

Sykes Picot a Century Later: a New Order for the Middle East?
Friday May 20 – Saturday May 21, 9:30 am
Maison du Futur – Bikfaya

During this decisive period of the Middle East history, and in light of the current conflicts and shifts taking place within the countries of this region, La Maison du Futur, in cooperation with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, celebrated the centennial of the Sykes-Picot agreement in an international conference entitled “Sykes-Picot a Century Later: A New Order for the Middle-East?” that gathered an elite of Lebanese, Arab, and foreign officials, intellectuals, and researchers. The conference was organized in the Serail, Bikfaya, on May 20 and 21, and included six sessions that tackled the historical contexts that led to the Sykes-Picot agreement, as well as the its repercussions on the emergence of entities with new borders, and the impact of this delineation on the reality in the affected countries like Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq, as well as on the nature of the regimes that were created, and their failure to build nation states, which is the root cause of the chaos we are witnessing nowadays. During the conference, several virtual scenarios were exchanged regarding what could have been an alternative to the geographic delineation should the Sykes-Picot agreement and the other arrangements that followed, especially the Treaty of Sevres, not see the light. The conference was concluded with a session where the panelists discussed whether the history was repeating itself today and whether a new geographic delineation for the Middle East is being secretly prepared by international powers, paving the way for the evanescence of some countries and borders created by the Sykes-Picot agreement, and thus the emergence of new entities. The speakers also shed the light on the possible nature of such entities and their foundations given the racial, ethnical, and religious and communitarian diversity of the people of the region. This conference is yet another proof of the Maison du Futur’s commitment to pinpoint major issues in the region and to highlight political, social, economic and cultural challenges that the region is suffering from in order to find the best ways to overcome them.

His Excellency President Amine Gemayel inaugurated the conference on Friday May 20, with an intervention that stated that this conference's objective is not only to evaluate the Sykes-Picot Agreement a century later, but rather to foresee the milestones of the next century in Lebanon, the Levant and the Arab World, "for the new international and regional conjuncture in 2016 and its impact on the peoples of the region is similar, in its interests, goals and intentions, to the regional game of 1916. We witness popular revolutions and military events in the region, from Iran to Egypt, destabilizing the entities that were created by the Sykes-Picot agreement and the San Remo conference." He added: "In the Sykes-Picot agreement, that was written in 832 words, the term "people" was not used even once, and the same goes to the term "self-determination". This means that a geographical factor rather than a human one was the basis of this agreement drafted in Paris, London, and St Petersburg". Gemayel clarified that the Sykes-Picot negotiations were aiming first at the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire and the redistribution of the English and French influence in the Middle East, as well as the creation of new entities that would pave the way for the emergence of the State of Israel. The objective was the mandate and not the independence.

President Gemayel highlighted several contradictions that accompanied the drafting of this agreement which were first of all the incapability of Britain to honor its promise of establishing a big unified Arab State, and second of all the Belfour promise to facilitate the emergence of a Zionist entity in Palestine, and third of all the Kurdish entity promise in the East of Anatolia that was cited in the 1920 treaty of Sevres, and then later on was canceled due to the Turkish nationalistic movement led then by Mustafa Kamal Ataturk. Gemayel considered that the conjuncture back then was similar to what we are witnessing today: "Aren't the objectives of the Kerry-Lavrov negotiations similar to the objectives of the Sykes-Picot negotiations? Aren't the western promises given to some Arab rebels to overthrow the current regimes similar to the promise made by TE Laurence to Sheriff Hussein and his son Faysal? In the same context, can't we consider that the commitments made by the new West (the US, Europe and Russia) to Israel regarding its existence, its security and its military primacy are in fact an extension of the Belfour promise?"

He added that the Arab populations that were struggling to change the entities created by the Sykes-Picot agreement and its subsequent conferences following the first world war were left now, after the revolutions, with the mere hope of preserving their territorial integrity and safeguard their international borders drew by this agreement that persisted for a century.

With the exception of the ISIL invasion of the Syrian-Iraqi borders, all the attempts to modify these entities are emerging, at least for the time being, from within the borders, towards the adoption of autonomous federations and regions. He said that the Arab nationalism projects lost ground in front of religious radicalism, and self-determination projects that the entities of the Middle East are seeking, and the racial, ethnic, and ideological components became the standard for drawing borders of new States. While the old and “made in the West” Sykes-Picot agreement moved the Levant from unrecognized States to internationally recognized States, the new Sykes-Picot will transform these States into cantons under an Arab and Islamic control but with a western support.

Gemayel added that in addition to the creation of the Hebrew State, the main cause behind the erosion of the Sykes-Picot structure is the Arab regimes’ mismanagement of their people, societies and States, and refused laying the blame on the Sykes-Picot agreement to justify the “troubled Arab regimes and the lack of governance and freedom, as well as the alternation of dictatorships and totalitarian, dogmatic and religious ideologies”. Gemayel highlighted that despite the trend, the current Lebanon is not the fruit of the Sykes-Picot agreement but rather the result of the tenacity of Lebanon’s notables, with the Maronite Patriarch Elias El Hoayeck in the forefront, who convinced France in the Paris conference (1918 and 1919) and the San Remo conference (1920) to modify the Sykes-Picot agreement and establish an independent Lebanese entity. Unfortunately, the Middle East region entered a dark tunnel (Lebanon included of course) a century and a half ago, and the current dark period it is witnessing, especially after the American invasion of Iraq, will not end before several decades. Yet, the new regional order will not be implemented in the Middle East after once printed on paper in the American and European circles of power nor in conferences held in Vienna, Paris, Geneva and Brussels.

He concluded saying: “What is today at stake is the ability of Arab people to find a shortcut to move from war to political settlements, as well as its ability to regain its independence, not from western colonialists as it was the case in the past, but rather from the Muslim jihadi and takfiri ideology, from ignorance and from totalitarianism. What is also at stake is the ability of the Lebanese to avoid becoming entangled in the wars of others... In order to serve the message that the Lebanese people should carry, not only their interests, they should preserve their historical map and their democratic State as well as their pluralism formula and their civilizational specificities... Until now, the Lebanese people are still confirming their belief in a unified Lebanon despite all the current divisions”.

Peter Rimmele from Konrad Adenauer foundation took the floor and said that “our meeting today does not aim at evaluating the Sykes-Picot conference but at thinking about the future of the region”. He reviewed the historical circumstances that accompanied the Sykes-Picot agreement, stressing that a century later, the region is suffering from a catastrophic situation. He added that Daesh announced the collapse of the Sykes-Picot borders in Syria and Iraq. Rimmele refused laying the blame on Sykes-Picot for all the issues that the region is facing, and considered that the current situation is the result of several political, economic and even environmental factors. He considered that we have to find simple solutions since examining the past will not be enough to putting an end to the sufferings we are witnessing today.

The first session was entitled “Sykes-Picot in its historical context: the art of the possible”, and was opened by **Carole Dagher**, the cultural attaché of the Lebanese Embassy in Paris.

Dagher stressed on the importance of the Sykes-Picot centennial in light of the current situation in the Middle East, and considered that despite the threats around borders of the countries created by the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the possibility of creation of new entities like the Kurdish State for example, the current borders are still internationally recognized. Dagher questioned the point of view of analysts who consider that the Sykes-Picot agreement is to blame for all the issues that the region is suffering from, and said that the question we should raise is: what other division of the region was possible at that time, and was the alternative back then, meaning the Unified Arab Empire under the leadership of Sheriff Hussein, a viable scenario, especially in light of the ethnical, religious, social and cultural diversity within this region?

Dagher said that the main problem of the region in the 19th century was the ethnical and religious minorities that were living under the Ottoman Empire, from the Balkan to the Levant countries. The importance of the Sykes-Picot agreement is that it is closely linked to the protection of minorities and their integration in the new entities it created. Dagher stressed on the importance of putting this agreement in its historical context, and discussing to which extent can it be held responsible for the failure in building Nation States in the Near East.

Dagher considered that the Sykes-Picot agreement is not the result of a spontaneous settlement and did not come out of nowhere, but was an interference in the logical course of history in light of the slow death of the “sick man” and the

collapse of the Ottoman Empire as well as its conflicts with European countries which led to the Vienna conference in 1878, and the result of the victory of Russia and its allies over the Ottoman Empire. According to Dagher, the latter conference consecrated Great Britain as the official protector of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire, and France as the protector of Maronite and Catholic Christians, as well as Italy as a protector of the above mentioned communities in Tunisia and Tripoli.

Dagher stressed that the situation prior to world war one (WWI) was similar to the current situation: Russia in confrontation with the Ottoman Empire amidst the attempt of the European countries to put an end to its growing influence in the East while preserving its interests with the Ottoman Empire and promoting its status as the protector of minorities in this region. Dagher said that the winners of this war drew geographical borders according to their own interests: The main concern of Britain at that time was preserving the route to India for the Jews and remaining the protector of this community, while France, and due to its historical relation with the countries of the region, was interested in encouraging the Arab Nahda promoted by Christians, especially Lebanese Christians, against the Ottoman Empire, and managed the world war one heritage in light of the existent diversity specificities.

She said that the results produced by the geographic divisions that were the fruit of the Sykes-Picot agreement were not always the same, as we had the Lebanese formula in opposition to the Arab failure. “The Lebanese formula based on the principle of the devolution of power according to the so-called consensual democracy represented by the national pact, produced a sectarian system that became an impediment to citizenship. In spite of the golden era that Lebanon witnessed when it was a haven of freedom and coexistence between different confessional and religious communities, it was crippled by its sectarian democratic system, and is currently witnessing an unprecedented institutional crisis; while in the Arab world the result was chaos and violence in light of the failure in establishing Nation States, in addition to the negative impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on this process.

Dagher concluded by saying that we cannot hold the geographical divisions made by Sykes-Picot agreement responsible for the failure of Arab States, and mentioned a number of factors that were the result of this like the failure to achieve national integration and to promote citizenship, corruption, the absence of social solidarity,

and the lack of balanced and fair development as well as the issue of sectarianism. Dagher then moved to presenting the speakers in session one who were Dorothee Schmid, Head of the Turkey/Middle East Program at the IFRI, France; Dorris Carrion, Research Associate at the Middle East and North Africa Program, Chatham House, UK; and Hassan Mneimneh, Principal at Middle East Alternatives, Washington.

The intervention of **Dorothee Schmid** evolved around the emergence of what she called the “New Ottomanism”, and said that Turkey inherited an Empire that harshly fell apart after world war one, and is therefore unable to digest this collapse and to accept the post-world war one situation. The Sykes-Picot agreement and the Treaty of Sevres are still, for Turkey, the symbol of the treason of Europe that is hard to forget: A double treason against Ottomans and Arabs.

According to Schmid, Turkey was once again a victim of the American President Wilson’s 14 points plan. Point 12 highlighted the need to give to the people of the countries who were previously part of the Ottoman Empire the right for independence, and to open the Dardanelles strait to international navigation with international guaranties. Schmid said that the Sykes-Picot agreement was the symbol of the defeat of Ottomans from one side, and gave momentum for a new Turkey led by Ataturk from the other side.

She added that the changes witnessed in Turkey back then on the internal level pushed this country to ignore Sykes-Picot in the national speech. Schmid also spoke about the emergence of a new form of Ottomanism , with Turkey regaining its power as a regional and international power led by Ahmet Davud Oglu, who is the foreign policy arm of the Justice and Development party – that is trying to rewrite history and overcome the choc of Sykes-Picot through promoting Turkish nationalism as well as changing the outcome of this agreement by presenting Turkey as a model to follow for the Arab world, and promoting its relationship with the world through regional economic cooperation projects and through seeking the status of a mediator to solve regional issues.

Under the title “Two Pieces of an International Puzzle: Sykes-Picot and Moving to the Post Ottoman Period”, **Dorris Carrion** started her intervention by stressing on the fact that Sykes Picot, namely the empirical partitioning of the post-ottoman

Middle East, was not a strategy. It was intended to meet a short term goal related to the British and French war time alliance. She clarified that if the circumstances that accompanied the first world war were different, the Middle East would have also been different, adding that the first world war occurred at a time when the world was witnessing big changes: The Ottoman Empire was getting weaker, the power of Britain and France as two super powers with converging interests after a history of hostility was increasing, the United States were coming out of its isolation under a leadership of a President convinced in the need to promote the principle of people's independency, in addition to a growing sense of patriotism and the calls for independence in the Middle East. Carrion stated that Britain's fear of the Ottoman Sultan's call for jihad that may lead to an uprising in British India, and France's desire to preserve its interests with the Middle East minorities led to this alliance between France and Britain and to their cooperation with Sheriff Hussein against the Ottomans. While Britain was filling the void resulting from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, its strategy was affected by several factors, and the same applies to France, the competitive force. This transitional period meant that policies and ideologies were susceptible to change or to deviation from previous patterns, and therefore it was normal for the colonial policy formulated after the first war to be totally different when it comes to the delienation of borders and the division of power.

She concluded saying that, it is clear that the agreement between Sykes and Picot and the post war multi year partitioning were just a few pieces in a global historical puzzle of political transitioning and State formation. We are currently witnessing a similar course, for in recent years and decades, we have been experiencing another period of fluidity and transition in which shifts in the balance of power, ideology and economy are occuring. Today's leaders, activists and thinkers who would like to see a new regional order or a new Arab State, will probably not be able to devise and carry out a coherent strategy to do so unless they work within the constraints and internal factors presented. "As much as I want to call upon the world's powerful countries to formulate strategies for how to respond to the region's transition, in reality I would argue that the most you can realistically expect from them is to formulate a set of guiding principles or minimum standards to streamline the unavoidable messy process of policy-making."

Hassan Mneimneh took the floor and started his intervention by stating that this review of the Sykes-Picot agreement that led to the creation of the Middle East

countries is not only historical but is also a need for the upcoming period especially when it comes to the outlook of changes taking place in the region. He added that we look at the future from two perspectives: a deterministic reading and a probabilistic one. We are facing today a new haziness similar to the one that was present between London and Paris after WWI, especially when it comes to the United States and its position in the course of events in the region. He said that contrary to popular opinion, “I want to put the Sykes-Picot agreement in its historical context and look at it from a positive point of view”. He clarified that the region’s gradual move towards modernity started with the nahda of the 19th century leading to the emergence of Nation States in the 20th century, but it remained an imperfect modernity especially due to the failure of these States, and “if we read the Sykes-Picot agreement from this perspective, we cannot consider it negative nor a result of conspiracy”.

Mneimneh spoke about a “demonization” of the Sykes-Picot agreement that is still going on, while to be fair, it had paved the way for the creation of Nation States in the region, which borders still exist despite all the the current conflicts. In Lebanon for example, in spite of the civil war and the different streams it witnessed from the call for unity with Syria to the call for the establishment of a Christian State, Lebanon remained as one entity.

Mneimneh reminded the participants that in the past, the focus while taling about Lebanon was on political maronitism and Islam Fiqh, and this does not exist anymore because maronitism melted in Christianity and Islam was divided into Shiaas and Sunnis. The same applies to Iraq, although a number of American analysts argue that Iraq was initially divided into a Sunni State, a Shiite State and a Kurdish State, which was refuted by Mneimenh. Saying that the Sykes-Picot borders are artificial ones and calling for going back to the pre Sykes-Picot means neutralizing the results of this agreement which also means abolishing Nation States. The foundations of these countries cannot collapse and talking about ISIL abolishing the Sykes-Picot borders is non-sense because destroying the structure does not mean destroying the country. Mneimeh said that “The main issue in the region that could be considered as the reason behind the mess is the current chaos that is preventing us from reaching full modernity”.

He said that the Sykes-Picot agreement’s aim was the consecration of Britain and France's influence in the region and the protection of their mutual political and

economic interests. However, according to Mneimneh, the agreement did not succeed at achieving these goals, but have led to the emergence of several new states over which the League of Nations granted mandate to France and Britain in a preparatory step for self-ruling; thus, they failed at reaching their reciprocal coveted objectives. He considered that the demarcation of these new states' borders from Iraq to Jordan to Palestine, Lebanon and Syria was artificial and arbitrary. He added that by 1948, the influence of these two international powers in the region has collapsed with the emergence of Israel and the rise of a pan-Arab trend, which viewed these borders as artificial and called for unity among the entities it did formed as a remedial step for Sykes-Picot's outcomes. The establishment of the Arab League was indeed the first step towards achieving this goal. He added that a century after the Sykes-Picot agreement, these entities did not succeed at removing the so-called artificial borders drawn by colonialism in accordance with the principle of divide and rule and failed to integrate into a unified nation; nor the region was fragmented along ethnic and sectarian lines in a backlash step to an arbitrary set of borders drawn by colonialism to serve its interests.

Despite the horrors that occurred in the region from the Lebanese war to the war in Iraq and Syria, along with the detrimental effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the borders have remained still, he said. He considered it early to judge if the Iraqi and Syrian wars will lead to the collapse of the regional map drawn by Sykes-Picot, pointing out to a number of gaps that distort the conflicting arguments often invoked to foreseen the end of the regime established by the Sykes-Picot agreement. The first argument which says that the region was before the Sykes-Picot agreement one nation is unfounded, and is only a romantic fantasy spun by nationalists who have a false reading of history. The second argument upholds the administrative order that prevailed before Sykes-Picot entrusting it a task it has never carried out. He added that these arguments are discarding a very important factor: A century after Sykes-Picot, the region have witnessed the emergence of new national identities due to the economic, social and political cycle fashioned by the national states. He believed that what were produced by the Sykes-Picot agreement were not only boundaries, but also existing nation states even though they had failed in establishing modern states which led to the crisis the region is currently witnessing as well as the erosion of its political regimes. And as proven by the Lebanese experience, what created and maintain states' borders or reshape

them are structure and entity and not ideology. He also denied the allegation according to which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has demolished borders drawn by Sykes-Picot, saying that destroying societies and states without providing alternative does not create a new map, but it leads to decay and not to a new repartition. He acknowledge that the only exception indicating a new reshape of the borders drawn by the Sykes-Picot agreement is the emergence of Iraqi Kurdistan, noting however that until now it is not yet an independent state and it is still connected to the central government in Baghdad.

He concluded by saying that it is easy to held the Sykes-Picot's established borders responsible for the current disaster the region is witnessing instead of acknowledging that the real reason lies in its nations' failure to reach modernity. He finally considered that the future of the Middle East cannot be in the re-inauguration of dictatorships or its division along ethnic and religious lines or its decay, but in achieving good governance and enforcing the respect for individuals and communities' rights.

A debate followed the first session inaugurated by deputy and former minister Marwan Hamade, who firstly thanked President Gemayel for organizing this conference. Hamade agreed with Mneimneh's views, calling to stop the demonization of the Sykes-Picot agreement which paved the way for the creation of Nation States recognized by the entire world. He described discourse about states' division or dismantling as ludicrous, saying that the region should go forward to the next phase. He added: "[...] the greater Lebanon is a reality that we adhere to and we refuse to let the game of minorities abolishes this reality. What we want is to establish standards that could help protecting our structure and revamping our regime accordingly, in a way that could meet the ambitions of all spectrums of Lebanese society and integrate all ethnic and religious minorities". He believed that the Taef agreement was a first attempt in the right direction and we should extend it to the region as a whole to step forward. He also agreed on the emergence of what was called the "New Ottomanism", stressing however, that what happened and continue to happen is nothing but the accumulation of betrayals and disappointments, that led to what is Palestine is witnessing today as well as the bitter experience the region is currently going through.

Deputy Sami Gemayel took the stage wondering how can we consider the Sykes-Picot agreement as a good one, when it has formed states mixing together unconnected people while at the same time, dispersing others like the Kurdish people. He believed that this agreement came out pre-packaged and did not take

into account the existing social structure nor the will of peoples to self-determination. He stressed on the right of peoples to decide whether they want to live together, or change their nations' external borders or modify their internal borders. He emphasized the need to use referenda so that the region's people can voice their opinion and avoids new wars; if we continue to ignore their will, the region's fate will remain torn between falling into the trap of failed states or prevailing dictatorships. He concluded by saying that the logic behind agreement such as Sykes-Picot did not affect only the Middle East but also the former Soviet Union especially in terms of nations that had emerged after its collapse, saying that the solution to these dilemmas and the way to build a lasting peace is the recognition of the principle of peoples' right to self-determination.

The second session entitled **“what if there was no Sykes-Picot? A counter-factual reflexion”**, kicked off with its moderator **Sami Aoun** describing its title as a provocative one; indeed, wondering what if there was no Sykes-Picot leads us to speculating on a would-be reality different that the one Sykes-Picot has engendered. Acknowledging that this question might be an artificial one, he nonetheless described it as necessary, wondering if we could imagine another reality for the region, a kind of a counter-factual. He revealed that Mark Sykes has an arrogant vision of the region, while the vision of Francois Picot was more comprehensive; Sykes signed the agreement with a pencil, while Picot signed it in black ink. He added that the questions that he will ask are addressed to two elites: “To the first which I called the Elite of the strategic Western one I ask if they have had undisclosed alternatives to Sykes-Picot? To the second elite, the Arab and Muslim one, I ask if they have had a clear vision whereby they could have had circumvented the West's view of the region's future”. Aoun presented the panelists in this session, Joseph Maila, Professor of political sociology and international relations, former Rector of “Université Catholique de Paris”, Steven Heydemann, Janet W. Ketcham in Middle East Studies, Smith College, and Yuri Zinin, Senior Researcher in the Civilizations' Partnership Center of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

Maila began his intervention emphasizing on Aoun's description of the tackled question as being provocative. He said that trying to see history through what it should have been, especially from a moral standpoint, and see history as it happened, are two different approaches to revise history. He added, when the agreement was signed, the Middle East was witnessing the emergence of

allegiances, namely a sense of belonging, there were also clear visions about what its future must be, Arab nationalism is one of them, as well as political experiences, especially in Mount Lebanon and Egypt.

He said that at the beginning of the twentieth century and after WWI, the two international powers by then, France and Britain, were competing for control over the Near East region for its importance in terms of communications and international trade's movement. He gave an historical overview of the situation that prevailed before the outbreak of the WWI in terms of wars and conflicts that had erupted between the European countries of France, Britain, Russia, Austria and the Ottoman Empire. These wars had exhausted the latter to a point it was at the time called the "sick man". The Ottomans had engaged in the war along their German ally in order to recapture what they had lost in terms of lands, expulse the British from Egypt and suppress the growing independence trend that had emerged in the Near East. With the outbreak of this war, the negotiations between France and Britain had begun over the future of the Arab territories in the Ottoman Empire and boundaries in a way that suits their mutual interests: Britain was seeking to establish its presence in the region and secure the road to India, and France was seeking to strengthen its role as the Christians' protector, especially the Maronites in Mount Lebanon. The first negotiations had kicked off in 1915 with Britain attempting to persuade Sharif Hussein to stand by their side and attack the Ottoman army on the western coast of the Hijaz as well as attacking the railway line between Medina and Istanbul line.

In return, Maila added, Britain promised Sharif Hussein the establishment of an Arab kingdom to be under his command that excludes Mesopotamia, which will be under the custody of the UK, as well as the Syrian coast and Mount Lebanon, which will be under France control. Sharif Hussein entered the war in June 5, 1916 proclaiming the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire. He added that in parallel, France and Britain have launched in 1915, bilateral negotiations between the French diplomat François Georges-Picot and his British counterpart Mark Sykes, to define their mutually spheres of influence and control in Southwestern Asia, leading on 16 May 1916 to ratifying what was later known as the Sykes-Picot agreement, which drew new borders for the region. On the other hand, a third track of negotiations was launched leading in November 2, 1917 to the famous

Balfour Declaration, which pledged the establishment of a Jewish state on Palestinian land. At the end of WWI, Britain ruled mandatory Palestine, Iraq, Transjordan and asserted its presence in Egypt, thereby achieving the goal of securing the road to India. The mandate for Lebanon, Syria and southeastern Anatolia, was conferred upon France.

However, the Sykes-Picot agreement and agreements that followed especially the 1920 Sèvres Treaty, became the target of bitter objections, the first proclaimed by Mustafa Ataturk, for conceiving the establishment of a Kurdish state and annexing the Armenian region within Turkey to the Republic of Armenia, newly recognized as a sovereign state. The current borders of Turkey have been delimited at the Lausanne Conference in 1923. In 1939, France ceded the Sanjak of Iskenderun (Alexandretta) to Turkey to ensure that it stands neutral in any future conflict. The biggest objection came from the Arab Near East in the light of Britain renegeing on the promise to recognize an independent Arab nation it has made to Sharif Hussein and the Balfour Declaration. The battle of Maysalun fought between the forces of the Arab Kingdom of Syria under the leadership of Emir Faisal bin Hussein and the French Army of the Levant in 1920 ended with the defeat of Faisal, leading later to the victory of Al Saud clan over Hussein and the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, while Hussein's sons Faisal and Abdullah were made rulers of Iraq and Transjordan. However, anger against the Mandate authorities remained overwhelming among Arabs, and even today they look at the Sykes-Picot agreement as an agreement imposed on the people without taking their opinion. The Balfour Declaration came to make things even worse, according to Maila.

Maila wondered about the rightness of commentaries holding the Sykes-Picot agreement responsible for the current regional chaos we are witnessing. He considered that the calamity is not in the Sykes-Picot agreement, but in the sharing of power and influence mentality that had led to it, along with mandate authorities' failure to prepare these entities for self-ruling and protect minorities and pluralism as being the region's main characteristic. Nonetheless, he suggested that the agreement bears considerable blame for the frequency and durability of the region's turmoil especially the unity fantasy used by different regimes established during the post-independence era (Nassirism, Baathist and Islamic). He was also skeptical about the viability of an Arab Nation comprising all Arab states given the racial, ethnic, religious and sectarian mosaic that make up the people of this region.

Maila concluded his intervention by speculating about the region's future. Despite the fact that we cannot deny the mandate's disastrous fallout on the region, we cannot on the other hand blame the current turmoil tearing apart the region on the demarcation of the borders, but rather on the region's countries failure to build national states and real citizenship, in addition to rampant sectarianism and the prevalence of an authoritarian political culture. What add to the gloomy scene are the Arab Spring failure and the rise of radical Islamist Ideology that tried to hijack it. Stating that the causes of the region current turmoil cannot be traced to the geo-political state order established in the aftermath of WWI, he instead held accountable the so-called game of nations, starting by the American intervention in Iraq to the US and European countries' reluctance to support the Syrian opposition against the regime, armed Islamist groups and Russian army, to the Gulf states' stance backing under the table Islamic groups against the Syrian Baathist regime, while at the same time allying with the West in the war against radical Islam, to the Iran and its proxies such as Hezbollah rampant influence, to at last but not least, Turkey trying to undermine the establishment of a Kurdish state as well as the Russian intervention in Syria. He finally said that the solution to this dilemma does not lies in repeating history but in overcoming history through building a federal order based on democracy, stressing the need to build a new stream in the Middle East and resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Steven Heydemann took the floor stressing that he does not represent any official view in Washington. He started his intervention by hailing the conference at this critical juncture in the Middle East history, especially in terms of trying to imagine different scenarios that could have been a viable alternative to Sykes-Picot and trying to imagine what the Arab world might had been like should Sykes-Picot did not happened and should the colonial authorities had adopted an approach that would have made it possible to define a political landscape through a process that gave more weight to the perspectives and preferences of local populations. He added that the borders agreed upon one century ago between Sykes and Picot, shaped the political scene for the post-Ottoman Empire era in the Arab Middle East. Further, these boundaries were often labeled as artificial, being a legacy of colonialism and lacking legitimacy, wondering about possible alternatives that would have then led to political and economic development in the Arab Middle East.

Presenting several alternative maps that have appeared in the last two years as a speculative exercise in designing new boundaries for the Middle East, he said that we are facing at this time of history tremendous threats to this political order especially with the danger that the rise of ISIL poses to the stability and future to that state order. He added, we are increasingly witnessing the emergence of several attempts to draw a new map of the area that go beyond boundaries drawn by Sykes-Picot, trying to divide it according to a new criteria based on confessional and sectarian lines to create a new political reality. He went on to say, questions that we should put on the table must address the viability of such maps and whether they will eventually contribute to install stability for the region's people. All of these maps have not dealt with these questions. What is more important, he added, is trying to imagine a different historic path and return to the starting point of creating these entities, wondering about the region fate if the Sykes-Picot agreement had not been ratified. In this context, he wondered about the region reality if President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points for world peace were implemented, among which the right for self-determination. He believed that if Wilson's statement of principles was instigated, it could had curbed communism, cramped Jewish immigration to Palestine and enable development to proceed, stressing that this alternative could had paved the way for the establishment of modern states in the region.

Yuri Zinin started his intervention under the title "The Sykes–Picot Agreement: view from Russia in historic and present terms", by stressing that it is hard to render the contemporary history and fate of peoples of the Middle East in isolation from "the Sykes–Picot Agreement, which had defined in secrecy, behind the back of Arab peoples the borderlines between the zones into which the Asian territories of the Ottoman Empire were divided". He added that the tsarist Russia decided against claiming any Arab lands. After the October Revolution, the new Soviet State exposed this agreement, denouncing the colonial policy of occupation and annexation, and opposing the system of mandate imposed by the League of Nations on the Arab peoples. Zinin highlighted the Soviet contribution to Arab obtainment of their political independence and national sovereignty after the end of the Second World War, especially in Lebanon, Syria and Algeria, and after that, its support for the Palestinian cause. He went on to say, that today politicians, experts and scholars are seeking the explanation of the current turbulent events in the region through exploring the past, notably the deal Sykes–Picot agreement.

It is interesting, he said, that a resembling resentment over the “accord” comes out at times from contrary and foe sides. For example Turkey's leadership does not hide its scorn for this accord which it says created artificial barriers between Muslim states and deprived Turkey of its natural influence in the region. Meanwhile ISIL repeatedly promised to make its best to “bury the Sykes–Picot deal”. He added that there is a widespread view that responsibility for partitions of Ottoman Empire which suited interests of colonial powers and for artificial borders set largely regardless to historic, cultural and others realities, rests with the Sykes–Picot accord. It led to an onset of a whole range of ethnic and religious conflicts that makes the atmosphere in some area still highly explosive.

But unlike the situation of one-century old, he continued, the present reality in the region is seen yet differently. Firstly it seems that the spirit of statehood, national identity on country scale penetrated sufficiently at various levels into different stratum of structures of modern Arab society within its borders. Secondly, geopolitical configuration and alignment of forces in the Middle East fall under an external impact of direct or indirect military, economic or other interference. He said that nowadays, there is a multiplicity of actors both local and global in the region and each has its own aims and interests though sometimes they are not conspicuously expressed. The current conflicts in the Middle East are of a new type and generation. They are unfolding in context of transformable relations in the societies amid the ongoing global processes in the world, rivalry of emerging local political poles Turkey, Iran and so on. These conflicts are affected heavily by a number of factors notably the broad decline of world economy, volatility of oil markets, growing flows of weapons toward the Middle East and Arab gulf, China phenomenon and so on.

He concluded by stressing that it can be expected that the shaping of the future in the region at the upcoming century will depend on impact and combined interaction of the just cited variables.

The session was followed by a debate during which the following questions were raised:

- Is it true that the Sykes-Picot agreement has fallen and we will be witnessing the establishment of new states including the Califate state which would be joining the UN?

- What would be the fate of a Palestinian state should the map of the region change?
- Would the region's reshape and the establishment of new states be done according to cultural lines? To what extent the West is morally responsible of what happened in the past and what would be in the future? Which party would be asked to redraw the region's map: Populations or the leaders in power?

Describing the questions as complicated, Maila said that nobody can answer them. In the case of a new reshape of the region, he added, the question that should be asked is about the legitimacy of such a step. Any new reshape will usher a war that will last 100 year. He continued to say that despite the fact that the Sykes-Picot agreement belongs to the past, the culture that paved the way to such an agreement is still prevailing; the intervention of the US, Russia and the European states in the region nations' affairs and imposing their borders are a living example of this culture. This is an ethical issue unacceptable nowadays.

Heydemann on the other hand said that while we cannot but recognized the seriousness of the crisis plaguing the region, this should not lead us to assume the existence of western hidden agendas aiming at imposing regional new boundaries, especially one that the US would be pursuing. He added that such agendas do not exist but in journalists' fantasies. He believed that the fall of the region's regimes would not cause borders alteration.

During the lunch break, keynote speaker **James bar** thanked the Maison du Futur and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for organizing this conference and talked about the reluctance of Britain to endorse the agreement which according to him was reinforced by an intriguing detail on the infamous map that was presented by French ambassador to UK Paul Cambon: "This map was autographed by both negotiators in the bottom right hand corner, and if you look closely you will see an important difference. While François Georges-Picot signed in black ink, Mark Sykes preferred to use a pencil to write his name and the date: 8 May 1916."

He considered that Sykes did that because he did not think the deal would stand the test of time especially that it had failed to resolve the future of Palestine satisfactorily.

He added that Britain had entered the negotiations with French with one aim: Establishing "a belt of English-controlled country" across the Middle East to protect the road to India, by creating a cordon that stretched from the Suez Canal to the Persian frontier, and cut across the main east-west land route running through Aleppo, down the Euphrates, to the Gulf. But this plan was thwarted when Picot refused to give Sykes Palestine. The two men compromised by agreeing the holy land should have an international administration, but it was an outcome that neither man liked, particularly Mark Sykes.

Sykes had clearly failed, and he quickly found his efforts being odiously criticized mainly by the military who warned that the deal would be opposed by the Jews who wielded vast financial influence in the US at a time when Britain needed to borrow money from America to pay for the war. At this moment, he added, one man saw an opportunity: Sir Herbert Samuel; he circulated a memorandum around the Cabinet arguing that Britain should back the Zionist cause and support Jews in their endeavor to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, arguing that such a state would keep the French away from Suez and would win Britain "the gratitude of a whole race". The then Prime Minister David Lloyd George was convinced by Samuel's argument, while France was not and persuaded the Russians to support its claim to Palestine.

Barr continued to say: "It is worth pausing to speculate for a moment about what might then have happened had there been neither Russian revolution nor a Prime Minister Lloyd George who had vowed to the Jewish-British scientist Chaim Weizmann and assured him that, if Palestine came under British influence, Britain would grant the Jews a charter in Palestine.

Under the title "**Retrospective and prospective: Syria and Lebanon**", the third session kicked off featuring as moderator Paul Salem, Vice President for Policy and Research at the Middle East Institute and the following speakers, Andrew Tabler, Martin G. Gross Fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Studies, Roger Dib, Former Minister, Founder and Director of the Near East Consulting Group and Amr el Azm, Associate Professor of Middle East History and Anthropology in Shawnee State University.

Former minister **Roger Dib** took the floor by stating that before Sykes-Picot, Lebanon's different communities coexisted within a defined territory and

Lebanon's specificity proved itself firstly through Mount Lebanon Emirate, then the Mutasarrifate and finally Great Lebanon which borders were drawn in the Treaty of San Remo in April 1920. He explained that the Sykes-Picot agreement came to organize the region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, as well as to protect its minorities. Whereas local inhabitants have not been consulted on the secret agreement's terms, they have played a role in its implementation: Maronites in Lebanon played a major role in drawing the country's boundaries, Syrians protested federalism, Ataturk in Turkey refused to cede the Sanjak of Alexandretta and the establishment of a Kurdish state. As for Iraq and Jordan, he added, their current borders were drawn by British for geopolitics purposes.

However, he stated that the common interest of Lebanese and French at that time to expand the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate annexing therefore Syrian territory to Lebanon, could be held responsible for the historic tension between the two countries.

He outlined several factors that have played in weakening the Lebanese state more than the Sykes-Picot agreement, the first of which is the Arab-Israeli conflict and the consequent refugees' crisis, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent Arab-Iranian conflict and Sunni-Shiite divide, and the Arab Spring which has ignited the Syrian war and unleashed Islamic extremist groups.

On another vein, he believed that ISIL has dissolved the borders drawn by Sykes-Picot agreement, stressing the need for an international conference featuring the main local parties to re-organize the region, arguing that only a treaty like the Peace of Westphalia, which concluded the Thirty Years' War, can help bring an end to the Middle East's deep-rooted conflicts; otherwise, the world is heading to the "other Crimea" war.

He concluded by expecting the continuation of the volatile situation in Lebanon due to external and internal factors, the most important are the outcome of the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah's grip on the Lebanese state, a new war between Israel and Hezbollah, along with the weakness of Lebanon's leaders and their inability to rule the country after the departure of Syria, the presidential vacuum and the ensuing paralysis of the constitutional institutions, the dire economic situation and the widespread corruption.

Andrew Tabler started his intervention by asking what if any of Syria and Lebanon's strengths and weaknesses can be traced back to Sykes-Picot.

In case of Lebanon, he said the factors that led to its instability cannot be traced to Sykes-Picot, but instead to the French state building. He added that Lebanon sectarian balance was not sustainable; maintaining the sectarian balance formed in the census of 1932 where Christians made up 51% of the population was an awfully slim majority on which to base power sharing in the 1943 National Pact.

As for Syria, he stated that this country was from the start more troubling and has witnessed during the mandate era more instability both in terms of divisions of Syria into separate sub-states and confrontations with the French Mandate authorities. But to be fair, he added, throwing off the colonial yoke with Independence did not bring about stability. By various accounts, Syria was perhaps the world's most politically unstable country, suffering from over a dozen coup d'états, and for three years ceased to exist as the "northern province" of the United Arab Republic. With the coming to power of the Baath Party in 1963 and Hafez Al Assad in 1970 brought more "stability" to Syria. But a closer look indicates that stability was often paper thin and appeared thicker than it was by civil war in neighboring Lebanon.

He continued by stressing that the role of the first uprising under the Assad's that culminated in February 1982 with the Hama massacre in bringing about the demographic and political conditions for the current uprising cannot be overstated. When Assad used the Hama incident to arrest nearly all of his political opponents and place the country on lockdown, he caused the Middle East Equivalent of the San Francisco earthquake effect.

Was the Lebanese civil war a lagging negative result of Sykes-Picot, or was the Lebanese resilience against mayhem a positive legacy of the same, he asked. In response to this question, Tabler said that Lebanon suffered and benefited from strong sectarian communities. It suffered in terms of distinct identities that were often behind the dividing lines during the civil war, and it benefited in that these communities kept health, education and basic services going during 15 years of civil war.

As for Syria, he asked whether the current Syrian crisis an indication that the French approach, from Sykes-Picot onward, planted the seeds of discord, or is it proof that the French attempt at partitioning and federalizing Syria was the sound course that was not followed. He said, a federalized Syria probably would have avoided some aspects of the Syrian civil war. But the influence of the Arab Nationalist movement and later Nasserism and the Baath meant Syria was inevitably the battleground for what all three of those movements regarded as the future of the region. More poignantly, what are the prospects of survival of the nation-states of Lebanon and Syria today, and have the notion of a nation-state lost its relevance? He believed that the nation state is more important than ever, that the core problem comes down to governance. He concluded by saying that a better governance requires a federalization of breakup of Syria.

Amr Al Azm took the floor wondering if we can blame Sykes-Picot for the downfall of Syria today. He added, it is often said that the original sin for many of the Middle East region's troubles is the Sykes-Picot agreement because it created states with artificial borders that did not take into account ethnic, sectarian, religious or tribal boundaries.

However, he argued that at least as far as Syria is concerned, the problem does not necessarily lie in the supposedly volatile artificiality of the state. Rather, it is persistent policy by successive Syrian regimes to suppress the emergence of a strong national identity, promoting instead alternate supra-Syrian identities that are sectarian (Sunni or Shiite) or inherently ethnic (Arab or Kurdish) or supra politico-ideological such as the one party state system of the Baath. These supra identities conferred advantages on those who fit them to the exclusion of the rest that ultimately led to the disintegration of the country today.

Looking to the future, any post-conflict planning should make it a priority to re-establish and enhance a strong sense of a Syrian national identity as a principal way towards reconciliation and stability rather than seeking to redraw the boundaries of the modern Syrian state based on new supra identities.

The session was followed by a debate during which the following questions were raised:

- Lebanon is currently facing earthquakes which are embodied by rampant corruption and the refugee crisis. Is another earthquake awaiting Lebanon in the near future?
- Kissinger and Brzezinski have agreed that the regional system based on the Sykes-Picot agreement is over and that the current events will eventually lead to the emergence of a new regional system based on reconciliation, partnership, mutual respect for existing borders and non-interference in domestic affairs of other nations. They went as far as to speculate the fall of the international system to the implementation of regional systems. Is this perspective viable?
- Will the collapse of internal borders lead to the collapse of external borders and thus to nations' evanescence?
- While some participants rejected what is often said that neither Lebanon nor Syria succeeded in creating national identity, other in contrary believed that the core problem in both countries is the lack of such identity.

Concerning Syria, Al Azm said the Assad regime worked hard to suppress the emergence of a national identity, encouraging instead alternate supra-Syrian identities that are sectarian or inherently ethnic or supra politico-ideological such as the one party state system of the Baath. As for what was said about ISIL and the Syrian identity, he argued that the regions controlled by the group in Syria from Manbij to Jarabulus to Raqa, are under tribal influence, where tribal identity is omnipresent and overlooks the national identity.

As for the emergence of new regional system, Tabler believed that what would steer changes in the region and implement a new power balance are internal players, especially with the US disengaging itself from the array of crisis hitting the Middle East.

As for Lebanon, Dib said since its independence Lebanon has been and will continue to be the target for earthquakes, mainly because of its critical geopolitical location. Lebanon was subjected to endure the dire consequences of several conflicts starting with the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Arab-Iranian conflict, to the East-West conflict. Nonetheless, he added, Lebanon was capable of containing these disturbances. What remains dangerous, however, is the rampant corruption which undermines any attempt to build a state. He believed that the core reason of

the region's mayhem resides in its failure to establish nation-states. Meanwhile, he emphasized the bind between the success of a new regional system and the extent to which it will abide by the Peace of Westphalia, stressing that Iran should stop meddling in the domestic affairs of other nations.

The fourth session was entitled “**Retrospective and Prospective: Jordan and Palestine**”, and was opened by its moderator **John Bell**, Director of the Middle East and Mediterranean Program, Toledo Center. Bell considered Barr's intervention in which he accounted how Sykes and Picot have dealt with the future of Palestine, the best introduction to this panel. He also emphasized Maila's concomitance between solving the Arab-Israeli conflict and putting end to the region's current havoc, especially with the multiple regional crises shadowing the Arab-Israeli conflict and back seating efforts for reaching a comprehensive solution. Bell presented the speakers, **Marwan Moasher**, Vice President for Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, USA), **Nabil Amr**, former Minister in the Palestinian National Authority and **Mahmoud Soueid**, former Director of the Institute of Palestine Studies.

Moasher presented his intervention via Skype, refusing to hold the Sykes-Picot agreement responsible for all the challenges the Arab world is currently facing. He also refused the “artificial boundaries myth”, most Arabs evoke to justify why a dream of a civil united Arab nation, characterized by diversity and democracy was not fulfill. While recognizing the dire consequences of foreign interference in the Arab world starting with the legacy of colonialism to the establishment of the Israeli state, he stressed that dwelling on colonial borders is unjustifiable as the world doesn't have any authentic or natural borders and plenty of other countries have “artificially drawn” borders and aren't fighting. He said the Jordanian state was not mentioned specifically in the Sykes-Picot agreement, but was carved out later by Winston Churchill in 1921. The state witnessed the flow of several waves of refugees: in 1948, 1967, 1990, 2003 and 2011-now, changing each time its demographic and political nature. He added that the monarchy proved to be resilient as the major two ethnic groups, the East Jordanians and the Palestinians, wanted the monarchy to serve as an umbrella and an arbiter. The political system was relatively more open than most of its neighbors.

Economically, he said, Jordan, much like many Arab countries, employed a “semi-rentier” system, benefitting from rents coming from oil (grants from the gulf), remittances and foreign aid (mainly from the United States recently). While the system has proved resilient, there are serious pressures today facing Jordan:

- On the political front, many Jordanians are frustrated with the way the state is run, and the lack of a serious voice for the citizenry. Several protests took place after 2011, although concern about ending up in a situation like Syria or Egypt has practically ended these demonstrations for the time being.
- The Syrian refugee problem.
- ISIL.
- Economically, unemployment is very high (13% overall, 30% among the youth), public debt is at 94% of GDP, and the fiscal deficit is over 10%. There does not seem to be a medium term plan to deal with these issues. The decline in oil prices means that sustained foreign assistance from the Gulf is not guaranteed.

He concluded saying, one hundred years after Sykes-Picot, Jordan is still struggling with the modern concept of citizenship that acknowledges equal citizenship for all regardless of gender, ethnic origin or religion. He added that Jordan should implement the necessary changes in its political system which could ultimately enable the modern concept of citizenship to flourish; Jordan had embarked in such endeavor in 2005 with the National Agenda project, however this attempt failed because it was rejected by a myriad of stakeholders who refused to give up their gains and privileges.

Former Minister **Nabil Amr** started his intervention by thanking president Amine Gemayel for organizing this conference, stressing that he will address the post-Oslo agreement which has ushered a new era for the Palestinians. However, he said that the Oslo agreement had its pros and limitations, and after its failure the Palestinians were left with only the limitations. While the Oslo agreement granted the Palestinians a passport, allowed the return of hundreds of thousands to Gaza and the West Bank and laid the nucleus of a Palestinian state, several factors played into its failure: Both Palestinians and Israelis were not ready for peace, the Palestinians’ unawareness of the Israeli political system and decision making, over-bet on international support for the new settlement, and finally a mutual misunderstanding of the agreement’s essence, whereas Israel saw it as a security agreement while Palestinian considered it as a political one.

Stating that Palestinians were currently isolated, he outlined several scenarios for a permanent settlement of the Palestinian cause. The first is the continuation of American-sponsored initiatives to simply manage severed relations between both sides in order to avoid any major escalation, warning that such scenario could flare-up in a vicious cycle of violence. The second is the two-state solution considered to be the best despite several obstacles; Amr said that the main dilemma facing the two-state solution is that Israel wants an ideologically based solution that recognizes Israel as a Jewish state, which is refused by Palestinians due to its dire consequences on more than 2 million Palestinians who hold the Israeli passport. In addition, Amr added, the Israeli want a demilitarized Palestinian state completely under their control, they want to truncate part of the Jordan Valley area which constitutes the main agricultural reserve for Palestinians, they are also adamant on their settlements policy and on the status of Jerusalem. In return, Palestinians want a geographically contiguous state free of settlements, enjoying a political and economic freedom with east Jerusalem as its capital. He stressed that the divergence in the two parties' vision needs an international effort that exceed the one put to achieve the Oslo agreement, believing that the tow-state solution will remain an unfulfilled dream.

As for the third scenario, Amr talked about the ongoing Lavrov-Kerry negotiations, wondering if it could pave the way to regional arrangements that include the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nonetheless, he considered this scenario ambiguous, unless the major players in the Middle East in general and particularly in Syria, reach an understanding for a new map for the region depending on the outcome of the Syrian war. However, he said, one could not but shed the light on some major game-changer factors that have occurred in both regional and international political arena: The hastening covert or public rapprochement between Israel and some Arab states, the new world order with neither the US or Russia enjoying anymore the status of superpowers able to running the world and imposing whatever deal they agree upon. On another vein, he said that despite Iran's influential role in the region's countries, it does not have a similar grip on the path of the Palestinian cause especially after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis and the subsequent severing in its relation with Hamas.

Welcomed by both Israeli and Palestinians, he described the last peace initiative of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi as the most serious attempt presented nowadays to break the deadlock facing the resumption of peace negotiations. He concluded by saying that the Middle East problems are not the product of boundaries established by the Sykes-Picot agreement, but rather the product of failed regimes that were unable to create national identities and to achieve

citizenship. He held the division among Palestinians responsible for the failure of the many attempts to bring peace, emphasizing the need for mutual understanding to accept the obvious: The destruction of Israel or the vanishing of the Palestinians are impossible scenarios. Coexistence between the two peoples is the inevitable historical horizon.

Mahmoud Sueid started his intervention by noting that while the Sykes-Picot agreement was signed at the height of WWI, its substance can be traced to the colonial aspirations of Britain and France; in fact, before Sykes-Picot and with the approval of France, British were eager to establish a Jewish state in Palestine for national interests, the most important being to control the shortest route between the Mediterranean and the Gulf, and thus securing the road to India.

Speaking about the current situation of the Palestinian cause, he considered that the divisions among Palestinians had dire consequences for the wider Palestinian quest for statehood and self-determination. He added that for Israel, Palestinian factionalism is a central piece in its strategy to divide and rule. Sadly, many Palestinians are playing along and by doing so are jeopardizing their own salvation.

Along this vein, he highlighted the “destructive” role played by Iran through arming Hamas and sowing divisions among Palestinian factions. Decrying Iran’s drastic role in the region especially in Lebanon and Syria, he said that Iranian claims to support the Palestinian cause are more ostentatious, showy, exaggerated, and theatrical rather than genuine and practical. He added that currently, the Arab governments have proven ineffective in helping the Palestinians pursue their national agenda; both Arab states and the international community have put the Palestinian issue on the back burner, pushing thus Israel to go further with its settlement construction policy, judaization of Jerusalem, Galilee and the Jordan Valley, without which there would be no life for a Palestinian state. He expressed pessimism over the prospect of resuming Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, saying that the Sissi’s initiative will go nowhere especially with the many challenges Egypt is facing with its launched war against extremist groups in north Sinai, the Palestinian factionalism and the multiple conflicts rearing across the region. He called on Palestinians to peacefully resist Israel’s settlement construction plan, to focus on international and regional initiatives and activate the policy of boycotting Israel politically, economically and academically until a permanent peace is possible.

The debate that followed this session raised several focal points:

- The Sykes-Picot agreement is not to blame for the emergence of the Israeli state as it is not responsible for the conflicts wracking the region.
- The weaknesses and contradictions of authoritarian regimes are at the heart of the Middle East's ongoing tribulations. Even the rampant ethnic and religious sectarianism is a result of this authoritarianism, which has come to define the Middle East's state system far more than the Sykes-Picot agreement ever did.
- The Palestinians' own internal divisions are the biggest barrier to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- There is a tangible change in public opinion in countries whose governments have been traditionally sympathetic to Israel giving the Palestinian cause an international dimension. That is cause for hope.
- Boycotting Israel is not a solution and it has proven to be ineffective.
- The need to contain the drastic role played by Iran with regards to the Palestinian cause.

Saturday, 21st of May:

Entitled **Retrospective and Prospective: Iraq**, Hassan Mneimneh kicked off the fifth session saying that Iraq may be the most prominent experience that was produced by the Sykes-Picot agreement and other subsequent agreements. Iraq may also be the country that has paid the biggest price for the unbalanced repercussions of Sykes-Picot agreement. He emphasized on Iraq's particularity among Arab states, as it is the only one that benefits of both natural and human resources, and was the most successful state to forging a national identity. In fact, despite decades of tyranny, he added, Iraq has witnessed a merge among its different components that has led to the emergence of the Iraqi national identity. However since the ousting of Saddam Hussein, the national narrative has fallen and been replaced by factional narratives such the sectarian, tribal racial and ethnic narratives. He said that these narratives express the deep Iraqi cultural crisis in the post-Saddam era in its quest to establish a new national narrative that overcomes these factional narratives and at the same time taking them into consideration. After introducing the panelists, he gave the floor to Maysoon Al-Damluji, Member of Parliament, Chair of the Parliamentary Culture and Media Committee, spokesperson of Al Wataniya Bloc.

AL Damluji began her intervention by thanking President Gemayel and MdF for organizing this conference and stressed that she will address in her intervention the current Iraqi crisis. She said that in addition to what Mneimneh said about Iraq enjoying both natural and human resources, this country was also the cradle of multiple civilizations as it was surrounded by other civilizations. She added that historically, Iraq had been the ideal place for conflicts among these civilizations and it had known its golden age when it had played a bridge among them. She continued to say that today is no different from yesterday, as Iraq is still the arena of multiple regional and international conflicts.

Al Damluji said she will begin her intervention with the occupation of Iraq in 2003, when all the state institutions were dissolved as well as the army and security forces; In addition, the de-Baathification law was enacted and we witnessed the damaging implementation of an ethno-sectarian quota political system, reducing the Iraqi state to its three components: The Sunni, Shiite and Kurds. She added that this situation has led to injustice, as a large part of the Iraqi people especially among the Sunni felt they were marginalized. After 13 years of conflicts among these components, we are currently witnessing the rise of internal conflicts within each one of them that will eventually lead to the disintegration of the big sectarian blocks. She considered the legislative election of 2010 as being a turning point because it has unveiled the big gap between Iraqis and the political class and it has showed the impact of foreign intervention in stoking sectarian division in Iraq. She said that the March 2010 election resulted in a partial victory for the Iraqi National Coalition, led by former Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, which won a total of 91 seats, making it the largest alliance in the new parliament. The State of Law Coalition, led by incumbent Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki at the time, was the second largest grouping with 89 seats. Despite this result, and due to foreign intervention, Al-Maliki retained his post as prime minister and started his term by launching a brutal repression against his opponents.

Between 2010 and 2014, the gap between Iraqis and the political class widened which has led to the fall first of Mosul and second of Anbar Province to terrorist groups; the Iraqi army fled with hardly a fight. She talked about the outbursts of street riots in 2015 which took place under the banner of preserving the unity of Iraq, refusal of religious political parties, rejection of sectarianism and fighting corruption. Muqtada Al Sadr movement joined these street riots demanding the

Iraqi government to deliver promised reforms, however, riots' demand were reduced to a simple government reshuffle. She concluded by saying that while the 2003 invasion of Iraq was decisive in creating Iraq's contemporary sectarian dynamics, the main danger that currently loom in Iraq is the growing inter-communal divide within each community. It will be a bloody fight; however it could usher a new era of cross-communal trend in Iraq's politics that upholds the national identity over the religious one.

Raid Juhi Alsaedi, Inspector General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iraq and Legal Advisor, started his intervention by explaining how nations have aroused throughout history, noting that the border demarcation drawn by the Sykes-picot agreement is not a first in human political history. Speaking about Iraq's future, he stressed that while foreign intervention is keen to see a shredded Iraq, and despite several secessionist voices especially among Kurds, most Iraqis are committed to the unity of their country within its current boundaries and adhere to national identity. He finally considered that ISIL will lose its battle to hold territory in Iraq and it will be eliminated as a cell-based terrorist group in Iraq. Accordingly, he added, ISIL phenomenon will not have a place in the future political map of Iraq.

After thanking president Gemayel and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, for organizing "such a stimulating conference," former Iraqi Ambassador to the United States **Rand Al Rahim** started her intervention with a couple of comments, the first pertains to what Andrew Tabler said about the United States and the other powers being unable today unlike in 1916, the time of Sykes Picot, of implementing their strategies on the ground. She said, "Yes, it is difficult today for the US or the EU to implement or enforce anything. However, the international community led by the US can stir zests, can shape opinions, and therefore, can influence outcomes". The second comment targeted the maps that Heydemann showed. She said, there is no smoke without fire; "these maps did not come from nowhere but they were a result of a widespread believe in the US that the whole region should be divided along sectarian lines", and that is why people are afraid of such maps.

Speaking about the so-called artificiality of the Iraqi state espoused by some

western pundits and the Kurds arguing that Iraq was clubbed together by Sykes Picot without good reason, she said that such argumentation does not stand. First of all, she continued, Iraq is no more artificial than other states created after WW1, not only in the Middle East but also in Africa and Central Europe, as well as in the Caucasus after the fall of the Soviet Union. Stressing that the issue of the artificiality of states “is a bogus one”, she said that the question that should be asked is: “Are the people in a state content with being in that state or not? And I think in Iraq, at the time of the formation of the state in 1921 and with the exception of the Kurds, all its components from Sunni, Shiite, Yazidis and Christians, had accepted to be within the borders of Iraq”. They were of course not content with the mandate, she added, but they were never opposed to the Iraqi state as it was shaped by the Sykes-Picot agreement.

About a reconfiguration of Iraq’s borders, she said, “We have to think in terms of external and internal borders (...) and we need to have a nuance approach to what we mean by a revision of borders”. Answering the question whether the apparent dislocation of Iraq is a correction of its artificial construction by Sykes-Picot, she said that the current disarray in Iraq is not a matter of borders, it is instead a matter of failed governance and that’s what we really need to focus on.

She continued that during the thirties, forties and fifties of the late century, there was an enormous effort at building up the Iraqi identity through the educational system and many other means. But that was disrupted by the Arab Nationalism that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, and the notion that there is a transcendent identity tended to submerge the Iraqi identity, and that was “very damaging”. She added, in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein tried to rebuild the Iraqi identity, yet he did so because of the war with Iran. Hussein was very eager to bring back to the front an Iraqi identity in order to help with the war in Iran. She stressed, “I think at that point, it was a little bit too late, because Saddam has already started persecuting Shiites and Kurds, and actually anybody who opposed him, including Sunnis; but most of the ills were directed or suffered by the Shiites and the Kurds. So we have an Iraqi identity that was built throughout the thirties, forties and fifties, revived again in 1980s but for the wrong agenda”.

She added that prior to 2003, the two aggrieved communities were distinctly the Kurds and the Shiites, who were unfortunately represented by religious parties.

The pact and the strategic alliance between the two were based on the fact that Kurds wanted federalism and Shiites wanted supremacy over the Arab part of Iraq. The problem is that after 2003, “we elevated not Iraqi identity but communal and factional identities”. There was no unified vision of what it was to be an Iraqi, no unified vision of how Iraq should be governed and by whom. She added, the Shiites were guilty of gross and triumphalism which boarded revenge; if you were Sunni, you were prima facie guilty and you had to prove your innocence. We had also a number of laws including the de-Baathification, accountability and justice, which put all the Sunnis on the defensive because not only were they excluded, they were also accused of complicity with Hussein regime, and therefore suspects and could not participate in the new order. The bad governance and widespread corruption worsened the situation.

She said that after 13 years of instability, violence and untruthful relation among the Iraqi components, it is time to rethink Iraq’s internal and external borders, and discuss the viability of Iraq as a unified state or as a federal state divided according to sectarian lines and comprising a Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish independent states, an idea fiercely espoused by Americans. Although such scenario is welcomed by Kurds, both Sunni and Shiite refuse it for different reasons, the Sunni because they touted it as treason, while the Shiites wanted a heavy hand on all Iraq. She added, there is many reasons why a division of Iraq is impossible the first of which resides in the fact that most provinces and particularly the Sunni ones, are patchwork of communities, Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds and Christians. And these communities do not live in discretely, they are into mix, they are cheek and jaw, village next to village, home next to home. If we wanted to create [pure regions], she said, the extent of ethnic cleansing, civil war bloodshed and dislocation would be enormous, far more than what we have seen until today and human cost would be tragic. The second reason, she added, is the rise of conflicts within each community, all of whom have militias and are armed up to the teeth, and none of whom can see eye to eye on the future. The third reason is that our neighbors who have enormous interests in Iraq are not going to be neutral and stay quiet about dividing Iraq; Iran, Turkey, the Gulf region will all interfere, ISIL will probably have an irreversible hold in Sunni areas, Iran will probably use the Shiite areas as a satellite region for its influence even more so than today; in other words we will have in Iraq a regional conflict by proxy.

Al Rahim concluded by saying that the solution in Iraq resides in fully implementing the constitution. “The Iraqi Constitution talk about decentralization; we have not practice this decentralization. The remedy for the foreseeable future: Devolution to those provinces and truly implementing the laws that describe the type of devolution, but at the same time, strengthening the central government in Baghdad in all responsibilities of governance, security, intelligence, border security and strategic planning”.

The discussion that followed centered on the following ideas:

- The future of ISIL
- The future of Kurdistan
- How can we create a cross-communal trend in Iraq?
- Are Sunnis in Iraq identifying themselves with Sunnis abroad more than with their Shiite fellow citizens?
 - Can secularism and the establishment of a civil state be a plausible solution for the Iraqi crisis?
 - Did Iraq choose the federal system because of the o-called existent division along sectarian lines or because of the Kurds?
- The future of minorities in Iraq.

In response to these questions, panelists said that secularism is an old existing trend in Iraq, arguing that since its inception in 1921, the country have witnessed the rise of secular political parties. They stressed that this trend is currently represented by the Iraqi National Coalition which includes among its ranks all spectrum of the Iraqi society. They emphasized the ideological religious difference between the Shiites in Iraq and Iran, outlining the growing criticism of the Iranian stances by Iraqi Shiite religious and political leaders. They added that Iraqis today, whether Sunni or Shiite, are keen to uphold their national identity, highlighting the social blending among them. They concluded by speculating that the reinvention of the secular trend in Iraq will lead to the emergence of secular leaders especially among youth who are today fighting bad governance and corruption. Finally panelists unanimously said that ISIL will not remain as a major player in Iraq, and while Al Rahim thought that Kurdistan will sooner or later be an independent state, Al Damluji predicted intern division among Kurds and Alsaedi said Kurdistan will remain attached to Iraq within the federal system.

Under the title “**A new Sykes-Picot for the region**”, the sixth session kicked off with its moderator Journalist **Jihad El Zein** stressing on two major issues raised during this 2-day conference, the first being the re-emergence of national identities throughout the region and the second the federal system being the solution for the current regional crisis.

Burhanettin Duran, General Coordinator, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research in Turkey, thanked President Gemayel and the Konrad Adenauer for organizing this conference. Speaking about the possibility of a new Sykes-Picot in the region, he said that discussions over a new Middle East are not new and can be traced back to two major events that shaped the background of Arab uprisings: the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq. He added that the concept of new boundaries was raised by two local actors: ISIL who claimed it has removed borders between Syria and Iraq in its endeavor to establish the Caliphate, and the Kurds in their pursuit for an independent state. He continued to say that even actors who refuse redrawing borders in the region know that it will never be the same again especially with all the changes in the international political scene. He spoke about three challenges facing the future of the Westphalian order in the region and threatening the nation-states formed after the WWI: The collapse of its three pillars sovereignty, territoriality and secularism; the rise of sub-factional identities at the expense of the inclusive national identity; the flow of refugees with the mass migration out of Iraq and Syria towards neighboring and European states. While emphasizing the world powers’ responsibility for the current crisis in the Middle East, he stressed as well on local parties’ responsibility like Kurdish or Sunni or Shiite communities in different countries that are making it very easy for global powers to be involved in the regional affairs with little cost for themselves. He said: “We have to think of this interplay among global and regional powers, in a sense that all of them have responsibility to form a new order for the region”. Speaking about eventual solutions for the region’s multiple crisis, he presented different scenarios, the first being the continuation of this polarization and division within the states along the lines of ethnic and sectarian conflicts, and this means the continuation of wars and violence. The other option is ending the competition between global and regional powers and push them to get together in order to discuss a settlement in Syria and Iraq.

The third one is a regional integration to end these conflicts starting by breaking this binary polarization between Sunnis and Shiites. He concluded by stressing the need to establish a new order in the region rather than a new Sykes-picot arrangement.

Nassif Hitti, Former Arab League Ambassador to Rome and the Vatican took the floor and began his intervention by saying that we used to consider the Ottoman Empire as being the sick man of Europe in the 19 century. Today, since the first decade of the 21 century, the Arab World carries some symptomatic features of becoming unfortunately, the sick man of the world. He added that we are witnessing today the emergence of an anarchical order in the Middle East due to what “I once called the desArabization of the Arab regional order”. He added that Arab states are currently unable to set the agenda for the region, especially with the rise of Iran and Turkey and their involvement in regional affairs.

He stressed that today we are back at what we thought ended up with the sixties: The return of ideologies as a disturbing factor in what usually should be a normal interstate relations, normal regional state order. The difference between today and the sixties is that during the sixties, we had instrumental ideologies: Arab Nationalism translated to socialism, conservative Islamism, but still it was political. Today we are having a primary identity based ideologies, not only in Islamism, but if we look through this transparent veil we could see that there are political Sunnism and political Shiism in this game, each of the two are used by great powers to promote and serve their own interests. So this return of ideologies at a state order level combined with a power vacuum in the Arab world, has reshuffled and recreated a reconfiguration of power in the region.

His third observation went to the Arab Spring; one of the main reasons behind what was called at one time the Arab Spring, is the clash between the two Ds: The demographic expansion and the under-development, the misbalanced development. The clashes between these two Ds has produced sticking bombs. This real socio-economic issue was hijacked by another clash, the clash of geo-politics and sociology, the clash of the geo-politics attractiveness of certain countries; Syria is very attractive, Lebanon used to be attractive unfortunately for the country geo-politically speaking, and sociology in terms of vulnerability of the national society. Because also the secular ideologies of the past were entirely discredited, and what we have been seeing is the emergence of sub-national loyalties, sectarian, ethnic and religious loyalties that were very much attractive and inviting for the geo-political intervention and interference.

He continued to say that sectarianism became unfortunately the name of the game, being used and misused to serve certain interests; the clash of sectarianism mainly between Sunni and Shiites is a key factor leading to the emergence of non-state actors who became currently much stronger in setting the agenda in the Middle East connecting national issues to transnational issues. If we look from Baghdad to Beirut, which is the region of our debate today, and beyond that from Sana'a to Sirte, we could see the importance of these non-state actors' role and fighting groups in this respect. He added, today, what is interesting enough is that most of the revolutions are not happening in Monarchies, because Monarchies have their traditional source of legitimacy, rather they are happening in what is called the "monarchical republics", which suddenly suffered from a sort of legitimacy vacuum. What we have seen in these countries, is not the "raison d'état" it's the "raison de la famille", and perhaps some parts of the family who was directly governing. What is important here is that in most countries except for Egypt and Tunisia, regimes were stronger than the state: Should the regime go down, the state will also collapse. That is what happened in Iraq and in Syria.

Hitti thought that the multidimensional fight over Syria mirrors all the fights in the region, and especially the strategic confrontation between the two returning regional empires, Turkey and Iran; for Turkey, it's the door to the East, for Iran it's the bridge to the Mediterranean. Speaking about the region's future, Hitti presented 4 possible scenarios.

The first scenario is the Sudanization scenario, which means the division of a country or more than a country into two de jure countries, leading to the creation of a new country. There are many reasons that would work against this possibility in the Levant; firstly it will not be limited to one state, so it will break down everything and secondly it has not the objective conditions for success. The second scenario is the Somalization scenario or the proliferation of failed states and disintegrated societies. The third scenario is the Lebanization model based on the concessional democracy, and implemented through an internal Taef and an external Taef.

Hitti concluded that the best scenario yet is the establishment of a civil state based on the concept of citizenship. There is no medium role of the communities between the individual and the state whether it is ethnic or religious or sectarian, it is based on respecting diversity, on an all-inclusive approach and on the rule of the law. Otherwise, we will remain in the same game of inviting interference and intervention and more and more balkanization of the region.

Paul Salem, Vice President for Policy and Research in the Middle East Institute started his intervention by asking if the region is currently witnessing deep alteration alike of what had happened on the second decade of the last century and had led to the Sykes-Picot agreement. Stressing that the region is indeed witnessing brutal shifts, he explained that what we mean by the need for a new Sykes-Picot is the need for a solution to the multi-regional wars. He added that we are facing today a regional war in which several local and external actors are involved making the opportunity to reach a settlement very minimal. Nonetheless, he considered that a new Sykes-Picot which redraw the region's boundaries is currently impossible as it will need to be implemented the blessing of the international community and the UN council, and this is not plausible. He added that instead of talking about new borders, we should focus on discussing means to establish security within the existent ones, firstly thought rebuilding a new political system that could usher the establishment of civic states. He continued to say that the region needs a new regional order which includes Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the US, Russia, China and Europe that work through political means to enforce the Westphalian order in the region along with rebuilding failed states. This could be done by ending wars plaguing the region and establishing economic cooperation.

Salem concluded his intervention by highlighting the drastic role Iran is playing in the region, calling the international community to work towards pushing Iran to refrain its expansionist ambitions while at the same time providing Tehran guarantees as to its security and role.

Discussion that followed this session focused on whether the region is in need for new borders or new political systems along with a new regional order.

Before giving the floor to Keynote guest Adan al Janabi, Interim Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Hassan Mneimneh presented a rap-up highlighting the main ideas discussed during the conference's different panels:

- The main problem the region is suffering from is the lack of states and the grip of totalitarian regimes.
- The legacy of Sykes-Picot transcends boundaries to reach the absence of national identity within the regions' countries.

- Two trends emerged as to speculating on the region's future: The first saw the region going ahead to a new redrawing of external borders in reminiscence to the Sykes-picot agreement and another emphasizing the failure of such scenario.

Al Janabi started his intervention by stressing that the situation nowadays is completely different from what it was when the Sykes-Picot agreement was ratified, especially with the new technology impact on international affairs as well as domestic affairs in each country. He added that today we are witnessing numeric wars fought by non-state actors, along with confused world powers unable to fight back and unprepared for such non-traditional wars. He continued to say that the problem from which the Arab world in general and Iraq in particular are suffering has nothing to do with borders but with policies adopted by regimes, whether related to foreign affairs or domestic ones. Predicting the falling of ISIL, Al Janabi warned against the world powers being unprepared for managing the after-ISIL era in the region. Having agreed to what some panelists said about locals having a say in determining the future of the region, he explained that what is meant by locals goes beyond countries' populations to include key regional countries, each of them having its own agenda.

He added that the region's problem does not lay in redrawing boundaries, at least for Iraq, as with the exception of Kurds, all Iraqis are content with their current borders. The problem is with the failing policies adopted during decades. Considering Iran as the major player in Iraq, he emphasized the absence of an efficient role played by the US, stressing that the US current approach to the Middle East, points to Washington adopting a relatively low profile, accommodating diverse local agendas. He added that the United States has distanced itself more visibly where it lacks the means or interest to influence the course of events directly. This is most evident in its policies towards Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. He speculated that after its multiple overt military interventions in the region, the US will continue with its disengagement policy, focusing instead on domestic issues. As for the European states, they are more focusing on countering the drastic impact of the refugees' crisis and they have no vision as how to settle our numerous problems.

Al Janabi concluded by saying that the most dangerous legacy of the Sykes-Picot agreement is Israel; until now the Arab countries failed at forging a viable and effective regional policy on how to deal with this country. The second crisis we inherited from this agreement is the Kurds' quest for an independent state. He added that this issue is being dealt with only in Iraq, while it is back seated in other countries such as Syria, Iran and Turkey. Saying that the Iraqi constitution outlined a working frame to deal with the Kurdish cause through federalism, he stressed that Iraq's future lay within its people's ability to refuse confessionalism as well as religious parties.