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**MEDITERRANEAN SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION:
INTEREST AND ROLE OF ITALY AND LIBYA**

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This paper looks at the international relations across the Mediterranean Sea, between the European countries - in particular, the European Union-EU - and the countries of the Near East and North Africa. In this framework, it tries to define the role of Italy and Libya and the joint actions they can carry out to foster peace and co-operation in the area concerned.

The paper inquires, first, into the directions of Italy's and Libya's foreign policies and the rationale of their role in the regions concerned; then, into the political and functional areas in which they can co-operate.

Rationale and directions

Every country is characterised by an identity, which, in turn, is laid on different dimensions. President Nasser used to say that Egypt is, first, an Arab; second, an African; and, third, a Third-World country. By the same token, we can say that Italy is, first, a European country; then, a Western or Northern Atlantic one; finally, a country belonging to the Mediterranean world.

As for Libya, I think that its self-perception is not very different from that President Nasser used to express with respect to Egypt: it feels, first, as an Arab country, with a strong pan-Arab trend; then, an African country; and, finally, a country of the Third World, i.e. in current terms a country willing to preserve its identity in the globalisation framework.

At first sight, this picture does not show any association between Italy and Libya, essentially because the geographic proximity provided by the Mediterranean has ironically a very different geopolitical relevance for Italy, which considers the Mediterranean very important in terms of identity, and Libya, which, on the contrary, considers it very secondary.

Libya's perception of the Mediterranean as an area less important than others with respect to its identity emerged very clearly in 1999-2000, when the talks undertaken by the EU and Libya for the latter to become a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership-EMP failed. In particular, the EU-Libya cycle of Euro-Mediterranean talks came finally to a standstill when Libya asserted its vocation for Africa - in particular Africa south of Sahara - in the EU-Africa Summit held in Cairo in April 2000. Libya is today a guest of the European presidency of the EMP, that is something close to an observer. In any case, it didn't want to become a member. This position is seemingly reflecting the secondary importance Libya does assign to the Mediterranean area.

In sum, a geopolitical analysis based on identity brings about the conclusion that Italy and Libya cannot be associated. However, identity may prove a treacherous analytical tool. No doubt, at the end of the day, convergence between countries uses to be more firmly predicated on interests than identity.

If a perspective based on interests rather than identities is assumed, the significance of the Mediterranean area for the countries of both the Northern and Southern side of the Sea, has to be reconsidered. In fact, in this perspective it emerges clearly that the Mediterranean area is important less in itself than as the link between the countries of the basin. It was in this sense that the Mediterranean was regarded by Taha Hussein¹, who did not denied the primary importance of the Arab world for Egypt, at the same time, however, wanted to point out that the Mediterranean was the necessary link between the Arab and the European world. By the same token, the Mediterranean Sea is the ineluctable tie between Europe and the Arab world.

If we overcome the vision of the Mediterranean as the product of a cultural solidarity and we look at it in a more realistic way, we can fully realise the importance of the area as a conveyor of North-South relations, and, even farther afield, between Northern European and Southern African countries. This perception of the Mediterranean as a link between the two shores is very clear in the foreign policy of a number of Arab countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, as well as European ones, namely those in the North of Europe. It is sometime obscured by the ideology - or the dream - of a Mediterranean solidarity, based in culture, ideology and past glories, in Southern Europe and the Maghreb.

For sure, the EMP and, more broadly speaking, the EU Mediterranean policies are also obscured by this kind of Mediterranean rhetoric. Beyond rhetoric, however, the EMP does reflect the mutual interest in that a working bond exists between the countries north and south of the Sea. Whether relations between these countries are organised in a multilateral body like the EMP or take place bilaterally, the Mediterranean remains the basic vehicle of their relations. It is in this sense that the Mediterranean is an important dimension in Italian-Libyan relations, independently of respective ideologies and identity perceptions.

Further to this argument, it should be pointed out that for the security of the countries encompassed by the Mediterranean area, this very area and its state of affairs are important independently of where their centre of gravity may be located. Both for Italy and Libya the centres of gravity are located outside the Mediterranean, respectively in Europe and in the Arab-African world. Still, because of proximity their security is anyway to some extent affected by Mediterranean factors. Whatever their policy towards the Mediterranean - whether bilateral or multilateral - and its relative importance in respective foreign policies, Italy and Libya cannot be indifferent with respect to security conditions in this area.

Thus, stability, cohesion and relative autonomy of the Mediterranean area with respect to external factor - rather than instability, fragmentation, and dependence - are important ingredients of their national security. This was evident for Libya in the recent process of the quasi-normalisation regarding the Lockerbie case and the UN sanctions' suspension. To these developments the strength of the Mediterranean co-operation was definitely not irrelevant. In this sense, one can conclude that even those countries, like Libya, that are not directly involved in Mediterranean regional and inter-regional policies of co-operation, have an objective interest in these policies and their success.

¹ Anouar Louca, «Taha Hussein ou la continuité des deux rives», *Qantara*, 4, 1992, in «La Méditerranée arabe», dossier spécial, pp. III-V.

Regional and inter-regional relations across the Mediterranean

Because the Mediterranean is the basic vehicle of their relations, and anyway a factor of their national security, Italy and Libya have a joint vested interest in making it an area of peace and prosperity. While Italy is convinced that the achievement of this aim can be facilitated by a pan-Mediterranean multilateral organisation like the EMP, Libya prefers a bilateral approach, with Italy as well as other European countries. A bilateral approach, however, does not exclude the need for a safe and solid regional context in which bilateral relations have to develop and joint actions to achieve this goal.

How can Italy and Libya contribute to make the Mediterranean an area of peace and prosperity? The response to this question is twofold. First, there is a general argument pertaining the architecture of the relations across the Mediterranean Sea. From this architecture a set of more specific responses can be derived. Let's start from the more general argument, which concerns the rationale for regional, inter-regional and sub-regional relations and their interplay.

Further to the risk of rhetoric, the Euro-Med formula, as it stands today, includes also a misleading vision of the architecture that is expected to sustain relations and co-operation across the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, this architecture does not account for the deep imbalance that characterise the area. In contrast, there are overwhelming asymmetries between the EU, on one hand, and the Southern Partners, on the other: a very structured, economically well-developed, and cohesive group on the Northern side and a heterogeneous group of economically undeveloped countries on the Southern side. Whereas the Northern countries have managed to establish lasting and solid peaceful relations among themselves, the Southern countries are beset by tension and conflict, in particular between Israel and the Arab countries. While in Europe a culture of co-operative security does prevail, in the Southern Mediterranean countries security is still based on a culture of force, balance of power and deterrence. Finally, the strong civil, secular, and democratic societies of the North have almost no match in the South.

These asymmetries are well reflected in the concept of "security complex" which was set out by the Copenhagen school, in particular by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver². The concept in question suggests that security co-operation presupposes that security problems are shared. In the Mediterranean context, it is evident that national security is really and directly threatened in the South-South dimension, whereas this is not the case in the North-South dimension. The relevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict in security terms is quite different in the South-South and in the North-South dimension. For sure, we are aware of the fact that in the North-South dimension there are a number of risks affecting prosperity, social development and other civilian aspects of security; however, no threats or risks in the military sense with respect to national security.

Thanks to its experience with the CSCE and the end of the East-West confrontation, Europe has a working structure dealing with security and acts almost exclusively

² Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, "An Inter-Regional Analysis: NATO's New Strategic Concept and the Theory of Security Complexes", in S. Behrendt, C.-P. Hanelt (eds.), *Bound to Cooperate - Europe and the Middle East*, Bertelsman Foundation Publishers, Gütersloh, 2000, pp. 55-106.

according to the concept of co-operative security³ (using co-operation to attain security rather than deterrence or balance of power). The same is not true in the South. Here, there was an attempt at structuring regional security relations according to the European blueprint of the CSCE in the framework of the multilateral track of the Middle East peace negotiations i.e. the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS). As it is well known, these negotiations failed because of the progressive disruption suffered by the peace process itself.

Because of the failure of the ACRS, the attempts made by the EU to establish a security co-operation in the framework of the EMP failed as well. In fact, they were doomed because a North-South security organisation across the Mediterranean can be done only if both sides have an internal security structure of their own. Otherwise, the two sides remain two heterogeneous security complexes that have no reason and way to get together.

As things stand today, the security priority on the area is not the establishment of a North-South pan-Mediterranean organisation of security, with a view to set out confidence-building measures and thus attain arms control and limitation. The priority is to help the establishment of peace in the Middle East in order to make a kind of Conference for Security and Co-operation in the Middle East-CSCME possible. Once the latter is established, a trans-Mediterranean organisation of security would become feasible as well.

This is not to say that the Northern countries cannot or have not to support Southern efforts to establish their CSCME. On the contrary, as it was assumed in the ACRS, they have to assist Southern efforts. The goal, however, has to be a CSCME first. Only, when a regional Southern organisation of security will be there, it will make sense to proceed to the organisation of inter-regional, i.e. North-South security relations.

A good Mediterranean architecture requires, first, that homogeneous regions be singled out, second, that these regions get internally structured. This may allow, in the end, to set in motion effective inter-regional security organisation.

Sub-regional and economic relations

An important, albeit more often than not neglected aspect of Mediterranean architecture are sub-regional relations, both in regional complexes and in the framework of inter-regional relations. Sub-regional relations are important first of all because they can provide flexibility to the whole of regional and inter-regional relations relating to the Mediterranean area. This area being constrained and polarised by the Arab-Israeli conflict, sub-regionalism may allow for some more breathing space. This is the case of the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union-AMU. The functioning and consolidation of the latter is largely independent of the Arab-Israeli conflict and would be a cornerstone of stability and prosperity for the countries concerned. It could help to prevent possible new conflict and help resolving outstanding conflict, like that on the Western Sahara,

³ 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.

The establishment of a sub-regional structure in the Maghreb would facilitate and reinvigorate inter-regional co-operation in the Western Mediterranean as well, i.e. the Five plus Five Group. In fact, the paralysis at the Euro-Med level has made the Group to resume its deliberations.

Sub-regionalism can be referred also to other formats, as the Mashreq and, for example, the area encompassed by the Agadir Agreement, which is intended to establish free trade among its members as the nucleus of a wider Arab free-trade area. This remark, however, raises the question of regionalism, inter-regionalism and sub-regionalism from the point of view of economic relations, whereas we have discussed it so far essentially from the security point of view.

In general terms, inter-regional economic relations are subjected to the same limitations we have observed in the case of security relations: a viable North-South relationship needs to be seated on a reasonable symmetry. In this sense, the Euro-Med free-trade area envisaged by the EMP must be achieved with some gradualist and differentiation. Here again, we are not arguing of a full sequencing, whereby no North-South integration would be allowed before the South has achieved its own economic integration. North-South co-operation must be carried out so as to foster Southern integration and at the same time lay the foundations of a balanced North-South integration. For these reasons, regional economic integration must remain open to inter-regional and global integration. It remains, however, a *prius* with respect to North-South integration.

This sequence was very clear in the REDWG (Regional Economic Development Working Group) which amounted to a complex inter-regional and regional agenda of economic co-operation in the Middle East in order to consolidate the peace to come among the various actors involved. If we compare the ACRS and REDWG agenda we can see, however, an important difference with respect to the level of inter-regional and regional interplay. Inter-regional interplay in the economic realm looks extremely more important and pervasive than in the security one. This is due to the fact that goods and services are traded more easily and freely than security. This is due, in turn, to the fact that security is more dependent on cultural, social and political factors than conventional goods and services.

Mediterranean architecture

In terms of Mediterranean architecture, the remarks set out above have a number of implications: First, whereas there is a more stringent need for sequencing in the realm of security between the consolidation in the South-South dimension and the North-South one, this sequencing is less stringently needed for in the economic and commercial realm. Here the development of inter-regionalism is stronger and is less or even not dependent on a previous consolidation of South-South relations. Second, a notion of “economic complex” would hardly make sense. In the economic realm openness is what matters. Whatever aggregation is acceptable and can play a useful role contingent to its openness. In this sense, the emergence of the Agadir Agreement or the consolidation of an AMU free-trade area would not contradict the aim of the wider Euro-Med free-trade area. On the contrary, it would help. Third, to the extent regionalism (or sub-regionalism) emerges as an exclusive option, it would prove disruptive. In the event, one has to point out that the exclusion of Israel from the interplay of regional and inter-

regional economic integration, while substantially neutral in the short-middle term, in the middle-long term would prove detrimental to both frameworks of integration and severely diminish returns from co-operation.

As we have already noted, while Italy is fully involved in the making of this architecture, Libya is much less so. However, as the Mediterranean provides the context and the very means of their relations, both Libya and Italy have a stake in the Mediterranean security architecture and an interest in contributing to its consolidation. In other words, their relations should play a constructive role with respect to the structuring of the Mediterranean.

To sum up: given what we have just argued about the Mediterranean architecture and the importance of this architecture for both Italy and Libya, these two countries should co-operate with a view to:

- Contribute to making a compromise possible between Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese and Israelis;
- Co-operate towards the achievement of a Middle Eastern security organisation, similar to the OSCE, and meanwhile complying with the outstanding security treaties and agreement, in particular TNP, CWC;
- Foster inter-regional political and security relations - in their respective roles of insider and outsider stake-holders in joint Mediterranean organisations - thus gradually making inter-regional fora more and more consistent with regional security;
- Promote sub-regional co-operation in both its South-South (AMU) and North-South (Western Mediterranean) dimension;
- Promote bilateral and international policies of economic co-operation and integration consistent with regional and inter-regional trends, even though not necessarily integrated in the latter;
- Encourage Libya to becoming a member of the Agadir Agreement and promoting economic co-operation with AMU.

In this way, Italy and Libya would contribute to their common interest of making the Mediterranean - i.e. the very context of their relations - an area of peace and prosperity