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EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA

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In the European geopolitical perspective, North Africa does not make much sense. Rather, European relations focuses on the Maghreb, the Arab Occident, which traditionally includes Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Egypt, although part to North Africa, belongs geopolitically to another framework, i. e. the Mashreq, the Arab Orient.

Libya, strongly attracted towards the Mashreq and the Arab-Israeli framework because of its Nasserite nationalism, as a matter of fact has failed to be co-opted in the group of the Arab front-line countries and, despite its endeavors, it has remained marginal to the Mashreq. In a sense, it is marginal to the Maghreb as well. Still, at the end of the 1980s, it integrated the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), thus accepting a less eastward orientation. Today, while Libya identity remains in-between the Mashreq and Maghreb, in European policies and perceptions it is definitely regarded as part of the Maghreb.

The AMU comprises Mauritania, too. Traditionally, Europe considers Mauritania as a sub-Saharan country. While the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue includes Mauritania, the current EU's Mediterranean policy format - the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, EMP - does not comprise this country (which is member of the Lomé Convention, instead). Were tomorrow an EU Maghreb policy to emerge as distinct from present all-Mediterranean EMP, it is likely that the EU would consider Mauritania as part to the Maghreb and have no problem in including it in an EU-Maghreb group-to-group framework. Mauritania is not considered in the following.

Thus, this article concentrates on EU-Maghreb relations, considering a wider or narrower notion of Maghreb according to cases. With respect to this area, Europe faces a number of challenges and issues which affect its security in a narrower as well as broader sense. The challenges and issues this article considers are: Libya as a "rogue" state; Algeria and political Islam; migration; the Western Sahara and the American presence in the Maghreb. For sure, the US presence in the Maghreb does not affect European security. However, the mediation carried out by former Secretary of State, James Baker, between the parties to the Western Sahara crisis, the weight of the American policy in shaping out Western and European attitudes towards Algeria and its islamism and, more recently, the Eizenstat initiative of economic cooperation towards the Maghreb states, are as many signals of a significant American role in a region where Europe perceives itself, and is broadly perceived by others, as a primary actor. This trend, while not a security issue, is a political question mark on the European role towards the Maghreb and, more in general, its southern Mediterranean approaches. The final section sets out some conclusions and prospects in relations to this question mark.

Relations with Libya

Gheddafi's Libya has never ceased to be a problem internationally. In many respects, the regime is characterized by strong heterodoxy and activism and, for one reason or another, it results to be a troublemaker. Rightly or wrongly, the regime has been suspected, more often than not, to use terrorism to attain its ends. This reason brought

about the US bombing of Tripoli in 1986. Since then, two kinds of policies have been conducted towards Libya, namely inclusive and coercive policies, according to two schools of thoughts which, in the end, after so many developments and changes, keep on confronting to one another still today. On one hand, inclusion is regarded as the right means to frame Gheddafi, prevent the regime from feeling frustrated or isolated, and, thus, moderate Libya's radicalism and unpredictability. On the other hand, coercion and retribution are considered as the most effective way to moderate Libya.

At the end of 1980s, Algeria's President, Shazli Benjedid, in a clear inclusive perspective, convinced Gheddafi to enter the AMU. It must not be forgotten that AMU was not principally born to foster economic and inter-state cooperation. Rather, it was essentially a framework for fostering cooperation among incumbent regimes and strengthening their domestic stability and security. In this sense, Libya, with its record of subversion and activism in the region - from Western Sahara to Niger - was seen better in than out - according to Machiavelli's known remark that, if one has an enemy, it must be either co-opted or killed. On the other hand, at that time domestic pressure and opposition from both tribal and religious quarters was beginning to increase in Libya, as well as in other Maghreb and Arab countries, so that mutual support within AMU was welcome by Tripoli. This inclusive policy was coupled by the inclusion of Libya in the framework of the "Five plus Five" Western Mediterranean cooperation, established in 1989 by the AMU countries, on one side, and France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, on the other (and submerged soon by the 1990-91 Gulf war)¹.

In subsequent years, coercion got the upper hand. The country was sanctioned by the UN² because it refused to hand over the two citizens suspected of carrying out the terrorist attack against a Pan Am civilian aircraft over Lockerbie on December 12, 1988. Meanwhile, France was suspecting Libya for the bombing of a UTA aircraft in 1989, and Great Britain, beside the Lockerbie bombing over Scotland, had no diplomatic relations with Libya because of the killing of a policewoman, Yvonne Fletcher, in 1986 in London.

The Libyan leadership's decision (April 5, 1999) to hand over the two suspects in the Lockerbie affair has brought about the suspension of sanctions and the implementation by the European states and the EU of normalization policies in a renewed inclusive perspective³.

Italy acted as a forerunner. In 1996 the Italian Foreign Minister received its Libyan colleague, Omar Al-Muntasser, in Rome. This meeting paved the way to a Joint Declaration of the two governments in Tripoli on July 9, 1998. By this Declaration, Italy has recognized its colonial responsibilities, in particular its duty to search for Libyan victims of the Italian colonial administration, to take care of them and their families as well as to help Libyan authorities to clear Second World War Italian mines.

¹ Michel Rousset (éd.), *La Méditerranée: points de vue de la Rive Nord*, Cahiers du CEDSI, n. 14, 1993.

² On sanctions see in general: Phebe Marr, *U.S. Policy of Sanctions: Prospects for Revision*, working paper presented to the workshop of the Bertelsmann Foundation "Critical Dialogue and Sanctions", Frankfurt, December 13-15, 1996; Geoffrey Kemp, *United States & European Cooperation on Iran Policy. Elements of a Common Approach*, prepared for the workshop of the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom on "U.S.-European Relations and the Middle East", Wye Plantation, May 8-10, 1997.

³ Luis Martinez, "Libye: la fin du purgatoire", *Politique Internationale*, No. 89, Automne 2000, pp. 307-320; Roberto Aliboni, *Including Lybia? EU, Arab World and the US*, paper presented to the Workshop on "Lybia: Current Relations and Future Prospects", United States Department of State, Washington D.C., document IAI0001, 25 February 2000.

In the same Declaration, the two governments agreed to set up an Italian-Libyan Joint Stock Company, owned by Libyan and Italian firms, with the task of undertaking joint development projects in Libya and transferring part of incomes to a fund for the support of operations related to colonial victims and de-mining. The Joint Company has been established on May 30, 1999. The Italian-Libyan relations have been rapidly upgraded: the Italian Foreign Minister, Lamberto Dini, visited the country on April 6, 1999, the day immediately after the sanctions were suspended, and a second time on 4-5 August 1999. The Italian Prime Minister, Massimo D'Alema, visited Tripoli on 1-2 December 1999. Bilateral relations are flourishing.

In a March 1996 letter to the French President, Colonel Gheddafi had promised to stick to the French sentence on the UTA incident, if it were handed down *in absentia*, and to collaborate with the French authorities to enforce it. The *ad hoc* French court established to judge on the UTA case handed down a sentence on March 10, 1999 which convicts six Libyan citizens *in absentia*. According to a communiqué by the Quai d'Orsay, by mid July 1999, a fund to compensate the relatives of the UTA victims has been transferred from Libya to France. As for convicted Libyans, French authorities have issued international arrest warrants. Whether Libya will collaborate to enforce them is uncertain. In any case, bilateral differences with Libya were publicly considered closed by France.

As for the UK, diplomatic relations have been resumed after 15 years on July 7, 1999. At the same moment, the two governments issued a Joint Declaration whereby Libya recognizes its responsibility in the killing of Ms. Fletcher and its readiness to compensate her relatives as well as to cooperate with the British police's inquire on the case.

In the perspective of this political normalization, Libya has started a multibillion dollar economic development plan. Most European countries are contributing to this plan. Italy, Germany, the UK and France remain Libya's most important partners. In 1997, these countries possessed the highest shares on Libya's world import: 19.4% for Italy; 10.5% for Germany; 8.5% for the UK; and 6.5% for France (about 8% in the two previous years). This trend is being upheld today, when not accentuated.

On this background of bilateral normalization, at the April 1999 EMP Ministerial Conference in Stuttgart the EMP invited Libya as an observer with a view to become a member. In subsequent developments, EMP Partners and Libya failed to agree on membership, but Tripoli has been invited again as an observer to the EMP Conference in Marseilles in November 2000.

The conviction by the international court that handled the case of one of the two Libyans indicted for the Lockerbie incident may put in question the ongoing European attempts at normalizing relations with the country and moderating the regime by including the country in some international cooperative scheme.

Algeria and political Islam

The Europeans' interest in supporting Libya's stability stems most of all from fears that Libya is destabilized by religious forces and such destabilization spills over into its Arab and Sahelian neighbors. The latter are very concerned by this danger as well. In fact, AMU's establishment was, among other things, a tentative response to this common danger. North African diplomacy, especially on the Egyptian side, has been

very active in supporting Libya against islamists so as to prevent transnational contacts and alliances between religious groups. Because of its pre-eminent interest in Southern Mediterranean stability, Europe has been very sensitive, both in bilateral and regional relations, to this concern. The invitation to Libya to become member of the EMP partly derives from this very concern and reflects one of the few North-South security understandings working across the Mediterranean.

Central to concerns of destabilization in the Maghreb and North Africa is the violent conflict unleashed by islamism in Algeria, however. These concerns regards Algerian spillovers into Europe as well. The European and Western debate on Algeria in the 1990s took place as part of wider Western perceptions with respect to islamism⁴. In this debate, two main positions can be discerned.

On one hand, after the 1990-91 Gulf War, European and Western perceptions of islamism and its impact became most acute as a result of domestic reactions stirred by this War in most Arab countries, in particular in Egypt, in occupied Palestine and in Algeria. Perceptions of islamist expansion combined with emerging ideas in Western countries about the enhanced role cultural and identitarian factors were expected to play in post-Cold War international relations and the clashes these factors would bring about. In this perception, islamism is a risk or even a threat with respect to Europe, more in general, the West and to their regional allies, which requires an adequate response in term of defense or coercion.

On the other hand, the raise of political Islam has been regarded in many European quarters as an evidence of the need to introduce political reform and pluralism in Maghreb and Arab polities. The argument was that, provided they renounced violence and accepted the rules of the democratic game (most of all, the alternance to power), Islamist parties and groupings had to be considered legitimate oppositions and be integrated in national political processes within the framework of democratic reforms. The inherent systemic character of islamist oppositions to the kind of national and secular states that have gradually grown up in the Arab region after the French Revolution, was broadly trivialized by stressing the unacceptability of “culturalist” interpretations⁵.

This point of view has been strongly supported by European non-governmental organizations (e.g. the St. Egidio Community in Italy) as well as academic circles and has strongly influenced European and, more in general, Western official policies. Developments in Algeria have been for Europe a most important test of such views and policies. Islamist leaders, considered as terrorists by Algeria’s (and other Maghreb’s) governments, were given political asylum in European countries - and in the United States. In general, the distrust towards the authoritarian and illegitimate character of the Algerian military regime overweighed concerns over islamist violence. The use of violence by the Algerian state was regarded as state-terrorism, to the extent it was exercised by a poorly legitimated incumbent power, so that sometime islamist violence happened to be regarded as a legitimate resistance. This state of affairs continued approximately up to mid-nineties. The expulsion of a number of Algerian leaders from

⁴ See G.E. Fuller, I.O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege. The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, Westview Press for RAND, Boulder (CO), 1995.

⁵ Shireen T. Hunter, “The Rise of Islamist Movements and Western Response: Clash of Civilization or Clash of Interests?”, in L. Guazzone (ed.), *The Islamist Dilemma*, Ithaca Press, Reading, 1995, pp. 317-350.

Europe - and the United States - coincided with a change in European and Western governmental policies in the sense of support to the Algerian government.

The institutional reforms set in motion by President Zéroual are now given credit by European as well as American governmental circles. Western civil societies do not lend the same credit to them and tend to believe that the Algerian government continue to be masterminded by the military and affected by their internecine struggles of power. The election of President Bouteflika, hailed in Europe as a good chance to emancipate the state from the military, has proved disappointing. In any case, while the international economic organization have never failed to support Algeria, what makes the difference today is that the EU, after a long suspension, has started the negotiations for a new association agreement with Algeria within the framework of the EMP, and NATO has provided a green light for Algeria's membership in its Mediterranean Dialogue.

European and Western perceptions towards political Islam have changed in the second part of the 1990s. Islamism is no longer regarded as a direct risk or threat to Europe or the West, but more aptly as a risk or a threat to regimes and countries in the region whose destabilization would be detrimental to European and Western interest to stability in the region and in their own countries. In this sense, the European policy, in tune with that of the United States, is today more supportive of regional regimes and less choosy about their political nature, be it the case of Algeria as well as Libya or Egypt.

Migration

Europeans are afraid of terrorism as a spillover effect from political unrest and islamism. Beside few cases of "new" terrorism, Europe is involved because of logistics and political motives. Political involvement is due to perceived "left overs" of colonial relations by Third World countries involved. For example, Algerian attacks in France in 1994-1996 exposed Algeria's islamists perception of a link between Algerian incumbent power and France. When it comes to logistics, geographical proximity and the presence of expatriated communities in European countries are factors which objectively involve Europe. There is no doubt that there is a more or less important correlation between the presence of expatriated communities - sometime fairly large, as the Maghreb community in France and the Turkish/Curdish one in Germany - and transnational trends like terrorism - as well as crime.

This correlation contributes to European negative perceptions towards migration, though it is not the only factor to explain such perceptions. Immigration, legal or illegal, is regarded as a spillover in itself. Towards this new immigration center that Europe is constituting today, the Maghreb is an important sending area. European responses, although not necessarily concerning the Maghreb or North Africa, are in any case relevant to the latter and sometime - especially in bilateral relations - have a direct impact on them.

As of today, immigration in Europe, in particular in the EU - with related issues, as asylum, citizenship, etc. - is essentially regulated by national policies. With respect to the Maghreb countries, the relevant national policies are those of Italy, France, and Spain, as landing countries and, more and more, countries of residence. The orientation of these regulations is oscillating. But, despite pressure from the left wing parties

towards the adoption of liberal policies, even towards illegally immigrated people, the substantive European and South European trend, with few exclusivist exceptions, is towards policies of more or less controlled access, independently of the left or right-wing character of the governments involved.

The integration of the European space to provide people the possibility of moving freely in the EU/Schengen territory, would require a EU response in terms of common immigration policies definitely more important than it happens today. By communitarising many questions relating to immigration, the Treaty of Amsterdam constitutes a progress⁶. Still, the process of communitarising immigration-related issues in the EU is proceeding slowly, particularly in terms of common action and resources. This situation has ironically prevented the EMP from dealing so far with migration and setting out cooperation in a field which, at the end of the day, is the only real North-South security issues in trans-Mediterranean relations. In sum, a very weak response to a very important challenge.

Western Sahara and the US presence in the Maghreb

The Western Sahara crisis⁷ can be considered as a terminated conflict, in the sense that it will hardly return to be an armed and internationalized conflict. Still, the conflict is not solved and, if a political solution is not worked out, it could trigger new tensions so that regional relations would be prevented from improving and bringing about the cooperation the Maghreb needs for its political stabilization and economic development.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the violent confrontation between the Polisario front and Morocco stopped after Algeria's support had already come to an end with President Ben Jedid. In 1992 the UN Secretary General on the basis of a "settlement plan" agreed upon by the parties involved, set in motion the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). After many years of helpless talks with the parties to implement the settlement plan, in 1997 the Secretary General asked former US Secretary of State, James Baker, to mediate between them so as to come to an agreement on how the referendum had to be regulated. Mr. Baker held talks in

⁶ See Bruno Nascimbene, *Immigrazione e asilo nel diritto dell'Unione Europea*, paper written for the research project organised by the International Affairs Institute-IAI on "Immigrazione e asilo nel quadro della politica italiana e nel contesto dell'Unione Europea", Rome, April 2000 (mimeo); P. Magrini, G. Sacerdoti, "L'evoluzione delle politiche europee nel settore della giustizia e degli affari interni", in R. Aliboni, F. Bruni, A. Colombo, E. Greco (a cura di), *L'Italia e la politica internazionale, Edizione 2000*, Istituto Affari Internazionali e Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, pp. 83-100.

⁷ M. Barbier, *Le conflit du Sahara Occidental*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1982; John Damis, *Conflict in Northern Africa Sahara Dispute*, Stanford (CA), The Hoover Institute, 1983; Tony Hodges, "The Western Sahara File", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January, 1984, pp. 74-116. Western Sahara was annexed by Morocco (partially in 1976 and completely in 1979) after Spain had left the area in the hands of Morocco and Mauritania without organizing the due referendum on self-determination (thus leaving sovereignty over its former colony undefined). The inhabitants of Western Sahara (Saharouis), largely expatriated into Algeria where they set up the Polisario Front. They were supported in their military operations against Morocco by Algiers in a kind of proxy war which went on until the beginning of the 1990s. Upholding supremacy in the region is the long-standing policy of the Algerian military, in the event by preventing Morocco from aggradinzig.

Houston which succeeded in bringing about an agreement on the procedure to set up a list of people entitled to vote.

This procedure, however, has not managed to establish the list as yet. The Moroccan government has submitted numerous candidatures to eligibility. MINURSO has approved only a minor part of them. This has triggered opposition and discontent on the part of Morocco and stalemated the procedure. After another unsuccessful round of talks by former Secretary Baker, in May 2000 the UN Secretary General issued a report asking the Security Council to provide a new mandate whereby other ways than the referendum were made possible, which the Security Council did.

According to a recent analysis⁸, the possibility that the parties compromise on a solution different from a “winner-take-all” referendum, for example a form of Western Sahara autonomy within the Kingdom of Morocco, is not to be discarded. The Polisario seems unwilling to recur to urban terrorism and unable to practice any military option any more. It is also aware of the fact that if Morocco loses the referendum, it will hardly result willing to evacuate the territory. Besides, Algeria seems more interested in settling its long-standing dispute with Morocco than supporting the Polisario. However, subsequently there have been no good news and the situation is stalled.

Despite some French international involvement and the fact that the Western Sahara issue is constantly on Spanish domestic opposition’s agenda, the Western Sahara issue is not interesting because it affects European security - which it does not - but because of the conspicuous European political absence in dealing with it diplomatically. The involvement of former Secretary Baker has obviously a personal character. Still, the choice by the UN Secretary General of an American rather than a European personality is an evidence of the fact that there is an American influence on the Maghreb which competes well with Europe’s. There is also an American policy towards this region that is far from neutral with respect to the region and European policies. This has been very clear with the change in Western policy towards Algeria. This change was not an American initiative only, albeit the USA definitely stated its decision more clearly and loudly than the Europeans (who acted without much official noise). The initiative, though, had certainly a strong impact on determining the change in European policies.

The presence of the United States in the Maghreb has been felt most recently because of the so called Eizenstat initiative⁹, which is intended to pursue with the Maghreb countries (including Mauritania and Libya) a closer trade and investment cooperation with a view to tie these countries to globalization trends more firmly. The countries concerned did not prove very responsive. However, the initiative is another evidence of an active American presence in the Maghreb.

⁸ Charles Dunbar, “Saharan Stasis: Status and Prospects in the Western Sahara”, *The Middle East Journal*, Autumn 2000, Vol. 54, No 4, pp. 522-545.

⁹ Abderraouf Ounaïes, “Le Partenariat US/Maghreb. Le Projet Eizenstat”, *Réalités* (Tunis), actes du colloque international “Europe-Maghreb: Bilan et Perspectives, Tunis les 19 et 20 Avril 2000, Juin (2000), pp. 89-92.

Conclusions and prospects

The conventional view suggests that, while the United States has a primary role in the Middle East, in the Maghreb this role is played by Europe. The issues considered in this article suggest, on the contrary, that Europe's role in the Maghreb is not that decisive and assertive. Some European countries have played an important diplomatic role in trying to put an end to the long-standing crisis of Libya. Europe, however, has no role in the management of the Western Sahara crisis and even failed to govern regional socio-economic challenges like migration. Apparently, it managed the Algerian crisis and the Islamist challenge more effectively. As a matter of fact, though, the foreign policy of the Algerian regime in the 1990s seems to have been affected less by the European than American role.

In the course of the 1990s, Algeria's leadership was moved by two principal perceptions in shaping its foreign policy: the European and French role with respect to the ongoing domestic crisis, and the development of NATO crisis management capabilities to intervene in regional crises. To counterbalance the risks of Europe's interference in the regime's policy, the Algerian government made its best political and diplomatic efforts to get closer to the United States. In this sense, Algeria signed and ratified the NPT in 1994 and signed a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA, which took effect in January 1997. On the other hand, to face the risk of NATO interventionism, they made the decision to enter NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and downgraded EMP's political and security relevance to their foreign and security policy.

Thus, Algeria's policy reflects a growing role of the United States in the Maghreb. Still, it reflects less the impact of an increasing American presence in the Maghreb than that of European weakness. The American presence in the Maghreb aims at governing stability in this region - this being the sense of the Eizenstat initiative and former Secretary Baker's mediation. In this endeavor, the United States pursues, for sure, its national interest, still to a large extent it makes up for Europe's absence or weakness.

To this trend, Libya seems an exception. In fact, Europe has shown some effectiveness in managing the crisis and might now help normalizing this country and easing United States' restoration of normal relations with it. True, after the Camp Zeist verdict and the conviction of one of the two suspects, the management of Libya's issue may go back to square one. Unlike the central Maghreb, where transatlantic relations are shaped by a mix of transatlantic competition and complementarity which in the end brings about positive results for all the parties involved, in the case of Libya a renewed transatlantic opposition could arise and respective roles could prove mutually detrimental rather than helpful.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, EU's Maghreb policy is affected by transatlantic relations no less than its Middle East policy. Still, it remains true that Europe could have a more prominent role if it wanted to, and that in principle, for geopolitical as well as historical, cultural and political reasons, its role of global civilian and economic actor could emerge more easily in the Maghreb than in the Middle East.

Europe's chance to play a primary political role in the Maghreb remains predicated on the relatively minor involvement of this region's countries in the Arab-Israeli conflict, on one hand, and their especially important economic ties with Europe (trade, oil, migration), on the other. Thanks to this combination, in the Maghreb case, Europe's economic and civilian identity can generate political results it cannot do in the

Middle East. In this sense, Europe should try to trade a special and enhanced framework of partnership with the Maghreb against the achievement of a number of appropriate political arrangements in the region.

Talks should include all the Greater Maghreb countries and have a two-tier structure. On one track, the bilateral Maghreb-EU track dealing with the economic, human and social dimension, including soft security issues. On another track, the Maghreb countries should set up plurilateral negotiating desks on significant regional issues, like reviving and revamping the AMU, establishing a regional cooperative security regime, and coming to resolve the Western Sahara dispute. When appropriate - as in the case of the Western Sahara dispute - non-regional actors, like the EU, the U.S. and the UN, should be involved in talks. There should be a conditional link between the two tiers of negotiations, in the sense that the institution of the special EU-Maghreb Partnership would depend on significant improvements in and the success of plurilateral talks on security and political issues.

This strategy could help Europe to materialize its expected and potential role towards the Maghreb. Furthermore, it would provide consistency and cohesion to transatlantic relations.

For this policy to be implemented, the EU must have a bold second thought about the all-Mediterranean policy it adopted with the Barcelona Declaration in 1995. This policy, blocked by the progressive stalemate of the Middle East peace process, has proved very rigid and has prevented the EU from using its instruments according to necessities and cases. It should be remembered today that, before the EU policy assumed the shape of the all-Mediterranean Barcelona process, there were proposals and experiences with a European-Maghreb special relationship (the EU-Maghreb approach adopted by the 1992 European Council in Lisbon and the Five plus Five group). This approach could be restored either in the form of a distinct EU-Maghreb relation or in the form of a sub-regional approach within the all-Mediterranean Barcelona framework. In any case, a choice is now in order.