. In order to achieve meaningful results, long-term commitment is needed, Ms Mehlem said.

François Duluc, Chief of Parliamentary Assistance at the National Assembly of France, discussed the French experience in co-operating with the MENA parliaments. France has a very long history of parliamentary relations with the region, Mr Duluc said. The National Assembly, together with the Senate of France, provide considerable technical and legal support to most of these parliaments, with the exception of Iran, Iraq and Libya. In case of the latter, France is closely following the developments and is prepared, if there is a request, to extend its assistance to the new parliament of Libya after the upcoming elections. The assistance is mostly intellectual rather than financial, because most of these countries are not impoverished.

The speaker also noted that France works directly with MENA parliaments rather than through international organisations or NGOs. The assistance is provided not only by experts and senior officials working in the National Assembly, but sometimes by MPs – including former MPs. France's approach is pragmatic, not ideological; it does not try to impose its own model of parliamentary democracy on these countries, Mr Duluc said.

Mohamed Abbou, Vice-president of the Assembly of Representatives of Morocco, presented the Moroccan perspective on the development of parliamentary system. He highlighted the importance of changes occurring in the region where people rose to protect their dignity and the right to participate in the decision-making process. Morocco has opted for the pluralist model, based on extensive political, economic and human liberties. The King of Morocco's willingness to listen to the people and to meet their demands ensured that the democratic legitimacy was secured. After a thorough and inclusive debate, a new constitution was adopted in 2011. It vested more powers in parliament and emphasised the value of tolerance. The new Constitution enjoys enormous support of the people, Mr Abbou said.

He also noted that the Moroccan parliament is eager to learn from the experience of other parliaments. Through seminars, workshops, training courses and other assistance programmes conducted in co-operation with the Council of Europe, WFD and other international organisations as well as individual countries, the Moroccan parliament's

capacities have been considerably enhanced. Mr Abbou also noted that the NATO PA could also make an important contribution to the democracy building effort in the region.

Suadad Najim, representing the League of Arab States, discussed the League's role in developing democracy in the Arab World. The Arab revolutions, she noted, were an inspirational event for all Arabs; they provided an opportunity for the people to build their own future and to live in dignity and justice.

While political change in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen occurred in a relatively swift fashion, Libya and Syria have suffered through civil wars. The brutality of the Libyan tyrant compelled the League to act. The League chose to abandon its traditional focus on the principle of state sovereignty and to replace it with a focus on aspirations of the Arab people for freedom. The League suspended Libya's membership. It was the first time the League took such measures against a member state due to human rights violations committed by the government. The Arab League endorsed efforts to apply pressure to end Gaddafi's repressive regime and called on the international community to implement a no-fly zone over Libya, which led to a UN resolution. Without the Arab League, Gaddafi would still be in power, Ms Najim argued. The League has also imposed sanctions on the Syrian regime.

The speaker welcomed the international community's concern with regards to human and political rights in the Arab world. However, she urged the international community to extend this concern to include the people of Palestine who are victims of injustice, Ms Najim said.

The final presentation of the session and of the seminar was made by Georgi Kandelaki, Head of the Georgian Delegation to the NATO PA, who spoke on the lessons learned from the Georgian transition and their potential relevance for the MENA region. He noted that the Georgian case is interesting and relevant, because within the course of several years that country managed to move from being a failed state to a frontrunner in many respects.

Between 1991 and 2003, the situation in Georgia could be characterised by wars, corruption, crime, oversized and ineffective institutions, poverty and a lack of energy sources. Since then the government has adopted a range of radical reforms. Georgia's law enforcement system was so defective that the government decided to fire the entire police force and to recruit new people through a transparent competition. The size of police force was reduced 5 times while the salaries were increased 5 times. Corruption was attacked everywhere at once. Publicised punishment for bribery and a ruthless crackdown on organised crime sent the message that corruption would not be tolerated. The results followed swiftly: within the following several years, crime rates declined by 48% (murders by 68%). Public trust in police skyrocketed from almost zero to astounding 87%. Corruption perceptions decreased dramatically and is now at the average European level.

A drastic reduction of corruption and crime had a positive effect on the business climate. In addition, the government simplified the tax system, reduced the overall tax burden and streamlined the bureaucracy. In a survey measuring the "ease of doing business", Georgia moved from the bottom of the country list to the 16th in the world. Mr Kandelaki stressed that all these achievements were only possible because the Georgians had strong political will and determination to change their country.

The Chairman Mr Cabras closed the seminar, thanking all the speakers and particularly the French delegation and the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur for the warm reception in Marseilles and all the hard work that made this seminar possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant, M.P. Chair,
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association
(NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
ACTIVITY	Joint visit of the 79 th Rose-Roth Seminar and the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM)
DESTINATION	Marseilles, France
DATES	May 11-13, 2012
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Senator Raynell Andreychuk
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$5,375.89
ACCOMMODATION	\$713.51
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$428.16
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$6,517.56