ESADEgeo has hosted Pakistani journalist and author Ahmed Rashid, to give a seminar on Security and Terrorism in South and Central Asia, on March 2, 2011.

Javier Solana and Ahmed Rashid in ESADE during the Seminar on Security and Terrorism in South and Central Asia, on March 2, Barcelona, 2011

ESADEgeo’s President, Javier Solana welcomed Pakistani journalist and author Ahmed Rashid, a leading expert on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Javier Solana highlighted that the seminar was taking place the same day as Pakistani Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti was shot dead in Islamabad to oppose the blasphemy law. The murder has been particularly striking as it has been the second murder in two months. In January, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, was also shot dead by one of his bodyguards.

Ahmed Rashid underlined that Pakistan is facing severe difficulties in the political, economy and social spheres. And the institution which is able to change the country – that is the military–is not prepared to do so. "Pakistan is still stuck in the Cold War, which allowed the army to become the savior of Pakistan. This situation has never been overcome and now the army has fallen into the foreign policy." For this reason, absent a political leadership, it is not viable expecting in Pakistan a revolution similar to the one we are witnessing these days in many countries of the Arab World.

Talking on Afghanistan, Ahmed Rashid emphasized the failure of the Bush Administration to make a “building nation” after 2000. In Rashid’s words this was “a big mistake because it was something achievable after the liberation of the Taliban”.

When talking about the transition in Afghanistan, Ahmed Rashid reminded the audience not to forget that there is an assumption that the US and NATO will be able to transition to military and policy in Afghanistan but we should also keep in mind the necessity to discuss how important pillars such as education and health are going to be transferred.
Another aspect which is very dangerous is the growing ethnic divide between the Pashtuns and Non Pashtuns. The high rate of Afghan men deserting NATO (32% every year) and from the Police (33%) is also a matter of concern.

All in all, Rashid were confident about Afghanistan’s future. “There’s a way out. But it has to be through dialogue with the Taliban”. According to Rashid, Taliban are ready for dialogue. “They’re afraid to be overcome by a new generation of younger, much more ideologized. This elder generation understands that with no foreign support, their economy would collapse within 6-12 months”. But for dialogue to happen, the US must take the first step.

During the seminar, regional countries were also attached an important role on the future of Afghanistan. Today, Rashid noted that they are much more polarized regarding the strategy on Afghanistan than they used to be. The common thought is that the US withdrawal will mean again that Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia will be compelled to run Afghanistan without resources. Although chances are low for this to happen because of global terrorism and global interdependency, Rashid stressed the need for a regional rapprochement in general, and for an India-Pak dialogue on Afghanistan in particular.