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## Round Table: Security in the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea Region

*MIREES' open lecture*

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Among the different activities offered by the LM course MIREES, on April 14, 2015 the opportunity has been offered to students and professors to attend the Round Table "*Security in the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea Region*". On this occasion *dr. Marco Valigi*, University of Roma Tre, presented the book "*Caspian Security Issues. Conflicts, cooperation and energy supplies*".

Among the presenters were the MIREES professors Albert Bininachvili (Columbia University and the University of Bologna) and prof. Arunas Molis (NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence Vilnius and University of Bologna), respectively specialists in security issues in the Caucasus and the Caspian, and energy security.

The opening address of Marco Valigi clarified how the book was based on a historical and geopolitical approach, analyzing the importance that the Caspian region has assumed in the course of history for various global powers. In the analysis of the historical context, it was possible to appreciate the influence of the political interests over several phases of expansion and political interactions, considering the theories of "Heart Land" and, subsequently, the "Rim land" applied to the nations of the Caspian energy basin. The analysis ranged from the point of view of the USSR to that of the United States, which considered this region a natural continuation of the Middle East, up to the economic interests of modern China and the European Union, which according to the author has failed in pragmatism in the energy security policies and economic implementation until now in the area.

The book "*Caspian Security Issues. Conflicts, cooperation and energy supplies*", as highlighted at the conference by prof. Bininachvili, draws strength from the clarity and the fundamental importance that this text assumes for the training of specialists in the area of the Caspian Sea and in studies related to energy security.

This geographic area defined as "Great Middle Asia" need to be studied in a more balanced manner regarding the historical and current political issues, devoid of interpretive prisms used by large state actors such as the Republic of China, the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the European Union itself, which entertained over the years a "special" relation with the states which are composing this diverse geopolitical area.

Just on this relation, economically and politically delicate, prof. Molis, specialist in energy security, specified that for the European Union, the maintenance and the development of infrastructure and good relations between the EU 28 and the “8” (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) of the Caspian region is a "priority project for the countries of the Union" (A. Molis). As with the development of the infrastructure of the Southern corridor, the result at the political level is a closer and more effective cooperation between countries involved and affected by the path of natural gas pipelines.

Striking example is the cooperative relationship that has developed between Greece and Turkey (both members of NATO, but with Turkey not being the part of the EU) beyond historical antagonisms. Collaboration for a profitable economic resource, ensures stability in the area. It is easy to understand how this complex system of pipelines can be interpreted as a useful tool for international security.

The other side of the coin is, as explained in the book, the level of international competitiveness that the countries of the Caspian Sea should support. In particular, the Russian pressure aimed at replacing the gas sold by the countries of the Southern Corridor has become increasingly insistent, for two basic reasons, described by prof. Molis. The first, and most important in terms of international relations, is that the interest in the energy markets of Russia and Africa by the European Union, is undergoing a change due to new priority placed on the agenda by the European Council: that of creating a single European market for energy, expanding the horizon of business within the territory, and intensifying exports. Hence the second reason, technical in nature: the pipes are now obsolete technology and the use of gas, even if only partially, is being replaced by the use of bio mass as an energy source.

This, as the authors suggest, resulted in lower prices for fossil fuels but, on the other hand, greater competitiveness not only within states suppliers of energy resources but also in the choice of which resources to use. This explains how projects such as the "Nabucco" have been set aside. Namely, the lack of investment, due to the competition between “Nabucco” and “South Stream” have outlined a situation that has fostered one subject rather than another. Among the favorite subjects of this competitiveness, as explained by dr. Valigi there is the example of Azerbaijan, defined by the same a "diplomatic miracle", because thanks to what the speakers have called "energy diplomacy", the Baku government could support since the early 2000s a policy of exchange, where in exchange for a single energy source provided (crude oil), they received from the European community raw materials lacking in the national Azerbaijani.

Interventions and questions, moderated by prof. Lucarelli, the MIREES professor of the course on Pan-European Security, have shown that the issues of energy security and the geopolitical situation in the Caspian Sea are a new horizon of study.

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