



IIHA AND RIEAS CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary of the 19th Annual Conference of the International Intelligence History Association (IIHA) and the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS), June 21-23, 2013, Athens, Greece.

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The International Intelligence History Association (IIHA) in collaboration with the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS) organized the 19th annual conference in Athens on June 21-23, 2013. The conference entitled “Intelligence in the Mediterranean and the Balkans” convened actors from across the region including academics, historians, members of the private sector, political scientists, researchers, active and former intelligence officials and members of the security and armed forces to explore the history of intelligence and the current security challenges facing the Mediterranean and the Balkan regions.

The 2013 annual conference developed a framework of guiding principles designed to facilitate a roadmap towards a multilateral, regional cooperation underpinned by the interdisciplinary research and teachings in the field of intelligence history. Interest in intelligence dates back to the biblical times when for example twelve Israelites one from each of the Twelve Tribes, as recorded in the Book of Numbers were dispatched by Moses to scout out the Land of Canaan before entering it. Intelligence performance is also found in the Hellenistic period when Alexander the Great successfully built the largest empire the world has ever witnessed in just 13 years partly because of intelligence gathering and information.

Coming to the most recent history, the 2013 annual conference explored the early intelligence of the World Wars I and II focusing on; (a) the difficult alliance of German Intelligence, the Ottoman Home front and beyond during 1914-1918, (b) intelligence and peace negotiations presenting the British-Ottoman experience of WWI, (c) Italian intelligence operations during the Spanish civil war of 1936-1939, and, (d) the role of Greek Diaspora in intelligence operations during the WWII.

The conference also highlighted the role of intelligence during the Cold war, addressed the lessons learnt forty years after the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, as well as pointed to Intelligence in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. Special attention was given to the transition from authoritarian/conflict intelligence agencies to democratic control and oversight, terrorism in North Africa, Olympic intelligence with regards to the CBRN preparations for the Athens Olympic Games, regional security challenges in South East Europe presenting the cases of Greece, Serbia and Romania.

Under the theme of “Between the Arab Spring and the European Debt Crisis: Contemporary Intelligence and Security Issues in the Region”, the 2013 conference highlighted the new political realities in the Middle East, the security challenges of the Arab Spring that Jordan faces, as well as the age of social media and the implications of the Arab Spring for the intelligence community.

The welcoming remarks of the 2013 conference were made by Dr. Shlomo Shpiro, chairman of IIHA and Dr. John Nomikos, director of RIEAS. Referring to the theme of this year’s conference and its focus on the Mediterranean and the Balkans, Dr. Spiro said: *"these regions in particular not only have rich and diversified history of intelligence but are facing turmoil and difficult challenges even today. The revolutions in the Arab world, the bloody civil war in Syria, Iran's nuclear program, the situation in Turkey, in Egypt and Cyprus, the euro-debt crisis and the threats of global terrorism, all mean that governments all over the world and in this region especially, are increasingly turning to their intelligence services for knowledge, for early warning and for policy advice, on how to make better decisions in such times of uncertainty"*. And concluded: *"Intelligence today is central tool of state craft of international relations and of regional security"*.

The conference's opening remarks were conducted by former deputy foreign minister of Greece **Mr. Konstantinos Tsiaras**, the ambassador of the state of Israel in Greece, **Mr. Arie Mekel**, and the deputy ambassador of Germany in Greece, **Mr Klemens Semtner**.

The Greek official referred to the Mediterranean's pivotal strategic position between three continents and its role as an important sea-trade that has historically attracted the interest of powers outside the region. He characteristically said: *"This situation resulted in a uniquely high concentration of different actors and overlapping interests. Under these circumstances, the need to maintain awareness anticipate future outcomes and protect against potential threats was served by all countries in the region making the Mediterranean the theater of numerous intelligence operations"*.

And he continued: *"...our region has witnessed more intelligence gathering activities in the course of history than any other place in the world"*.

The Greek official concluded his opening remarks by referring to the many facets of the current challenges and stressed the need for the region to carry out its responsibilities in a collective manner. He specifically stated: *"The security interdependence among all countries in the region is perhaps one of the key lessons learnt from our common historical experience. Furthermore, it is a valuable lesson in the light of more recent geopolitical developments such as the Arab Spring. In a time of geopolitical shift, information awareness can be very helpful in maintaining regional trust and good relations among the regional actors. It is for this reason that I find the title of this year's conference very timely and the fact that it is taking place in a Mediterranean setting is very appropriate"*.

Then, the floor was given to the Israeli ambassador in Greece Mr. Arie Mekel for his opening remarks. The Israeli ambassador made a few brief comments about five distinct issues of common interest namely Israel, the Middle East, Iran, Energy and Greek-Israeli relations.

On Israel, the ambassador presented Israel which is 65 years old with a population of 8 million citizens, out of which 6 million are Jews, and 2 million are Muslims and some Christians. He particularly said that Israel is a strong country with the strongest

military in the Middle East always ready to defend itself, and emphasized on Israel's economy which is viable and managed to get through the recent global economic meltdown more or less successfully. The ambassador quoted former Israeli Prime minister and minister of Defense Mr. Ehud Barak who once described Israel as "a villa in the jungle", a quote that brought him to the rest of the Middle East.

Specifically, he made reference to the ongoing regional turmoil and stressed the Israeli concerns, by telling the audience: *"We all know the turmoil, the problems throughout the region and it is not new to any of us, we are not involved in that, we watch it like everybody else...we are spectators, we are concerned, we hope that there will be no spill over for instance of the situation in Syria into our neighbor Lebanon and so on"*.

The ambassador elaborated on the regional turmoil, the lack of its connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and expressed the resolve of the Israeli government to resume peace negotiations. He characteristically said: *"For many years, many people in the world including our friends, said to us the most important, the most dangerous problem in the Middle East is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If you would have solved this, everything in the Middle East would be fine. I think that now, everybody would agree that even if we would have a Palestinian state tomorrow morning, this could do nothing to resolve the situation in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria"*. And he went on confirming that *"we want to solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem not to do a favor to anybody but to do a favor to ourselves. We believe in the two-state solution so that there will be two states; one Israel for the Jews and one Palestine for the Palestinians. Right now we are in the midst of another effort, this time, by Secretary of State John Kerry to get the two parties to the table and we hope it will be successful if we can resume the peace process"*.

The Israeli ambassador elaborated briefly on Iran and the importance of the efforts to stop Iranians from developing nuclear weapons, and addressed the issue of energy referring to the Israeli government's decision on the one hand to maintain for domestic consumption the 60 percent of the Israeli discovered gas that probably amounts to 500-600 bcm, and on the other hand to export the rest 40 per cent of gas to markets like the European one. He emphasized on the aspect of regional energy cooperation by saying: *"We've told the Greek government on the highest level that we*

would be happy to make Greece a hub for this gas that will continue to Europe; it can be brought here by pipeline or by liquidifying it and bringing it by tanker; we also want Cyprus to be involved in this because they also found gas and we believe that these three countries, Israel, Greece and Cyprus, if we work together and use our power like in the area of natural gas, we could become together a regional power that will be able to stand up to other regional powers".

The ambassador's last point of the opening remarks focused on the evolving level of Greek-Israeli relations. He specifically confirmed that: *"the last three years, we have seen a dramatic upgrade, a dramatic change in the relations between Israel and Greece, and it is expressed in many ways in the area of defense. There is a lot of cooperation especially between the two navies, the two airforces, tourism - 400 thousand Israelis were here last year, we hope to have half a million this year, a very significant number....."* And concluded with an optimistic note: *"we are happy to see the influx of visits by the ministers of both countries.....The most important event will happen in October where we will finally have the GtoG (i.e. Government to Government) which means what is understood as the High Council where Israel and Greece will be together.... Greece-Israel relations are now in the midst of their honeymoon but let's not forget that we have a lot of catching up to do."*

Given all the abovementioned, this year's 19th annual IHA conference in collaboration with RIEAS provided the context for exchange and informed participants on matters pertaining to the Mediterranean and the Balkan regions as a logical extension of the previous such conferences.