

Euro- Mediterranean Political Relations: Confidence and security- building measures

Dr. Carlos Echeverria Jesus¹

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There is a resurgence of interest in the search for a viable form of dialogue to promote cooperation among Mediterranean states on regional concerns affecting the Mediterranean as a whole. With the end of the Cold War and the beginning of peace- building in the Middle East, the differentiation between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean has become less clear. These Mediterranean subregions are separate, but share a socio- economic common denominator. In addition, the evolution of the European Union's Mediterranean policy has brought the northern and southern Mediterranean shores closer to each other. Finally, instability and insecurity in their widest sense are probably the most important factors, suggesting that the time has come for the Mediterranean to be viewed as a single region.

There are assumptions that a culture of conflict exists along the southern shore of the Mediterranean, where the military play an active role in politics. Moreover, while the northern shore has many institutions for dealing with conflicts, no cooperative institutions operate in the south.

The question of mutual perceptions

For European security institutions dealing with Mediterranean politics, the first problem is to understand what, in this region, is meant by the term 'security'. In fact, the absence of a common strategic language in the region has traditionally been a major problem. That understanding is a precondition to any effective dialogue and to any cooperation between countries to the north and south of the Mediterranean.

An added complication is that there is a diversity of perceptions of security among non- European Mediterranean countries:

- there are no military threats from Europe perceived on the southern and eastern shores (Libya is an exception).
- None the less, southern Mediterranean countries view the development of a European Security and Defence Identity with suspicion, misinterpreting the Western military activities in the Mediterranean area, such as military exercises and the possibility of humanitarian operations.

¹ Dr. Carlos Echeverria Jesus is Research Fellow at the WEU- Institute for Security Studies. Paper presented at Halki International Seminars (September 7- 14, 1996)

- The tensions existing between and within the North African and Middle Eastern countries themselves account for the core of their security concerns.
- In addition, in North Africa 'security' is normally associated with internal problems or with non- military issues.

In fact, a number of conceptual and terminological misunderstandings must be overcome. The various Euro- Mediterranean dialogues on security, such as those initiated by the Western European Union (WEU) in 1992, by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 1994 and by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1995 are aimed not only at preventing negative perceptions between the two shores from worsening, but at building up the security environment in the Mediterranean basin.

Security dialogues in the Mediterranean basin

Given that all kinds of interconnected problems are present in this region, states within the Mediterranean basin are resuming active exploration of some ideas for regional cooperation, and to provide effective for a for reconciling views. The search for principles governing the construction of a new security for the Mediterranean has begun in the European Union (EU), the WEU, NATO and the OSCE². This is a reflection to be done north and south and east and west together. In fact, the Mediterranean region can no more be sliced into two or more separate segments as in the past.

The plurality of institutionalized dialogues in the Mediterranean region is a very important asset:

The EU is addressing the Mediterranean as a whole and stresses the need for a step by step approach in the first chapter (political and security) and in the third chapter (cultural and human) of the Barcelona Declaration, for which the details are now being worked out. Up to now, the EU's Mediterranean policy has consisted in a network of bilateral agreements rather than in a multilateral approach. The Barcelona Declaration calls for a sustained political dialogue and its on- going follow- up has been described as an opportunity for the governments and institutions of Europe to partake in the construction of a new Mediterranean relationship. For the establishment of a zone of peace and stability, the EU proposes an increased dialogue based on respect for democracy, good governance and human rights.

The principle that Euro- Mediterranean partnership is invisible, on the basis of a full Euro- Mediterranean partnership, would constitute a confidence- building measure in itself, since a recognition of priority has never existed between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. The Euro- Mediterranean partnership should establish a framework of comprehensive

² See Echeverria Jesus, Carlos: "The Mediterranean Security dialogue" in WEU Institute Newsletter Number 18, October 1996, p.1

CSBMs, irrespective of delays, which are always possible, in the on-going Arab- Israeli peace process. In short, the Barcelona Conference of November 1995 supposed that for the first time in the history of the Mediterranean region, something serious had begun.

Concerns about the risks in the Mediterranean have prompted the WEU and NATO to promote bilateral and separate security dialogues with some non-member Mediterranean countries. Since 1992, the WEU has been gradually developing a dialogue of on politico- military issues with some countries of the Maghreb region (Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia), later expanded to Egypt in 1994 and Israel in 1995. On 8 February 1995 exploratory discussions were undertaken between NATO and Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and, in November 1995, Jordan. The initial input has been provided by Italy and Spain, while at the Seville informal meeting of NATO Defence Ministers, in September 1994, a French proposal was submitted for a 'Partnership with the South'³. NATO's initiative was supplemented by an Italian proposal for a 'Partnership for Peace (PfP)' in the Mediterranean⁴. This 'informative dialogue' is not aimed at establishing institutional links with the countries concerned and is promoting stability in the region. Pessimists consider that overlapping initiatives by WEU and NATO could confuse the issues, by emphasizing the 'hard security' aspects. Close attention will therefore have to be paid to the requirements of non-duplication, complementary, coordination and transparency.

The OSCE is very active in Mediterranean affairs since the Budapest Summit of 1994. The CSCE/ OSCE has held two seminars to discuss the applicability of European experience on CSBMs to the Mediterranean: the first in Cairo (September 1995), which provided the Mediterranean partners for cooperation with a picture of the OSCE experience; and the second in Tel Aviv (June 1996) which developed the experiences of other forums in concluding dialogue. OSCE countries themselves have recognized that certain methods and mechanisms which worked reasonably well in the past in certain circumstances would not necessarily be successful in other environments in the future. It is assumed that to apply the OSCE model 'per se' to the Mediterranean would be difficult because the region is different in character. Nevertheless, the OSCE as an example of CSBMs is useful because it promotes a new and imaginative way of thinking.

The **Council of Europe** is fully aware that the future of the countries of the southern shore has a vital bearing on Europe's democratic security and stability, and that it is essential to promote their political, economic, social

³ This proposal has been completed in 1995 by a new French proposal for a 'Pact of Stability for the Mediterranean'. See the intervention of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Barcelona Conference, Europe, no.6617, December 1995, pp.10- 11.

⁴ See Domenico Corcione (Italian Minister of Defence): Sicurezza nel Mediterraneo: Una strategia di partenariato Williamsburg, III Informal Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers, 5- 6 October 1995, pp.5- 9.

and cultural development, in order to contribute to a greater respect for human rights.

President Mubarak, in his speech before the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 1991, called for a **Mediterranean Forum** as a platform for interaction among Mediterranean countries, with the aim of developing cooperation in all fields. The first official meeting of the Mediterranean Forum was held in Alexandria on 3 and 4 July 1994. Then, foreign ministers of ten Mediterranean countries proposed the establishment of an informal dialogue in order to pursue concentration and initiate partnership programmes⁵. Three working groups were formed in 1994, dealing respectively with political, socio- economic and cultural cooperation. Since the Mediterranean Forum is evolving, members states have decided to defer decisions on other applications for membership until specific criteria have been reached on the basis of consensus.

Formal and informal is the **Casablanca and Amman Process** affecting the Middle East and North African countries (MENA) which started with the Casablanca Economic Summit, held in October 1994. The Summit, sponsored by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, was attended by representatives of 61 countries and 1,114 business leaders from all regions of the world⁶. It is directed at stimulating both governments and private capital to promote growth and economic activities throughout the entire MENA area. The second MENA Summit was held in October 1995 and the third in Cairo in November 1996. Its global component supplements the multilateral dimension of the Arab- Israeli negotiations.

The MENA framework is linked with the institutionalized **Middle East Peace Process** and its working groups: one on Regional Economic Development and other on Arms Control and Regional Security. The Middle East Peace process promotes networking and pragmatism. In fact, the Regional Economic Development working group established in the framework of the peace process negotiations, and the Casablanca summit, could turn out to be mutually reinforced and highly complementary⁷. The two processes may well remain separate, but they could develop in ways that may generate and exploit complementarities.

⁵ The Forum so far includes a limited group of eleven North African and southern European countries: Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.

⁶ The presence of almost all countries of the southern and eastern shores, with the exception of Syria and Lebanon, is in itself an important step promoting stability.

⁷ The Regional Economic Development working group includes a diversified number of 'donor' countries, whose efforts focus on the countries directly affected by the negotiations (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria).

Specific Confidence- and Security- building Measures

The Mediterranean must be a link and not a frontier and interactions through CSBMs must be allowed to multiply in the region. CSBMs should include:

- the Mediterranean requires bilateral and multilateral cooperation for the prevention, more than the management, of crises. Conflict resolution mechanisms have been emphasized only in the Middle East. A conflict- prevention center would deal with the causes of tensions; a crisis- management center would imply the associated communication networks and early- warning systems. The Stability Pact for Europe could inspire ad hoc 'round tables' in Mediterranean region by promoting bilateral agreements. CSBMs could build up civil- military relations, interparliamentary connections, the control of defence budgets, etc.
- it is essential to increase transparency and information on each other's intentions and activities. At this stage, this dialogue might prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations on the development of WEU/ NATO capabilities, which may be seen as threatening, especially in view of the review under way in these Western security organisations⁸. There are many ways in which transparency could be fostered: visits and briefings; exchange of military training programmes; exchange of experts; seminars on military doctrines; prior notification of major military exercises⁹; joint training of armed forces; exchange of observers at military exercises¹⁰; share the experiences of the Camp David process and the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) in the framework of the Middle East peace process; verification and control measures, by the UN or ensured regionally, with the participation of European security organizations in a complementary role; cooperation in the follow- up to the ratification of arms control treaties, the UN register of controversial weapons and information on arms expenditures; etc.
- The armed forces could play a potential role against certain new risks, such as: environmental and economic issues (pollution control, fishing surveillance and anti- smuggling missions); international humanitarian relief; the fight against drug trafficking and international

⁸ See Maalmi, Abdelouhab: 'L' OTAN et le sud de la Méditerranée: les malentendus d' un dialogue' in L'Annuaire de la Méditerranée, Paris- Casablanca, Germ- Published, 1996, pp.52-55.

⁹ 'Bright Star 1995' involved Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, France and the United Kingdom. 'Cleopatra 1996' included units from the Egyptian, French and Italian navies.

¹⁰ 'Tramontana 94' involved France, Italy and Spain and the Spanish Government invited military attaches from the countries of North Africa to attend as observers. See 'Exercice tramontana: la coopération méditerranéenne en action' Eurodefence, no.1, Janvier 1995, pp.51-52.

terrorism; the prevention of international organized crime, aid to the civil authorities in fighting illegal immigration; etc. The role of the armed forces in joint air- maritime surveillance and control systems could be instrumental.

- Peacekeeping could also become an instrument of cooperation between the northern and southern shores in the Mediterranean because the legitimacy of peacekeeping operations is increased by the simultaneous and diversified participation of armed forces from several countries. From the time being, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco are playing a very active role in IFOR/ SFOR, and the success of this multinational force might be instrumental in convincing the Arabs that Western and European security alliances are not directed against them and the Muslims. A cooperative approach between European and non-European Mediterranean countries, in mobilizing African peacekeeping capabilities- using the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) framework- is a very attractive scenario. Cooperative actions on peacekeeping could include: the exchange of information and experiences; the exchange of experts in the field partners on courses relating to peacekeeping at national defence academies or at the NATO Defence College; common analysis of possible forms of cooperation for the operations listed in the Petersberg Declaration¹¹; the definition in common of criteria regarding the training of personnel for peacekeeping operations and common training of personnel; etc.
- The creation of the Mediterranean Academy or Institute focused on diplomatic and strategic studies could be useful in order to dispel the generalized misperceptions existing also at the South- South level. The Center should become a CSBM in itself and a potential producer of additional CSBMs. This common project, a direct result of the new partnership framework, should include shared programmes, shared professional teams and shared attendance. The role of strategic and defence institutes in training and information (exchange of researchers, setting up seminars for training diplomats and military) could be instrumental in order to create a 'security- community' in the Mediterranean.

Conclusions

The complexity of the socio- economic and political challenges facing the Mediterranean countries today, particularly those on its southern shores, makes it clear that they can only be met within a region- wide cooperative framework.

¹¹ These operations are: humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks; and tasks of combat forces in crisis- management, including peacemaking.

In spite of the many formal and informal forums for exchanges and dialogue established with the non-European Mediterranean countries, Europe has not yet developed a coherent overall strategic concept of how to deal with the Mediterranean issues. Distinct approaches and procedures on CSBMs, considering the specific subregional demands and North-South relationships, are being addressed by the EU, NATO, WEU and the OSCE. They should represent progressive steps of cooperation and every effort must be made to complement among all these organizations involved in the Mediterranean is a prerequisite which could lead to the adoption of practical CSBMs in the region. For instance, a very interesting aspect of the Dayton Peace Process and its implementation was the interaction between international organizations: OSCE, EU, WEU and NATO, all of them also involved in Mediterranean initiatives.

The formal and informal forums of dialogue are not considered sufficient by the governments of non-European Mediterranean countries, which continue to seek to improve and intensify them bilaterally, while only recently appearing more responsive to multilateral mechanisms and to the notion of CSBMs perceived as an instrument and not an end to be used in the creation of security and stability.

The OSCE as an example of CSBMs is useful because it promotes a new way of thinking. NATO and the WEU can do little to alleviate risks that are not of a military nature. Nevertheless, close coordination between these two dialogues could usefully improve the broader security environment, as a component of a Western confidence-building process. Any initiative by WEU and NATO must therefore relate to the prospects of a more comprehensive partnership sponsored by other institutions, particularly the EU.