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CONFLICT PREVENTION

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The Barcelona Declaration has to be considered as an international peacebuilding regime. International peacebuilding regimes, according to the definition of the International Crisis Group-ICG, are “international laws, norms, agreements and arrangements - global, regional or bilateral in scope - designed to minimise threats to security, promote confidence and trust, and create frameworks for dialogue and co-operation”¹. They are geared to prevent conflict and to post-conflict management (including preventing conflicts from re-escalating).

The Declaration is not specifically devoted to conflict prevention in the sense that it never mentions the latter. Furthermore, conflict prevention has been only very seldom called in by the varying drafts of the Charter for Peace and Stability the Senior Officials took into consideration. However, as just pointed out, as a peacebuilding regime, the Declaration is inherently devoted to conflict prevention.

That conflict prevention is the basic task of the Barcelona process is indirectly confirmed by two circumstances. One is that the Barcelona Declaration excludes conflict resolution from its goals when it says that the “Euro-Mediterranean initiative is not intended to replace the other activities and initiatives undertaken in the interest of the peace, stability and development of the region”, making it clear in the following that by such exclusion it refers principally to the Middle East Peace Process. In contrast, it does not exclude conflict management and prevention. The second circumstance is that, at the end of the chapter illustrating the political and security partnership, the Declaration makes reference to the “long term possibility of establishing a Euro-Mediterranean pact to that end”. Although it does not specify the kind of pact, we know from the preparatory talks that the Europeans, in particular France, put forward the idea of a pact of stability. The Southern Partners were not prepared to such commitment, although they did not want to rule it out. What is left is an allusion to a typical instrument of conflict prevention, i.e. that pact of stability the EU members implanted successfully in the CSCE/OSCE framework and later on in the Balkans. Anyway, this allusion is important to understand the feelings that presided over the establishment of the Euro-Med Partnership and the broad direction that is embedded in it.

Thus, conflict prevention looks like an inherent and important character of the Barcelona process. What concept of conflict prevention does fit with it?

Conflict prevention activities can be understood as a short- as well as long-term response to crisis and conflict. In the short-term, conflict prevention singles out the symptoms of a crisis and intervenes to suppress or correct them. In the longer-term, it

¹ ICG, *EU Crisis Response Capability. Institutions and Processes for Conflict Prevention and Management*, ICG Issues Report No. 2, Brussels, 2001, p. 3.

identifies the root causes of possible crises and conflicts and acts to lay the structural foundations of peace. In the first case, it is a response aimed at maintaining peace, whereas in the second one it is regarded as a response aimed at building peace. To use the definitions of the European Commission, while short-term conflict prevention has the task of “reacting quickly to nascent conflict”, long-term conflict prevention has that of “projecting stability”².

In the first part of the 1990s, under the pressure of a large number of emerging conflicts - especially within states - the international community felt most concerned by the necessity of implementing preventive diplomacy in its varying forms. This short-term priority was very clear in the then UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace*³. Very soon, however, the long-term link between conflict and structural factors of political as well as socio-economic nature came in the forefront.

This link has two distinct origins: first, the new strength of humanism and humanitarian concerns in the post-Cold-War context and, second, the emerging awareness of the long-term links between social and economic development and conflict, especially within international economic organisations. The first trend has brought about the concept of *human security*, i.e. “an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on the security of territory and governments”⁴. The second one has brought about the concept of *structural stability*, i.e. “a situation characterised by sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures, and healthy social and environment conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resorting to violent conflict”⁵ (the latter sentence corresponding again to democracy, as defined in Athens in the fifth century with the emergence of philosophy and dialectics).

Today, a large effort of peacebuilding is accomplished internationally with a view to attain structural stability by intervening on the root causes of conflict. As for human security, it has been subsumed in the concept of structural stability. However, several objectives of human security are pursued on an *ad hoc* basis, as the prohibition on child soldiers or regulation of small arms. This trend has been fostered by the initiative of the governments of Norway and Canada to establish an international Human Security Network⁶. Thus, structural stability is pursued by either integrated programmes or specific peacebuilding initiatives.

Peacebuilding and peace-maintaining activities are pursued both multilaterally and bilaterally. The activities directed at maintaining peace are normally carried out by multilateral organisations or international *ad hoc* coalitions. Bilateralism is not very frequent in peace-maintaining activities. In contrast, peacebuilding, while strongly

² *Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention*, COM (2001)211 fin., Brussels 11 April 2001, p. 6.

³ B. Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, United Nations, New York, 1992.

⁴ In the world of the Canadian Foreign Minister, Anxworthy, as quoted by Astri Suhrke, “Human Security and the Interests of States”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 30, No. 3, September 1999, pp. 265-276.

⁵ The definitions used by this paper are taken from the SWP-CPN, *Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building: A Practical Guide*, Berlin, December 2001.

⁶ See www.humansecuritynetwork.org. How the Human Security Network was evolved is told by Suhrke in the article quoted at note 1.

pursued by international organisations, is also very important in bilateral agendas, in particular when it comes to development co-operation.

In sum, conflict prevention can be pursued in many ways: by long-term activities of peacebuilding as well as short-term activities of preventive diplomacy; by integrated peacebuilding agenda as well as specific human security initiatives; multilaterally or bilaterally. All these options are largely open to the Barcelona process, although so far the developments that prevented the Euro-Med Partnership from evolving actual co-operation in the political and security realms have also prevented the Euro-Med countries from picking up preventive diplomacy options. As of today, the Euro-Med Partnership is decidedly tilting towards an agenda that includes almost exclusively long-term prevention.

Is the concept of long-term prevention, that is prevailing in the Euro-Med Partnership today, actually shared by the Partners, in particular Northern and Southern Partners? In fact, there are important limitations and ambiguities in the way and extent this concept is shared.

The current thinking in the most developed countries is that democracy links, on the one hand, with development and, on the other hand, with peace. The correlation between peace and democracy is based on the known Kantian argument that “republican states”, in an environment of international legality, will not wage war to one another. This is what one refers to by the concept of “democratic peace”. On the other hand, the correlation between democracy and socio-economic development has been defined by Amartya Sen, among others, as a process in which economic growth increases the number and quality of individual liberties⁷. In more prosaic details, democracy weakens and dissolves constraints to economic development and is, in turn, strengthened by the latter. Democracy or democratisation is understood as a factor that changes and reduces the role of the state in the economy as well as any concentration of wealth and power. It makes possible to liberalise the economy and proceed to privatisation. It introduces and reinforces stability. Economic growth made possible by stability allows, in turn, for providing jobs and lowering poverty. That outcome helps reducing conflict strongly.

What is contested between North and South in the Euro-Med Partnership is not the argument in itself as much as its actual or practical application.

Fundamentally, the Northern perception tends to see democracy as key to development, whereas the Southern one tends to believe the other way round, i.e. that development, once achieved, will ease in a more or less distant time the advent of democracy. The North tends to see political and economic growth as a single strongly interrelated process. The South as a process by stages. Both North and South, though to different extents and in different ways, recognise the link between conflict, on one hand, and political and economic reform, on the other. Where they differ is on the interplay between economic and political reforms.

⁷ Amartya Sen, *Lo sviluppo è libertà*, Mondadori, Milano, 2000 (*Development as Freedom*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1999).

In the 1990s, the Northern international community has made a significant effort to link economic and political reform to one another in a conflict prevention perspective. The OECD Development Aid Committee and the European Commission have “mainstreamed” conflict prevention in their agendas of development and socio-political co-operation. Such mainstreaming means two things at once: (a) that in the long-run there is a link between economic and political reforms, on one hand, and the prevention of conflict, on the other hand; (b) that economic reforms cannot succeed without political reforms.

To give an example of conflict prevention mainstreaming in development co-operation, one can refer to poverty. Poverty is the result of deep-seated and diffuse social and economic inequality. Inequality, in turn, is a major obstacle to sustainable development and a relevant link to conflict. Poverty is regarded as a factor of multidimensional processes of exclusion. “The dimensions of poverty cover distinct aspects of human capabilities: economic (income, livelihoods, decent work), human (health, education), political (empowerment, rights, voice), socio-cultural (status, dignity) and protective (insecurity, risk, vulnerability)”⁸. All these dimensions link inextricably to one another as potentials of conflict. Consequently, in a policy perspective, according to the Northern point of view, poverty cannot be eradicated by economic means only. Its eradication needs also, among other things, an action of empowerment and an overall process of democratisation.

As noted, it is precisely this interplay between economic and political factors that is hardly accepted by Southern Euro-Med Partners. Democracy and human rights are regarded as culturally relative concepts. Their interrelation with economic development is perceived as an interference whereby, in order to obtain the means to attain sustainable economic growth, they are compelled to accept an alien concept of democracy as well. For sure, they are convinced, as much as the Western countries, that democracy brings about stability and thereby helps preventing conflict in the long-term. Still, they want to remain free to enforce their own concepts, i.e. a political reform predicated on non-Western concepts and values. For this reason, they do expect European support to develop economically and socially. However, they do so with a view to set in motion without interferences their own political reforms at appropriate time, i.e. as soon as an improved economic situation will allow them to proceed. Thus, from a conceptual as well as normative point of view, the Southern strategy is inherently opposed to Northern strategic thinking.

Is conflict prevention a divisive or unifying concept in the Euro-Med Partnership? To some extent it is a unifying concept, for in fact all the Partners are convinced that reforms should be enforced in order to come to structural changes which, in turn, would allow for peaceful relations. When it comes to ways reforms must be implemented, it is divisive concept.

The North-South opposition within the Euro-Med framework about the timing and interrelation of political and economic reforms is partly due to conceptual and

⁸ See the “Policy Statement by the DAC High Level Meeting upon endorsement of the DAC Guidelines on Poverty Reduction”, and DAC, *In the face of poverty. Meeting the global challenge through partnership*, DAC Guidelines on Poverty Reduction, Executive Summary, Paris 25-26 April 2001.

ideological reasons, partly to political circumstances and conveniences. This is not a question that must concern this paper. Whatever the reasons for this opposition, however, here is the gap to be narrowed.

In this perspective, a first approach that can be used is some downgrading of the unilateralism the Southern Partners perceive in the political concepts put forward by the Europeans and the role these concepts are expected to play in the process of co-operation. One way to narrow the gap is to give way to as much opportunities of dialogue and debate as possible at the level of governments as well as civil societies. Another, more deep-seated, way to pursue the same goal is to upgrade co-ownership in the Euro-Med institutional framework as a way to encourage Southern ownership. If reforms have not to be perceived by Southern Partners as an outcome of EU unilateralism, they must primarily be owned by the countries involved. The principle of ownership is not very clear in the Euro-Med Partnership (not as clear as it is in the ACP-EU relations, for instance). Reforms seem to depend on conditionality only. In contrast, they must lay primarily on a sense of ownership. On the other hand, the process of decision and the very nature of the Euro-Med Partnership made appear the latter less a common Euro-Med institution than a EU policy towards the Mediterranean. A more convincing co-ownership should be introduced in the common Euro-Med house. This may encourage, in turn, the Southern Partners to own individually the policies co-owned by the Partnership.