

**DOCUMENTI
IAI**

**EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION:
LIMITS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TODAY'S EMP**

by Roberto Aliboni

Seminar on "Early Warning and Response in a Conflict Prevention Perspective: Applying Experiences to the Euro-Med Context", Jordan Institute of Diplomacy - Istituto Affari Internazionali
Amman - Jordan 1-2 October, 2001

EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION: LIMITS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TODAY'S EMP

This paper presents some remarks on early warning (EW) and conflict prevention (CP) within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). This remarks are preceded by an evaluation of the present EMP's political status and capabilities.

Evolution and present state of the Euro-Med political context

The EMP is one out of the four schemes of inter-regional co-operation in which the European Union (EU) is presently involved, with a view to helping prevent and manage conflict by means of co-operative security policies and eventually upgrading its own security.

The Barcelona Declaration has given CP a pivotal role in the EMP. Geared to intervene on conflict's structural causes by means of sweeping economic and political reforms, the EMP is first of all a policy of long-term conflict prevention. In the Declaration, however, beside this overall orientation towards peace-building and structural conflict prevention, there are also indications on joint action to manage conflict and carry out preventive diplomacy in the shorter run.

The objective of providing the EMP with proper crisis-response capabilities was pursued by talks aimed at establishing a Euro-Med Charter on Peace and Stability. These talks shed vivid light on the fundamental disagreement that exists with regard to human rights and democracy. Yet, they also pointed to conflict prevention and human security as a common ground on which the EMP could be based.

The outburst of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis since September 2000 has prevented the Charter from even being considered by the November 2000 EMP conference in Marseilles and the talks from being pursued. Further to the discontinuation of the talks on the Charter, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis has practically resulted in a suspension of EMP's political and security dimensions and impressed a strong bilateral emphasis on economic co-operation¹.

Given this crisis, does it make sense to continue to talk about Euro-Med CP and EW systems in the EMP? A response to this question depends first of all on what the EMP's outlook is believed to be. On the basis of such an evaluation, one can speculate on whether and what CP and EW can be developed in the EMP. Let's first consider the state of the EMP today.

Despite the crisis, the EMP is unlikely to vanish or suffer a recess similar to that of other Mediterranean and Middle Eastern fora (like the CSCM; the ACRS; the MENA economic summits, and so forth). The EMP is a multi-layer structure in which political, cultural, social, security and economic dimensions are brought together without being necessarily interdependent. If some dimensions recede and multilateralism weakens, the EMP can still survive by working on remaining dimensions and using the EU's

¹ An overview of the present status of the EMP is provided by an array of oral and written contributions in House of Lords, Select Committee on the European Union, *The Common Mediterranean Strategy*, Session 2000-01, 9th Report, The Stationery Office Limited, London, 14 March 2001.

preponderant role as a stabiliser. Moreover, the Southern Mediterranean Partners have in any case a broad interest in the existence of the EMP and in having an EU presence in the overall process that, willy-nilly, brings together the North and the South across the Mediterranean.

What is happening as a result of the present crisis is that EU-South Mediterranean relations are assuming once again the “hub and spokes” pattern of the past. Admittedly, it is not the most effective pattern of relations, and in this sense it has been criticised and the Barcelona Declaration was precisely a response to this criticism. The “hub and spokes” model is less effective than other models, in particular the multilateral pattern of relations the EMP has tried to set in motion. But it is not ineffective in absolute terms. And today’s context allows for no more than a pattern of relations which is closer to the “hub and spokes” than to the multilateral model. Although not the best solution, it does not exclude significant Euro-Med working relations .

Thus, in this author’s view, the EMP will continue to work, though short of previous ambitions. It will work essentially as a “hub and spokes” pattern of relations, where the EU would play a central role and mediate relations among the “spokes”. It is with reference to this model that we can speculate on what CP and EW arrangements could be like in today’s EMP, without losing touch with reality.

To this purpose, the paper considers three points: (a) it summarises the model of EW&CP that emerged from the talks on the Charter; (b) it speculates about what EW&CP arrangements may be established with the EMP as it is today; (c) it provides some suggestions on the role of confidence-building and civil societies in present conditions.

EW and CP in the talks on the Euro-Med Charter: a possible agenda

In their talks to set out the Euro-Med Charter, the Senior Officials considered various drafts, almost invariably coming from the EU side. In general, these drafts were basically oriented towards the idea that long-term CP and peace-building should be the main task of the EMP and that the political dialogue should be enhanced and work, among other things, as an EW arrangement on the basis of regular information-sharing. While there was consensus on these broad orientations, the Southern countries - as already pointed out - never shared EU’s systemic link between political and economic reform in order to fight the root causes of instability and conflict. Most EMP Southern Partners maintain that the EU should help remove structural economic and social imbalances and leave Partners free to seek their way towards political stability and reform.

The Southern vision seems closer to the “human security” approach², as developed in the Lysøen process, than to the more traditional (and less pragmatic) approach recently finalised and adopted by the EU Commission³.

² Astri Suhrke, “Human Security and the Interests of States”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 30, No. 3, September 1999, pp. 265-276.

³ *Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention*, COM (2001)211 fin., Brussels 11 April 2001.

If the talks on the Charter were resumed, differences would not disappear but the “long-term” approach to CP - whether more or less traditional - could be the building block on which consensus could be based. Very little was said in the Charter talks on this long-term approach (even though it was, meanwhile becoming the central approach in the EU doctrine of CP).

In the talks and the Charter’s drafts more was said about preventive diplomacy and the instruments and procedures to set up an EMP system proper. True, what the Senior Officials discussed were more scattered measures than an organic draft for the implementation of a short-term CP arrangement (thus reflecting the scant consensus on conducting preventive diplomacy). However, by referring to the drafts of the Charter, in particular the one presented by the Portuguese Presidency in the first semester of 2000⁴, it is possible to get an overall tentative view of how EW and short-term CP could look in the EMP framework:

- EMP’s institutions would consider available information and eventually make decisions on joint preventive action; as in other bodies of regional co-operation (e.g. the Permanent Council in the OSCE), they would work as an element of EW, using “dialogue as an early warning procedure”⁵; it must be noted that, in this perspective, EW would be understood as an information-sharing activity, intended eventually to start processes of preventive intervention (information > consensus > action);
- beside coming from information-sharing in EMP institutions, EW would also come from “structures that would facilitate crisis prevention meetings and common perceptions in identifying structural risk factors and root causes of conflict”, i.e. from some kind of EMP situation centre or national and/or intergovernmental (e.g. EU) situation centre;
- in implementing joint preventive actions, EMP institutions would be supported by some kind of conflict prevention centre, i.e. a “Euro-Mediterranean mechanism for preventive diplomacy and crisis management”; beside logistics, this centre would provide “training in conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy” (and possibly other facilities of the same kind);
- EMP institutions would dispose of a set of specific instruments of conflict prevention, that is “procedures of clarification, mediation and conciliation”; “judicial settlement of differences and disputes”; and “adherence to appropriate international conventions”, which - depending on the case - could be operated by the institutions themselves, by means of “Euro-Mediterranean mechanisms” (e.g. the CP centre or centres), or deferred to incumbent international courts.

EW and CP in the present Euro-Med context: a feasible agenda

Today, pending the crisis unleashed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the project sketched out by the Charter’s drafts, as incomplete and modest it may appear, cannot be implemented. In the present Euro-Med context, the EW and CP agenda is shaped by

⁴ Quotations are from the Portuguese draft.

⁵ As it was put by the “Action Plan”, an early working document presented by the Italian Presidency in the first semester of 1996 and then superseded by the start of the talks on the Charter.

two parameters: (a) the limits set by the overall Euro-Med political context; (b) the role of the EU. A strong EMP would be able to make its own EW&CP arrangements and tend to limit its dependence on the EU and its preponderant means. A weak EMP will tend to be more dependent on the EU and take advantage of the latter's firm and diversified structure. The present context suggests a weak EMP based on a "hub and spokes" pattern of relations, where the hub is provided by the EU. Despite the considerable dangers of unilateralism and Southern disaffection, this pattern of relations may make the EMP work. It is, therefore, in such a scenario that EMP's arrangements for EW and CP have to be figured out.

As we know, EW may come from information-sharing within the Senior Officials Committee. It may be brought in by individual Partners (both EU and non-EU). It may derive from EU institutions, which provide EW information on their own initiative or because so mandated by the EMP (as its hub). Whatever the format of such EW, in the present conditions, EMP institutions are poorly prepared or plainly unable to respond. In particular, their ability to respond is very different according to whether the action to be taken concerns the long- or short-term. As far as short-term action is concerned (late prevention, i.e. preventive diplomacy, or early management), the problem is that the EMP has not yet approved any mechanism or framework to make joint action possible. As things stand today, if a consensus arises to proceed on a specific case, the Senior Officials would have to prepare an *ad hoc* decision to be approved by the 27 Ministers and the latter would have to gather purposely to approve the decision: something that, for the time being, would require more political will than the EMP seems to enjoy. Thus, while the EMP in its present state can obtain and generate EW, preventive diplomacy and other short-term action can hardly take place.

Instead, as far as long-term action is concerned (i.e. early or very early prevention), in particular actions related to aid and economic co-operation, the current institutional set-up largely allows for action. Within broad orientations approved by the EMP Ministers and the EU Council, the Commission works out policies and decisions that are approved by the standing Euro-Med Committee for the Barcelona Process and then implemented by the Commission itself. Thus, there is a working framework for extending aid and economic co-operation on a multi-annual basis (essentially, the national and regional indicative plans), whereby long-term economic and financial policies can be implemented with a view to affecting the root causes of conflict.

Is there a system of EW when coming to long-term CP? As a matter of fact, there is an important interaction here between the EMP and the EU Commission, whereby the EMP can receive and contribute EW to a large extent. Before approval of the national and regional indicative plans and other economic measures by the Euro-Med Committee, there are significant opportunities for EW interactions between the Southern Partners and the Commission. These opportunities are mostly provided by the organisational and institutional set-up of Association Agreements and, where these agreements are not in force, by long-standing relations and diplomatic contacts between the Commission and the countries concerned. Thus, national and regional plans, submitted to the MED Committee and later on to the Euro-Med Committee, do incorporate previous information and negotiations. This means, among other things, that the relevant aspects of these plans in terms of EW and CP must already have been considered by both sides.

With the mainstreaming of the Country Strategy Papers in the EU's system of EW/CP, the consideration just mentioned is bound to assume compelling significance. In fact, the strategy papers will focus on the identification of the "root causes" of instability in the countries concerned and, in this sense, will bring about far-reaching and diffuse consequences in terms of policies and objectives. The analysis of the root causes of instability by the strategy papers and its policy implications, as legitimate as they are from the point of view of EU policy-making, may not match with the Partners' consensus. EMP's previous experience with the talks on the Charter suggests that there would hardly be a consensus on political "root causes" and related reforms. The countries concerned may disagree, even strongly, with donors' analysis and have difficulty in accepting policies stemming from it. It must also be noted that, if the same analyses and policies were presented in a more general perspective, they might result acceptable. It is the explicit statement of root causes of instability by the strategy papers that may, in fact, create a political problem which otherwise would not exist .

If this is true, the EW evidence provided by the strategy papers must be submitted to some consensus-building procedure. They should be at least commented, if not approved, in some EMP's political instance, like the Senior Officials Committee. In other words, the strategy papers or some cross-cutting elements of them should be mainstreamed in the EMP political dialogue. For sure, in a "hub and spokes" context, they should be mainstreamed, first and foremost, in the Association Agreements' institutions.

In conclusion, today's EMP is by far more prepared to develop long-term EW and CP than short-term. In the shorter-term, the EMP can share information within its institutions and obtain information from the EU, but would hardly be able to act. In the longer-term, the combination of multilateral and bilateral structures brings in EW, fosters consensus, and permits action to be undertaken. The recent reform by the Commission of its system of CP, in particular the introduction of the strategy papers, can provide an opportunity to strengthen EMP's capability in long-term EW and CP.

Confidence-building and the role of civil societies

Despite efforts and goodwill, a "hub and spokes" model cannot but reveal strong limits in developing and strengthening co-operative frameworks. The model is fatally predicated on a more or less large degree of unilateralism. It risks to weaken rather than strengthen co-operation and cohesion. For this reason, it must be supported by confidence-building and efforts to secure transparency. Furthermore, civil societies and non-governmental networking should play an important role in it.

While in present conditions the establishment of EMP proper facilities for EW/CP is highly unlikely, EW in the form of information-sharing in the EMP institutions could be encouraged as an exercise in transparency and confidence-building. Initiatives in this respect from individual Partners, especially on the Southern side, can hardly be expected, though. It is the EU which should make an effort to submit information coming from its expanding structure of EW and CP units to EMP institutions. This effort should concentrate on short-term crises and issues, for - as we know - with respect to long-term issues and crises, the EMP is more equipped to reflect and even act. In any case, with the mainstreaming of CP in the EU overall agenda, improvements

in co-operation and involvement are needed, in particular in regard to the process of the strategy papers.

In order to help introduce EW in the EMP institutions, the EU could ask for a mandate. Even without a mandate, it could take the initiative of inviting liaison personnel from the Southern Partners in its EW/CP units and introducing other measures of transparency and confidence-building (visits, seminars, etc.).

The setting up of regional centres for conflict prevention should also be encouraged. In general, a conflict prevention centre is less an instrument to gather information than one to manage procedures seeking to settle disputes and prevent latent or potential conflict between more or less consenting parties. The establishment of these regional conflict prevention centres could encourage the Southern countries concerned to take initiatives. Furthermore, the centres could be given a broad task of analysis and planning that they could make available to EMP institutions.

Networking remains a most important instrument of cohesion and co-operation. There could be forms of networking between national and EU's situation centres on a voluntary basis. Above all, though, networking concerns the civil societies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). EMP's think tanks could share a Euro-Med dedicated model for conflict analysis, like the one the Istituto Affari Internazionali-IAI is exploring, and help feed a joint data-base. Their information and analysis could be made available to the officials in the EMP/EU and the public.

In the same sense, another measure that could contribute to introducing EW/CP in the EMP could be the establishment of some kind of co-operation between the Conflict Prevention Network-CPN and a similar Euro-Med network of think tanks. This co-operation would be related to the compilation of the country strategy papers. This agenda would be without prejudice to Commission and EU conclusions, but would certainly attenuate perceptions of unilateralism, improve confidence and accustom the EMP to some common work in a EW/CP perspective.

Conclusions

This paper presents some remarks on EW and CP within the EMP. It summarises the model of EW&CP that emerged from the talks on the Euro-Med Charter for Peace and Stability but could not be pursued essentially because of the crisis erupted between Israel and the Palestinians in September 2000. The paper argues that, because of current political constraints, the EMP has to work, as of today, on the basis of a "hub and spokes" pattern of relations, with the EU working as the hub.

Because of these limitations to political will, the paper concludes that today's EMP is far more prepared to develop long-term EW and CP than short-term. In the shorter-term, the EMP can share information within its institutions and obtain information from the EU, but would hardly be able to act. In the longer-term, the combination of multilateral and bilateral structures could bring in EW evidence, foster consensus, and permit action to be undertaken.

EMP's EW/CP capabilities can be stimulated by fostering confidence-building measures and the role of NGOs. To help build confidence, the EU could submit information coming from its expanding system of EW to EMP institutions, and foster

liaisons and voluntary networking between the EW structures in the partner countries and EMP's. Also, it could encourage the establishment of regional centres for conflict prevention seated in Southern Mediterranean countries.

The recent reform by the Commission of its system of CP, in particular the introduction of Country Strategy Papers, can provide an opportunity to strengthen long-term EMP capability in EW and CP. This opportunity concerns both governments and NGOs. Euro-Med networks of think tanks and NGOs could be associated to the EW process that is expected to be based on the strategy papers.