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2ND IAI-SWP REVIEW CONFERENCE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN

Report

by Daniela Pioppi

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ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI

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The *Istituto Affari Internazionali* (IAI) and the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP) have organised, two related conferences, respectively in Rome in 2000 and in Ebenhausen in 1998¹, with a view to debate the principal issues affecting Mediterranean relations in the fields of politics, security, economics and culture. In the 2000 conference, with the collaboration of the Rome Office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Mediterranean relations were explored in the light of the experiences of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and of the new importance given to political and cultural relations. The conference was organised with the financial support of the German Marshall Fund. A list of participants and the agenda of the conference are enclosed with this report.

1. Introduction and Overview

In the opening session the two directors of the IAI-SWP exercise, Roberto Aliboni and Volker Perthes, together with Franco Zallio (Fintesa Studi Paese) gave a first overview of the main issues and problems faced by the Euro-Med Partnership (EMP).

Volker Perthes' introduction focused on more political issues. He started by underlining the fact that the EMP is an experiment of 'regional governance' (expression taken from 'global governance'). However, the region comprised by the EMP is not a geographical expression. The EU decided who was to be included (i.e. Libya and the Balkans are excluded, but Jordan or EU non-Mediterranean countries are comprised). Therefore, the problem remains: what is a proper region for the EMP undertaking?

The political issues in the EMP for the next years are:

(a) rapid elites change (the average number of years in power of top decision-makers in the Middle East and North Africa region fell recently from 23 to 14 years and will probably drop further). By elites it is meant not only prime decision-makers (presidents, kings) but also the ruling class as a whole.

(b) the chances and limitations of political change.

In this transition, the EU has the capacity to assist Southern Mediterranean countries but its assistance must be complementary to that of the United States, as a more definite and powerful actor in the international arena. Where the EU can more effectively take action is in implementing the third basket of the EMP and encourage civil society exchanges and democratisation of polities. In any case, there is a problem of EU credibility. In order to reinforce such credibility, EU member states should be more committed to improve administrative procedures in order to facilitate human exchange (e. g. proposal of a 'Barcelona visa').

Perthes concluded by mentioning that main political issues to be discussed are:

(a) what is the best way not to compromise the Barcelona's acquis (i.e. free trade in agriculture; human rights);

(b) political conditionality;

(c) ownership of the Barcelona Process. The EMP is perceived by Third Mediterranean Countries (TMCs) as a European initiative.

¹ Report published in *Orient* 39 (1998) 1, pp. 17-24.

Roberto Aliboni's introduction to the conference focused on security aspects of the EMP. He highlighted that the situation in the Mediterranean is different from that of other adjoining areas of the EU: in the MENA region most conflicts are 'terminated' (i.e. not solved but in a stalled situation: Arabs-Israel, Western Sahara, Turkey-PKK) and others are 'contained' (i.e. Iraq).

Terminated conflicts have shifted violence from inter-state to intra-state arenas. For this reason, security in the area tends to focus on and depend from domestic developments and factors (political, social, economic, religious, etc.).

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation is an outstanding issue which definitely affects inter-state relations. However, most motives for proliferating relates to domestic factors. Its military relevance is also mostly South-South. Given this context, Aliboni suggested a set of policy responses to be given:

(a) political responses more than military, reflecting the absence of threat perceptions North-South (i.e. EMP);

(b) formats for regional and inter-regional security co-operation. In this respect the EMP is incongruous (i.e. it does not include Iran and Iraq). Security arrangements in the Middle East affect the EMP. Regional security co-operation is badly needed (Arms control and Regional Security ACRS), but North-South co-operation is on the contrary mostly bilateral.

Aliboni concluded by making the following points:

(a) there are not military threats for the EU in the region, but not military solutions;

(b) there is an asymmetry of forces North-South and therefore a strategic instability, which does not allow for a military co-operation in the proper sense.

(c) the first chapter of the EMP was too ambitious and not implementable. There should be a new concept of security (i.e. soft security or human security). The PSOs are hardly effective without political solutions and proper framework.

Franco Zallio provided the audience an overview on the problems of economic co-operation in the Mediterranean. He started by noticing that after the stagnation of the 80s, the Mediterranean economies have realized some progress during the 90s: economic growth has increased; economic reforms, however cautiously, have been launched; privatisation is growing. However, this progress has happened at a national level, and it was driven by national agendas. Regional integration made nearly no progress. Intra-Arab trade is in fact still very limited, constrained by high tariff and very relevant non-tariff barriers to trade (import licensing, safety and health standards, cumbersome customs procedures, etc.). There were only two major exceptions: the growing trade relations between Turkey and Israel, clearly linked to political factors, and the growing Turkish imports from the EU after the 1996 entry into force of the customs union.

In a similar way, regional projects and institutions have had very little influence on the economic developments in the area. This holds true for the various institutions linked to the Multilateral peace talks, for the Intra-Arab Free Trade agreement, as well as for the Euro Med Partnership.

Two issues are crucial to the future of the Barcelona Process: the implementation of the Free Trade agreements and the new agenda. As far as Free Trade agreements are concerned, implementation has been much slower than expected. Delays have occurred both in the negotiating process and in the ratification process. Facing these delays and difficulties, the European Commission submitted in 1998 a proposal for a new agenda, based upon the experience of the EU Single Market. The proposal aims at enhancing the economic benefits and the policy credibility effect of the Euro Med Free Trade Agreements through the harmonization of regulatory regimes and administrative requirements. Progress on the new agenda will be entirely dependent on the interest expressed by partner countries. Here we are touching a major issue of the economic partnership: since Barcelona, differences among Mediterranean countries have increased, not only in terms of economic performance but also in terms of will and power to implement the agreements with the European Union. So, it is more and more crucial that the handling of the new agenda is sufficiently flexible to allow partners who wish to advance ahead

of others to do so without prejudice to the Euro Med structure.

But the new agenda should not consist only of new concessions from Mediterranean countries. The EU must tackle the most sensitive areas of trade, mainly agriculture, where a number of Mediterranean countries have good potentialities. The sensitivity of the issue is highlighted by the fact that the delays in the ratification of the FT agreements were mainly caused by European agricultural interests, opposing the additional agricultural concessions included in the agreements.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the European Commission, which keeps complaining of the slow progress of South-South trade, bears some responsibility for that, having applied different rules of origin in the different EM agreements.

2. Middle East Peace Process

Joel Peters (Ben Gurion University) opened the Middle East Peace Process session by giving a general evaluation of the one-year Barak government. The promise of Barak's electoral campaign was to reach a comprehensive peace within 15 months. However, while the Syrian track is basically a trade off (security arrangement for land), the Palestinian track is more complex.

Three future scenarios could be imagined: (a) Peace Process on hold; (b) Palestinian track moves forward while the Syrian track is on hold; (c) Palestinian track on hold because Israeli government cannot compromise with a weak government coalition, while the Syrian track will develop because Syria can no longer play on Israeli occupation in South Lebanon.

Mustafa Hamarneh (Centre for Strategic Studies, Amman) added few remarks asserting that on the Palestinian track, many issues are not solved. The only difference with the past is that Arafat is more willing to compromise. The Israeli public is for peace but not at the other parties' conditions (i.e. on refugees issue or Jerusalem). But, if Arafat compromises on refugees the Arab-Israeli conflict would not be closed because he would not have the consent of the Palestinians. Israel wants to close the 'first circle' in its security perspective (i.e. neighbouring countries). Therefore, the Israeli public supports the peace with Syria because it does not represent any threat anymore. The situation is on hold mainly because Assad died and because of American elections.

Completely different is the situation on the Palestinian track: Madrid and Oslo are dead and the framework for the peace process is different altogether from its inception.

A participant noticed that the Peace Process is stalled after Rabin's assassination and Netanyahu government. Barak is negotiating a ceasefire not a peace process and does not recognise Arafat as an equal partner. Barak has humiliated Arafat in a number of situations. Barak's conception of security is completely different from Rabin's vision of the 'New Middle East'. The Palestinian position at the moment is not based on the principle land for peace, but land (minus X) for peace. Where x denotes an unknown. The declaration of independence of the Palestinian State is put off to September not only for symbolic reasons, but because on these conditions diplomatic negotiations are more and more difficult.

However, it was answered, it is a mistake to over emphasise Rabin's different vision. In fact, Israeli position has remained very much unchanged through the last governments.

It was added to the debate that the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon was a major positive event. This is true even if this event may have some consequences in that the Hezbollah could become a model for Palestinians (i.e. violence pays). As far as the Syrian track is concerned, Barak lost a great chance.

A last consideration was that Clinton is seeking a diplomatic success for the end of its term in office and therefore is putting pressure on Israel to make some decisive steps towards an agreement.

3. Euro-Med Partnership

Roberto Aliboni opened the session stating that expectations on the EMP were too high at its beginning. The audacious idea of a comprehensive approach has failed and the EMP remained a European initiative. Especially the first chapter on security was too ambitious. However, more than the failure itself, what is worrying at the moment is the indifference towards this failure. As an answer to that, political dialogue should be enhanced. On the contrary, in Stuttgart, human security was included in the Partnership, but political dialogue was avoided and considered an interference.

Muhand Melbouci (INESG – Alger) responded to Aliboni's presentation by stating that the EMP is not a failure. On the contrary the present situation should be seen as a new phase of maturation where real problems start to be tackled with:

- (a) South Mediterranean countries as well as the EU are mainly interested in the economic aspects of the Partnership. Both sides neglected political co-operation.
- (b) There are major economic and political imbalances between the South and the North. The challenge is political transition of the South towards democratisation and economic transition towards the free market.
- (c) There is a high risk of marginalisation of the MENA region (TMCs trade with Europe is 60% of their total; on the contrary TMCs represent only the 2-3 % of total European trade).
- (d) There is not enough willingness from the EU side to fully implement the second economic basket.

Following the presentations of Aliboni and Melbouci, other problematic aspects of the EMP were discussed:

- (a) the European Union is changing and is different from what it was in 1995 when the Barcelona Process started.
- (b) The aim of the EMP was not to build a 'region', but was a negotiation of economic relations without extending development responsibilities towards the South.
- (c) There is the need of more transparency from the EU side.
- (d) From a security point of view instead of promoting Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) there was the implementation of 'Mistrust Building Measures (MBMs)' (i.e. EROFOR EUROMARFOR that were never discussed in a Euro-med context).
- (e) Lack of co-operation in the South. Need for more integration. Even if the EU and the US bear some responsibility.

4. The human dimension in the Mediterranean

George Joffé (SOAS – Geopolitics and International Boundaries Research Centre) opened the session on human dimension by asserting that human rights and good governance are only a façade to the EMP. The problem is not a disagreement on the values that support them, but on the contrary their legitimisation in the political context. Moreover, economic liberalisation and transparency do not necessarily bring about political equivalents.

A research supported by questionnaires distributed to the EuroMeSCo institutes find out that there were not significant initiatives on human rights and good governance from the European side since the establishment of the EMP. The EMP was implemented to contain immigration from the South. This aim is a contradiction with globalisation and also with the European need for skilled and unskilled labour force.

Mehmet Ali Birand (analyst, Istanbul) agreed with Joffé that the discourse on human rights and good governance is omni present, but without any real substance. There is not implementation of real political conditionality. However, Turkey is an example of how the EU can be influential on the observance of human rights and democratic standards (i.e. political debate on death

penalty).

A participant argued that there is in fact a political-cultural disagreement between Europe and the Islamic world. This contrast is rooted in history and difficult to change.

The debate dealt with effects of external pressure or intervention. The conclusion was that external pressure can be detrimental, but can also have a great value.

5. Good governance in the Mediterranean

Fred Tanner (GCSP, Geneva) opened the debate on good governance in the Mediterranean by pointing out that the intra-state dimension of Euro-Med security places an emphasis on questions related to good governance, and in particular to civil-military relations and security sector reforms.

If we start from this assumption, then the EMP has the following policy options:

(a) EMP could get involved in peace-building operation without developing into a regional organisation (i.e. OSCE or OAU), that is a much more difficult task.

(b) Security-building also means democracy-building in the Mediterranean. The future Charter for Peace and Stability should include good governance.

(c) The EMP could be involved in other activities such as joint monitoring (i.e. elections) and observation missions; the formulation of a political binding code of conduct (i.e. on civil-military relations); training and education to form an Euro-Med security expertise; seminar diplomacy; people-to-people interactions; networking.

Mustafa Hamarneh specified that the Middle East is not homogenous, there are very different situations in different countries. Society evolved as a result of external factors. Globalisation is not a new phenomenon and it is historically linked with the experience of colonisation. Democracy and accountability were never in the colonial state agenda. Syria and Jordan, for example, have traditionally a weak civil society. Pastoral rural culture prevailed on urban culture. Nowadays, elections are managed through tribal arrangements. Also gender relations should not be forgotten when talking about democratisation.

The role of the NGOs in the democratisation process is debatable. NGOs are in most of the cases not efficient. They have a private sector/ business mentality. They operate for their own self-sustainment and provoke a fragmentation of society. Moreover, they are financed from abroad and seen with suspicion by local population.

A participant opened the question of civil-military relations by saying that democracy is the prevailing of the civil on the military. The Algerian revolution had this rule. But the military can also be the grantor of secular republican values (i.e. in Turkey).

It was added that Turkey is an example of an ambiguous situation: on one side the civilian power is weak and the military fill the gap, on the other civilians are using the military for the 'dirty work'. Also the West uses Turkish military for stability and so on.

A participant intervened by suggesting to keep a realistic approach. Turkey can be a model for other TMCs even if the political situation is far from being the ideal one. It followed a debate on whether 'good governance' could work in TMCs and if it is maybe worth to move to more realistic concepts such as 'clear or efficient governance'. Democracy can hardly be imposed from the outside.

A participant added to the discussion that an important aspect of good governance is fighting against corruption. Corruption is an obstacle to economic development (example South of Italy).

During the discussion was mentioned the question of the contraposition between democracy and stability. It was stated that the problem of the region is rather to go from 'stagnation' to stability.

Final Round Table: The Future of the Mediterranean Structure

Carlo Jean (OSCE, Vienna) opened the round table by looking into the relationship between the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Both are part of the Mediterranean but the relationship between them is not so close.

The link between these two neighbouring areas is maybe Turkey. In fact, the Balkans is important for Turkey, even if the country maintained a low profile policy in the region. However, it should be remembered that Turkey's role after the cold war increased dramatically because of its strategic position not only towards the Balkans but also with respect to the Gulf and Central Asia.

Major common problems of the Mediterranean region in its entirety are urbanisation, demographic pressures, water, conflict proliferation and organised crime. However, the problem of political Islam does not concern the Balkans. In fact, this region is more culturally similar to Western Europe and does not follow the same patterns of its Mediterranean neighbours.

There is a different relationship between EU and the Balkans if compared with EU relations towards the rest of the Mediterranean.

EU relations with the Balkans are, in fact, regulated in an inclusion perspective. Moreover, the future of the EU and NATO is linked to the Stability Pact in the Balkans.

Roberto Aliboni made its contribution to the concluding round table saying that the EMP is going towards a more realistic approach (i.e. a looser framework, co-operation in transnational risks, soft-security etc.). Even economic co-operation will probably be more efficient in the years to come.

The question to be asked though, is why the EMP did not succeed in its aims. A first answer could be found in the difficulty of sharing a concept of security.

It would probably be easier to leave the security issue to NATO, which is developing its relations with the South Mediterranean (i.e. NATO Mediterranean Dialogue). A positive step in this direction was the inclusion of Algeria.

Another issue is that relations with Eastern Europe are doubtless facilitated by a feeling of shared identity that does not exist towards TMCs;

John Harper (Johns Hopkins University, Bologna) added to the round table an American perspective. He started by asking whether US sees a connection between the Balkans and the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean and the Balkans is not of US primary interest (with the exception of Turkey). This however does not mean that the US should leave the floor to the EU. The US approves the idea of the EMP as long as it does not transform itself in an exclusive economic block. NATO will certainly extend its umbrella towards the Mediterranean.

The US is sceptical but not hostile towards the formation of a European Security and Defence Identity. As long as Turkey is able to joint any European military structure US will not create any problem. However, it should be kept in mind that US naval forces are present in the Mediterranean since 200 years and will not go away.

Carlo Jean specified that any EU intervention in the region is impossible without US permission.

Volker Perthes drew the concluding lines stating that the question to be asked is: what does the EU wants in the Mediterranean? The EMP rationale is the EU fear of migration and the will of pushing the instability line further south. If this is the rationale what should be done is:

- (a) develop a sense of ownership of the process;
- (b) develop common institutions;
- (c) transparency from the EU side;
- (d) develop conditionality following a standardised approach (i.e. fixed criteria for progression-regression). The standard could be double for instance in the case of Turkey which is a candidate, but should be fixed. There is the need to reinforce the link between funds and good governance.