

**TRANSATLANTIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK**  
**Conference "The Impact of Elections in MENA and the**  
**Western Balkans: A Look at Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya,**  
**Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan"**

**November 13, 2018**

**Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Michael Haltzel**  
**Chairman of the Board, Transatlantic Leadership Network**

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to welcome you all here today. My name is Mike Haltzel, and in my capacity as Chairman of the Transatlantic Leadership Network, I would like to convey to all of you attending this conference my enthusiastic greeting.

We are especially grateful to Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri, the Congressional sponsor of this event. It is an honor to be able to meet here at Capitol for our inaugural conference.

The launching of a new organization is an exciting event, even more so if there is a perceived need to be met. I would submit that the Transatlantic Leadership Network, or TLN, falls into that category. It is our belief that practitioners of international relations must reorient themselves to the dynamics of a rapidly changing world.

Issues nearly unknown only a few decades ago now must assume central importance in national policy: climate change, mass migration, well-armed and violent non-state actors, the intensity of alliance commitments, populist challenges to Western democracies, the positive and negative effects of social media, China's rise and the end of the short-lived American "unipolar moment", and the very weakening of the international framework that has served the Western world well for more than seventy years.

All these items and more require a rethinking of governmental policymaking, as well as cooperation among governments, businesses, and civil society.

To that end, the Transatlantic Leadership Network will convene broad-gauged experts and practitioners dedicated to strengthening and reorienting transatlantic relations.

TLN's activities include policy briefs, young leaders' initiatives, seminars, and conferences such as this one. Through these activities, we will engage a broad spectrum of decision-makers and

thought leaders to address contemporary challenges in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.

For example, TLN is planning a conference next spring in Mostar on Bosnian reform, and a conference next June in Poros, Greece on the new energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Our meeting today is on the timely subject of recent elections in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) and the Western Balkans. Our speakers and panelists will discuss Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic reform agenda and its viability; the new governments in Baghdad and Erbil, and current relations between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan; and investment as a means to strengthen democracy and stability in these countries.

The scholars, business leaders, and diplomats whom we will hear today constitute a real star-studded cast. You should have received their capsule biographies, and the chairpersons of the panels will make any further introductions. I would like, however, to give special recognition to three prominent American officials: Amanda Bennett, Director of the Voice of America, who will give the opening remarks; Gretchen Birkle, Deputy Assistant Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development; and Eric Carlson, Senior Adviser for Bosnia at the Department of State. Please join me in welcoming Director Bennett, Deputy Assistant Administrator Birkle, and Senior Adviser Carlson.

Now to some unfortunate news. We are deeply disappointed that the Vice President of Libya, Abdulsaleem Kajman, as well as the other panelists originally scheduled to speak on our morning panel on reconciliation in Libya, were refused U.S. visas.

This case raises the whole question of President Trump's travel ban against seven countries, including Libya. It goes without saying that the safety of the United States must be guaranteed. The stated reason for the ban on Libya is its supposed inability to report public-safety and terrorism-related information. I would certainly urge the government of Libya to comply with U.S. requests for that information.

But these gentlemen are anything but terrorists. A blanket country visa ban that does not differentiate between foes and potential friends of the United States is quite simply counter-productive.

Self-isolating policies such as the visa ban erode the global leadership of the United States and will ultimately weaken, not strengthen our country. If the administration truly seeks to maintain strong foreign relations, it would do well to welcome those persons from other countries who seek to initiate dialogue with the U.S.

Due to bureaucratic delays and domestic political events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are also without Milan Radović, a prominent banker from Banja Luka, and Goran Miraščić, a member of the National Economic Council. They will join us next time when we continue our series on the Western Balkans at the conference in Mostar.

My colleagues and I at TLN recognize that there are many challenges to healthy and productive relations between the United States and Europe and the MENA region. We hope and anticipate that the Transatlantic Leadership Network will be able to play a meaningful and positive role in shaping and reorienting American foreign policy to be more amenable to these changing dynamics. We urge you to look at our website at [www.transatlantic.org](http://www.transatlantic.org) and to utilize the interactive “contact” function to communicate to us suggestions for future conferences and comments on our publications.

In conclusion, let me repeat my warm welcome and as Humphrey Bogart said to Claude Rains at the conclusion of the movie “Casablanca,” voice the hope that today’s inaugural TLN meeting will be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Now it’s my pleasure to ask my friend and colleague Daniel Serwer to chair the first part of the proceedings.