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BETWEEN DIALOGUE AND PARTNERSHIP: WHAT NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONSHIP ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN?

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BETWEEN DIALOGUE AND PARTNERSHIP: WHAT NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONSHIP ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN?

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In the post-September 11th evolution a new transatlantic dimension is emerging based in the struggle against terrorism in a global perspective. Terrorism is identified as today's central threat to international security and co-operation.

As usual, however, at the very moment this new solidarity does emerge, it brings about the germs of fresh divisions. In many European quarters, there are two principal perplexities:

(a) That the new alliances the United States is seeking to set up in the emerging strategic perspective may weaken or trivialise both the transatlantic bond - which remains fundamental in many European security perceptions - and the multilateral pattern of relations developed over time in the Western alliances (by strengthening the post-Cold War tendency towards *ad hoc* multinational coalitions);

(b) That the strategic perspective assumed by the United States may emphasise military over political, cultural, social and economic responses as well as strategic alliances over partnership and thus prove inadequate to cope with the root causes of conflicts.

This paper is more concerned by the second than the first point. In fact, the assumption of the paper is that, beside war to terrorism and its sponsors, the broad post-September 11th perspective needs to include the development of co-operation and partnership if allies are to be strengthened and support to terrorists to be suppressed. While today's emphasis is on the military response, there is no doubt that, in order for an effective and dedicated anti-terrorist international coalition to be set up, it must be consolidated by providing, at one and the same time, institution-building, partnership and political responses, including appropriate social, cultural and economic measures.

In sum, the winning strategic approach to the situation generated by September 11th should couple effective military measures, on the one hand, and policies of co-operation inspired by partnership and comprehensive security, on the other.

As global as the new strategic perspective may be, the Southern area beyond the Mediterranean Sea, in particular North Africa and the Middle East seem to acquire more relevance from the point of view of both Europe and the United States. This is due to two main factors:

(a) In the terrorists' eyes, a significant shift of the balance of power towards Islamism in North Africa and the Middle East would open the way to the shift in the global balance of power they are seemingly looking for. Consequently, any Western military achievement would be ultimately void, if the West failed to secure stability, manage political transition, and ease the resolution of conflicts in the regions concerned. What is really and primarily at stake in the new strategic perspective is the political transition in the central region of North Africa and the Middle East.

(b) Europe's logistical role and its relevance as a target have decidedly changed with respect to recent past. Since the 1970s, Europe has worked as a logistical platform for political activities, including terrorism, aimed essentially at North Africa and the Middle East. Increases in migration have more and more facilitated this role. On the other hand, Europe suffered many spillovers from terrorism. Only very seldom,

however, it was a direct target. In contrast, the post-September 11th evidence suggests that Europe is becoming a target as well as a logistical platform directed not only at North Africa and the Middle East but also to the United States and Europe. In this perspective, and pending an increasing exposure to migration, Europe's proximity to North Africa and the Middle East, previously neutral in its effects, has now an impact on Western security and requires policies suited to manage such proximity.

Since many years the Western countries are generating efforts and institutions aiming at rendering the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas stable and capable of peaceful change. These efforts have set in motion a considerable number of organisations and institutions based on co-operation and partnership (which are broadly referred to in this paper as ORGs). The impact of September 11th on international relations adds new strategic weight and importance to these efforts and suggests their strengthening. The question is how the constellation of initiatives of co-operation that have been established since the end of the 1980s has to be reinforced and redirected to make them more effective and able to cope with the challenges put by post-September 11th world.

To respond to this question, let us, first, comment on some recent and current experiences – essentially the ACRS in the Middle East peace process; the EU-initiated Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP); and the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue (NMD) – and then provide recommendations and suggestions about what to do.

Generally speaking, their initiators have envisioned ORGs in a broad co-operative and preventative perspective. For this reason, beside other aspects they include some forms of co-operative security regimes. Conflict resolution has not been regarded as their specific task, instead. As far as the Euro-Med Partnership is concerned, the Barcelona Declaration rules out conflict resolution expressly. Conflict resolution has been left to bilateral talks.

The ACRS and the EMP, in different times and ways, have been assigned the task of accompanying and facilitating the peace process, by preparing a regional context that fits the process to get to the peace and consolidates and preserves it once the peace is done.

The failure of the Middle East peace process has made the co-operative security regimes contemplated by the ORGs largely inapplicable.

It must be pointed out, however, that in a more limited and less politically engaging perspective, some elements of co-operative security could be implemented all the same. In fact, co-operative security is inapplicable as of today in a properly multilateral context and with a view to the implementation of structural confidence-building measures and related measures of arms control and limitation. Waiting for more favourable conditions, however, the implementation of some declaratory and even operational confidence-building measures is possible, in particular in non-multilateral, i.e. e. bilateral, sub-regional or multi-bilateral contexts.

More in general, if the ultimate purpose of co-operative security is understood as that of providing security “through institutionalised consent rather than through threats of material or physical coercion”¹, the functioning of co-operative security agendas within

¹ Janne E. Nolan, “The Concept of Cooperative Security”, in Janne E. Nolan (ed.), *Global Engagement. Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century*, The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 1994, pp. 3-18, p. 4.

the ORGs remains important as low as their actual profile may be. In this sense, while the ACRS went admittedly in a definite recess, what survives in the EMP and what can potentially be done in the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue (NMD) is a valuable and sensible asset.

In the Western vision of the ORGs, especially in the EMP, the above-mentioned concept of co-operative security does prevail. Consequently, security is understood in a broad sense and is based on a comprehensive approach that, beside military, includes non-military factors. The attainment of security is thus regarded as dependent not only on disarmament and other measures of security co-operation but, most importantly, on the long-term achievement of “structural stability” in the societies and polities concerned. According to the EU Commission, “Characteristics of structural stability are sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures and healthy environmental and social conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resort to conflict”².

Thus, the implication of structural stability and comprehensive security is the necessity of a transition to democracy by the Southern partners. Democratisation means the adoption by the countries concerned of a set of principles (the ones listed by the 1993 Copenhagen Declaration) relating to the respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms and minorities by means of the full establishment of the rule of law. The implementation of democracy is expected to bring about, like in Western Europe itself, the end of violence in intra- as well as inter-state relations, and by the same token to provide security and stability to Western Europe and the Western alliances in general.

The Barcelona Declaration has outlined a broad agenda of democratisation, similar to that currently being implemented in the European East. This agenda, however, is perceived by the Arab Partners as a factor of political and cultural intrusion as well as a danger of domestic destabilisation. Furthermore, it is regarded as a project that, while intended to provide Europe with the stability it is seeking for in the North-South dimension, does not necessarily provide the Arabs with the solution to intra-regional, South-South conflict they badly need for in their national security perspective. Security is thus regarded as unevenly distributed among partners.

Very soon after its inception, the EMP’s development as a forum for political dialogue and security co-operation has been hindered and almost blocked by this difference. The negative evolution of the peace process has made things worse. Still, the real reason for the poor performance of the EMP as of today is less the failure of the peace process *per se* than the Arab perception of existing ORGs as bringing about security agendas that fail to encompass their problems, while seeking for Arab co-operation to solve European problems. Furthermore, these agendas are perceived as asking for sweeping reforms without taking care of the regional security problems and conflicts that weaken governments and prevent them from proceeding to reforms without the high risks of becoming their victims.

Is comprehensive security more or less largely inapplicable to Euro-Med civilian relations in the same way as co-operative security regimes are to military relations? As a matter of fact, while the link with democratisation has created many tensions and prevented the EMP from finding out a common ground and taking common action so

² *Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention*, COM (2001)211 fin., Brussels 11 April 2001, p. 10.

far, the emphasis entailed by the comprehensive security perspective on non-military factors has proved broadly conducive to co-operation between the Northern and the Southern partners. This is anyway an important result. It can promote forms of security co-operation and be used as a platform to enlarge and consolidate such co-operation.

In sum, a fully working common ground can in principle be based only on a trade-off between political and economic reform in the South to secure the North more stability, on one hand, and peace in the South to provide regional countries with security internationally and domestically, on the other. In this trade-off, peace in the South looks like a pre-condition for carrying out reform over there and then assuring stability in the North-South dimension.

Short of peace in the Middle East, the ORGs have provided only modest results so far with respect to the goal of security co-operation. Nonetheless, what we have just said shows that there are significant second-best common grounds that the parties involved can adopt. Let's consider these second-best common grounds.

From the South, many suggest that the EU should renounce its security perspective in the EMP - i.e. structural stability and its implications in terms of democratisation - and promote an agenda to support social and economic development in the South that would be de-linked from any short-middle term expectations about political reform.

The Europeans, in particular Northern European states and social-democratic governments could hardly accept this perspective, however. In fact, many would perceive it as a policy that would foster authoritarian regimes without returns.

Furthermore, the European perception of increasing spillovers from the Southern Mediterranean countries in the short-term can hardly be overlooked. The September 11th development have deepened these perceptions and increased the need for more stability in the South in order to obtain more stability and broad security in Europe and the West. An agenda limited to the extension of economic aid and co-operation could not be sufficient.

A possible second-best common ground may refer to a pragmatic and selective approach. This would consist in identifying specific "files" central to broad regional stability and security. Economic co-operation and development is definitely one such "files". Further "files" concern, however, also soft security issues, like immigration, international crime and trafficking as well as issues like terrorism, that in the post September 11th perspective have acquired a strategic dimension in some respect closer to hard security. For sure, Northern and Southern views are more often than not opposed to one another on these issues. Suffice it to think, for example, of immigration and terrorism. A pragmatic, issue-by-issue approach, however, would have the merit of comparing interests without making binding reference to values. By referring to interests, this approach would allow for negotiations and political compromise. This kind of agenda, based on non-military factors and de-linked from any values affirmation, as limited as it may be with respect to EU ambitions, in particular political reforms, seems very important in the post-September 11th perspective. The Europeans would not need to drop their ideas about structural stability and its implications. At the same time, they would avoid to link too stringently or affirmatively present policies of co-operation and their expected results in terms of middle-long term changes in the South (and consequent stability for the Union and the West).

Let's try a summary of the arguments developed in the above. First, it is clear that the

continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts puts a strong limit to any multilateral or collective co-operation between the West and the North African and Middle Eastern regions.

Second, while the ORGs are very helpful in supporting any possible peace process, it is also clear that they are not and cannot be geared to conflict resolution tasks.

Third, although ORGs' effectiveness is constrained and reduced by the lack of a solution to the Middle East conflict, ORGs can allow for the implementation of broad co-operative security, in the sense underscored above; consequently, they can secure a more or less important degree of security co-operation in the short term and pave the way to long-term changes and co-operation. It is in this perspective, that they can be made more functional as a tool of dialogue and reinforced as an instrument of partnership in order to support co-operation in the post-September 11th situation.

Fourth, in order for existing ORGs to be reinforced and generate more co-operation, flexibility and variable geometry have to be used. What previous experiences with the ORGs do suggest is that:

- multilateralism proper must be turned in forms of multi-bilateralism; in fact, the latter is governing relations between NATO and its Mediterranean partners in the NMD; in the EMP multilateralism is still governing political relations, but economic bilateral relations between the EU and individual partners in the framework of the Association Agreements are getting definitely more important than the multilateral framework envisaged by the Barcelona Declaration;

- sub-regionalism must be given more room beside regionalism; the two formats must not be mutually exclusive, but complimentary and allow for things to work in sub-regional frameworks when and where they cannot do so in the pan-regional circle; in this sense, initiatives relating to the Maghreb (the group of Five plus Five), or the Arab countries (the Agadir Agreement), or Turkey and Israel, or Eastern Mediterranean, are, in fact, acquiring more importance; for sure, sub-regionalism needs good management to avoid that these same initiatives happen to turn into regional disruptions;

- Multiplying declaratory confidence-building measures and partnership-building measures should be able to strengthen flexibility so as to increase transparency and cohesion, even though these measures may prove unable to generate common action and structured security co-operation in the short term.

Fifth, based on the use of more flexibility, the ORGs can provide working security relationships in many ways:

- A military security co-operation in the multi-bilateral framework of the NMD, essentially based on increasing transparency and dialogue; operational measures could be enforced bilaterally or by groups willing to do so;

- A model of mostly civilian comprehensive security co-operation in the multilateral framework of the EMP, fundamentally aimed at setting the conditions for co-operation on soft security in the short term and "structural stability" in the long term;

- a reinforced political dialogue, in institutional or semi-institutional shape, in all the frameworks involved;

- a set of sub-regional framework of co-operation, where more advanced forms of security co-operation could be implemented.

In sum, a more marked shift to partnership is today a necessary transition whose acceleration is limited by the weakness of conflict resolution in the Middle East. Still, within such limits, a transition from simple dialogue to partnership is possible where the

necessary non-military co-operative response is provided beside military responses.

Given these general orientations, what should be done in more detail in the present situation?

Waiting for the possibility of restoring talks on restructuring regional relations in the Middle East – which remains the crucial challenge to cope with – there are three more specific questions: (a) keeping on refitting the EMP so as to enable it to respond to civilian and soft security challenges; (b) strengthening the NMD role of partnership with respect to the very simple role of providing transparency it is performing today; (c) setting out some co-ordination between EMP and NMD in a transatlantic perspective.

The EMP is largely and bravely redirecting its activities towards a comprehensive security concept where emphasis is given to co-operation relating to civilian, economic, social, cultural factors. The EU and its Partners more and more regard the EMP as a framework for preventing conflict in the long term. This perspective demands for the attainment of structural stability and exposes the EMP to tensions about the promotion of democracy and its implications. However, the long-term perspective helps smoothing these tensions. Furthermore, the “root causes” of instability and the promotion of democracy to remove them are discussed in a bilateral context, i.e. the Association Agreements, rather than in the EMP overall multilateral context. This circumstance allows for compromise and mediation and prevents tensions and strong oppositions between the parties. More in general, it is clear that the EU is accustoming itself to a less value-laden and assertive behaviour. In this more pragmatic context, many otherwise dividing “files”, like for example “terrorism”, can be discussed in a more constructive environment and bring to common action and compromise.

As for the NMD, it seems high time that it moves from a dialogue intended to improve information and transparency closer to partnership tasks. By taking advantage of its multi-bilateral format, the NMD should be able to advance in the field of declaratory and transparency CBMs and enter also the field of operational CBMs even in a framework as politically narrow as the present one. As an all-inclusive Western ORG, the NMD is regarded by the Southern Mediterranean Partners as a forum where international security and relating political issues can be considered and shared with the Western world. There is no doubt that the NMD could become a forum to share views on terrorism in the framework of a fruitful political dialogue. Making political dialogue a regular feature of the NMD could be the task of a first attempt at enlarging the NMD and direct it towards partnership.

In order to begin to move from dialogue to partnership, the Mediterranean Co-operation Group - i.e. the 19 NATO nations body at the level of diplomatic counsellors presently in charge of the NMD and the formulation of its agenda - should make a specific effort to identify the fresh and key issues which would pertain to a NMD's higher political and security profile and would have to be proposed to the Partners as an NMD enlarged agenda. Once this new enlarged agenda is identified, the MCG should ask for an intensification of NMD meetings at the Ambassadorial level to consider it. The goal of this upgrading of the NMD would be that the Ambassadors of the Partners would meet periodically in a kind of Mediterranean Co-operation Council, which by its very denomination would express the existence of a regular political partnership among the Mediterranean Partners. This would constitute a strong signal of the West's willingness for an upgraded security co-operation with the Southern Partners.

Co-ordinating the ORGs is not an easy task because governments, in particular Western

governments, are divided about objectives and policies with respect to the areas concerned. The question can be regarded in a middle-long term as well as in a short-middle term perspective.

As things stand today, it is possible to envisage in the shorter term a kind of division of tasks between the EMP, expected to specialise in civilian and soft security and act as an essentially regional ORG, and the NMD, with a clearer attitude towards developing security with respect to military instruments and closer to a global vantage point. As wise and effective this division of tasks would result, however, the political impact of both ORGs is bound to remain limited unless the stumbling block of the Middle East conflict is lifted and a closer political understanding is assured between the United States and Europe on the different issues and crises of the region.

Without this transatlantic political understanding, the division of tasks mentioned above will remain uncertain and unsteady. Consequently, their political impact will remain uncertain and unsteady as well. Thus, whatever the co-ordination in the short term and its effectiveness, the question of a long-term co-ordination in the framework of a regular, possibly institutionalised transatlantic co-operation remains an open question and – at least from a European point of view - a necessary requirement (which the post-September 11th US seems to downplay).

Whatever the weaknesses of the co-ordination in the longer term, in the shorter term the ORGs and their agendas of co-operative security, with all their limits, need to be reinforced. The division of tasks illustrated above, although limited as well, can help with respect to two urgent challenges: (a) preventing instability in the region and preserving the possibility of a long-term democratic political transition in it, and (b) increasing in both the EMP and the NMD the possibilities of a co-operation on terrorism.