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PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

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THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

by Roberto Aliboni¹

The Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) have celebrated their annual meeting in Naples on 2-3 December 2003. The Naples conference is the sixth in the series of such meetings after the founding conference in Barcelona in November 1995. The EMP is a multi-dimensional process of multi-bilateral cooperation between the European Union (EU), on one side and Cyprus, Israel, Malta, Turkey, seven Mediterranean Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia) and the Palestinian National Authority, on the other side.

With the enlargement of the EU next year in 2004, Cyprus and Malta will shift to the EU side. On the other hand, with the inception in June 2004 of the new EU approach towards neighboring countries, Turkey's position as a candidate to the EU will be definitely strengthened and the country will qualify more as a likely member on the Union's side than otherwise. Thus, in perspective, the EMP will assume a more Euro-Arab character; at the same time, the Arab-Israeli conflict may weight more in its framework. From the European point of view, this is a new challenge as well as a fresh opportunity, not only in regional but also in transatlantic terms. So, which are the prospects and challenges of the EMP?

As usual, in Naples the Ministers discussed the most relevant issues in European/Western – Mediterranean/Arab-Muslim relations and didn't make unexpected declarations about such issues as the need to give sovereignty to Iraq and more prominence to the international community in the transition as well as the need to combat international terrorism and revive the process of the "road map" in Israeli-Palestinian relations. This is part of the regular – although not that bold - political dialogue the EMP is tasked to. From the point of view of the EMP process in itself, the measures they approved are significant, still they look in tune less with the need to face with due imagination a rapidly changing international and regional environment than sound ordinary administration.

Many people – especially in the South of the Mediterranean – would have expected some bold initiative from Italy, holding the EU Presidency in the second part of 2003. On the contrary, the Italian Presidency took home three significant, still fully predictable achievements, dictated less by Rome than by the institutional EU machinery in Brussels. These achievements were plainly anticipated as priorities of the Italian Presidency in the document on "common strategy" that every Presidency has to prepare following a broad rule established by the Common Strategy of the European Union for the Mediterranean Region adopted by the Santa Maria de Feira European Council in June 2002:

- Finalizing and approving the project of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, thereby facilitating its establishment;
- Incorporating FEMIP (the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership already established by the Barcelona European Council of March 2002) in a

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European Investment Bank' majority-owned subsidiary with the task of promoting private investment and economic initiatives to help Mediterranean development;

- Setting up the process to establish a Euro-Med Parliamentary Assembly with consultative powers in the Euro-Med framework predicated on the necessary accords on such assembly by the European Parliament and the Euro-Med national assemblies.

No doubt, the EMP will take advantage of such measures. However, they will hardly have much to do with challenges ahead. These challenges concern, first of all, the role the Mediterranean is going to play in the EU overall external policy after the 2004 enlargement to Central-eastern European countries; second, the way the EU will promote democracy and respect for human rights in the region; and, third, the significance of the emerging European Security and Defense Policy- ESDP in reviving a cooperative security or a security cooperation role by the EMP. Let's look at these three points before trying to draw some broad perspectives in Euro-Med relations.

A new neighborhood policy for a wider Europe

The EU broad approach to external relations consists of a two-tracks policy whereby each country becomes partner to an Association Agreement bilaterally and, at the same time, party to a regional multilateral framework (where applicable: for instance, not in the case of the Russian Federation or Ukraine). The Central-eastern countries have their so-called European Association Agreements and are parties to the enlargement process. The Southern Mediterranean countries have their Association Agreements and are parties to EMP joint activities as, for instance, the process to set up an all-inclusive EMP free trade area.

The enlargement of the present 15-countries EU to seven more countries and the prospects of further – although apparently distant – inclusions in Eastern and Western Balkans puts two questions: first, where the EU has to stop and, second, what to do with those neighbors who will not be included. As for the first question, while EU's possible extension is already substantially defined (the 2004 enlarged EU, plus the countries supposed to join in 2007, plus Western Balkans), some important details are lacking. Whether the Transcaucasian countries will be part of the EU is still undecided. At the same time, Turkey's predicament remains uncertain, too, although in principle there is no doubt about its status as a candidate and all would remain to decide is the negotiations' schedule. As a matter of fact, not all the EU members are convinced that a country like Turkey, for a number of reasons, can really become a member. For many, as for Russia, there are proportions and features, which make possible for Turkey to be a privileged partner but hardly a full-fledged member of the EU.

Whatever the future definition of the EU, there is a number of neighboring countries which may feel excluded and evolve a sense of frustration with respect to the EU or develop less a sense of cooperation than contests or even disputes. The EU regards such developments as a risk. The High Representative for the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) – the institution that guides what is there of EU common foreign and security policy, presently Mr. Javier Solana – in a widely appreciated communication on what could be the EU strategic concept, made on 20 June 2003 at the European Council gathering in Thessaloniki ("A Secure Europe in a Better World"), pointed out that "Even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important. It is in the

European interest that countries on our borders are well governed. Neighbors who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe.”

The EMP is predicated on similar perceptions. So have been, in general, EU policies towards areas of crisis or concern as Central-eastern Europe immediately after the end of the Cold War and, subsequently, the Balkans further to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. What is new in is the need for a broader and comprehensive response rather than the regional or *ad hoc* responses provided so far. Lessons learned in the last years from different crises are that many risks, particularly when it comes to soft security issues, are transversal to different regions rather than peculiar to such regions. Although organized crime, or clandestine migration or terrorism may have some regional or local peculiarities, still they come from many quarters. Thus, EU orientation – as considered in a number of communications from the Commission, subsequently approved by the Council² – is to work out a single policy whereby a number of issues and risks from adjoining areas would be dealt with independently from their regional sources, by means of homogeneous guidelines and with centralized resources (taking advantage of scale economies).

These guidelines amount to policies aiming at integrating neighbors in a single huge market, thus promoting prosperity in their economies. They also aim at promoting political reform, i.e. democracy and respect for human rights, so as to create a political context that would foster economic reform. This is what the High Representative wanted to mean by pointing out that it is in the interest of EU security that “countries on our borders are well governed”.

In sum, the new EU policy for its relations with neighboring areas seems willing to pursue two principal aims: (a) defining the EU with respect to non-EU and put forward a number of policies to offset this identity split – EU vs., non EU - by an homogeneous area of order and prosperity (the President of the Commission, Romano Prodi, said: “we will give you everything but membership”); (b) managing relations with areas as different as North Africa and Russia by similar criteria, if not the same policies.

The implications of such policy may prove far-reaching and sometime uneasy for the EMP countries. To be part of the huge homogeneous area of order and prosperity put forward by the EU, neighboring countries will be requested to proceed to reforms in the political as well as the economic realm with the assistance of the EU. On one hand, EU financial and economic aid will be made conditional on democratization, respect for human rights and the rule of law as well as on economic performances. On the other, the economic area including the EU and its neighbors is envisioned as a huge single market, where all the factors of production will have to move freely. Thus, it would require a strong program of liberalization. No doubt, strong differences will emerge among neighbors in implementing the necessary reforms. Some neighbors will be willing and able to proceed to those reforms, others will be either unwilling or unable or both. The area seized by the EU neighborhood agenda will see a considerable differentiation among partners. They will get differentiated according to a pattern of concentric circles, more or less close to the center - the EU - independently of the region they belong to.

² So far, the most important such communications is: Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Brussels 11.3.2003, COM (2003) 104 final.

In this perspective, while the EMP will formally stay, the idea and the working of the Mediterranean grouping will be dwindling. As a matter of fact, some Mediterranean countries will perform well and stay close to the EU together with some Eastern European countries. Other Mediterranean countries will lag behind and be positioned far away from the center with countries from other regions. While the EMP, as of today, is a two-tracks organization, what is going to survive is essentially the bilateral network of the Association Agreements. The hub and spokes pattern, already strong today, will be strengthened. At the same time, it will be subsumed, as noted, by a concentric-circles pattern of relations. In any case, the overall outcome of the new neighborhood agenda will be that of making surrounding sub-regions evaporate and the EU have to do with a single area, essentially on a pluri-bilateral basis.

Will this development be positive or negative for the Mediterranean countries? Mediterranean regionalism will be essentially diluted in a wider set of relations. In general, Mediterranean countries will have difficulties in competing for funds with Eastern European countries and remaining in step with the overall trend of the new EU agenda. In the EMP, this development will eliminate the stumbling block of the cohabitation between Israel and the Arab partners. Things should work smoothly, as they do in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, where common endeavors are very reduced and relations are substantially bilateral between each partner and NATO. However, because of the EU attraction power, "horizontal" regional integration and cooperation in the Mediterranean/Middle Eastern area will become harder to achieve, be it in the MENA dimension (as in the second track of the Madrid peace process) or in the inter-Arab dimension (the Pact of Agadir).

Democracy and human rights

The brief history of the EMP is dominated by a split between partners about democracy and human rights. The Barcelona Declaration is very clear about these issues. The aims of democracy and human rights are prominently stated in the preamble, the first chapter on political and security cooperation as well as the third chapter on human and social cooperation. In the preamble, it is said that the partners are "convinced that the general objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity requires a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights, sustainable and balanced economic and social development, measures to combat poverty and promotion of greater understanding between cultures, which are all essential aspects of partnership". Over time, however, it came up that the Declaration is not reflecting a truly working agreement between parties.

In EU eyes, democracy and human rights are the first and most significant building blocks for any reforms' sequence to be started. The broad mainstreaming of democracy and human rights in EU external policies and the CFSP has been articulated in the 2001 Commission Communication on "EU's role in promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in third countries"³. More recently, the Commission issued a similar

³ COM (2001) 252 final.

communication focusing on the Mediterranean partners⁴. Both communications ask for a more strict and effective application of democracy and human rights criteria in implementing EU policies.

However, efforts at fostering political reform have proven unsuccessful with EMP Arab countries, whereas they succeeded in Central-eastern Europe, are succeeding in Turkey and have not negligible chances to be achieved in the Balkans in the longer term. One reason for this difference, may be so called “positive” conditionality, that is the chance of being included in the EU, if reforms are achieved, something that is not foreseen for the Mediterranean countries. For the latter, in fact, only attenuated forms of inclusions are foreseen: in the EMP and, now, in the neighborhood policy. Another reason is that, in general, the EU was unable to apply negative conditionality effectively lest destabilizing incumbent regimes and risking to foster, ironically, the advent to power of religious and nationalist extremists in Arab Southern Mediterranean countries, as Algeria, Egypt or Tunisia.

All in all, how policies to promote democracy and respect for human rights can be strengthened and made more successful is a most important issue for the future of the EMP. Furthermore, with the events of September 11, the war on terrorism in Afghanistan and the debate that led to the war on Iraq, the goal of democratization, its implications for social and economic development and its significance for regional and international security have assumed a more central role with respect to the whole of the Arab-Muslim world than that they used to in the past.

Democracy in the Arab-Muslim world, as a basic factor for change and security in the very Arab-Muslim world and internationally, has become an Atlantic issue, going well beyond the Mediterranean. As a transatlantic issue, democracy is a factor of both convergence and divergence. The transatlantic debate is bound to have anyway a great influence on the EMP. Since the nineties, democracy has always been important in both American and European approaches to provide stability and development to Third World areas with a view to improve national and international security. No doubt, however, that in the European approach democracy used to play a definitely more systemic and primary role than in American policies. With the Bush’s administration, democracy has been moved to the center of the stage, while previous attitudes mostly concerned in assuring stability to the expenses of promoting democracy are sharply criticized. In this sense, today there is convergence between the democracy-centered doctrine the EU has applied in the Mediterranean – although hesitantly - through the nineties and the new American doctrine to deal with the Greater Middle East. Thanks to this doctrine, both EU and the U.S., that is the Atlantic community, should be able to act more assertively than they used to in the past.

This convergence exists only in principle, however. It has a strong potential of synergy when it comes to specific cooperative responses. It turns into divergence when it comes to broad political and military responses. As far as cooperative responses are concerned, the American doctrine and the new programs to promote democracy and economic development in the Arab-Muslim areas are very much in tune with EMP’s “philosophies”. In fact, the American government has recently initiated two schemes to help economic development and democracy, one on a global basis, the Millennium

⁴ *Reinvigorating EU actions on Human Rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners. Strategic Guidelines*, COM (2003) 294 final, Brussels 21 05 2003.

Challenge Account (MCA), in an essentially developmental perspective, and another one directed at the Middle Eastern region, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), in an essentially political perspective, instead. Both are linked to democracy and human rights as benchmarks for disbursement and as goals to attain in a perspective of long-term development and peaceful international relations.

MEPI is basically similar to MEDA, the EMP's agenda for linking aid to democracy and human rights promotion. It is bound to fund democratization in the same perspective the EU has done by means of the EMP since 1995.

However, the Atlantic partners do not agree on the political and military context in which such similar cooperative responses have to be provided, as it was clear from the transatlantic debate on the war on Iraq. In this debate, there emerged two extreme positions. The extreme *Realpolitik* American attitude, whereby democracy has to be forcibly enforced *manu militari* by a regime change, and the extreme European position whereby democracy should only be promoted by working out a complex and long-term consensus. This opposition reflects well the different nature of the United States as a traditional power and the EU as an only civilian power, which surrogates with cooperation and consensus its lack of political and military power.

This opposition between American and European political orientations towards the Arab-Muslim world may prove inter-blocking, despite the fact that their specific programs to promote democracy are moved by very similar inspirations. The synergy potential in European and American programs of cooperation risks to remain unexploited. Furthermore, if the basic American political approach towards the Arab-Muslim region will remain predicated on political unilateralism, the use of military force and coercion, the EMP agenda of promoting democracy on the basis of consensus will hardly be able to act effectively.

Whatever the transatlantic impact on the EMP, the latter needs to make its only-cooperative approach more effective. Conditionality and other cooperative instruments have not proved sufficient so far to convince the Southern partners to initiate political reform in their countries.

The responses to such failure the EU intends to provide are a more strict application of conditionality and the new neighborhood policy (that will be laid in turn on a stricter application of conditionality). As noted, conditionality was loose in the nineties lest regimes could be weakened and replaced by extremists. The issue of alternatives to regimes didn't change meanwhile. A stricter application of conditionality thus remains a risk that can be offset only by more willingness to act politically by the EU and its members. This is not to say that the EU has to adopt an American-like policy of unilateralism, use of force and disregard for international law. It means that it must proceed to some political choices. To make an example of such choices, we can make reference the support given to the (not very fortunate) "short" regime change in Palestine by forcing the appointment of a moderate *prima minister* and a sound minister of Finance. This was a political choice (with its risks). More in general, the EU should understand that democracy promotion policies, and any policies indeed, cannot be laid on principles only. They must also be laid on interest. If this will be the attitude of the EU, its policies of democracy promotion in the EMP and in the neighborhood circle will result more effective. By the same token, the present gap in transatlantic orientations will be narrowed.

These remarks, finally, must be put in the new neighborhood policy perspective. As noted, this policy will emphasize bilateral relations between the countries concerned and the EU center. The sense of a common effort will shrink: it will be up to individual countries to compete and to opt for the circle where they wish to stay, whether close or far away from the center. By the same token, EU approaches to the partners will be differentiated and, as a matter of fact, the EU may get more or less interested in whether members comply or not with the rules of the game or in the extent they do. In this most variable framework, the risk is that democracy promotion in the Arab-Muslim sector of EU neighborhood will quietly become a feeble priority. This will weaken the meaning and the role of the EMP in the European as well as transatlantic arenas and may proven inconsistent with Western security interests.

ESDP and EMP: a return to cooperation in the security realm?

The whole of the EMP consists in a (rather ambitious) exercise of cooperative security. The first chapter of the Barcelona Declaration, aiming at an area of peace and stability by setting up a kind of Euro-Mediterranean mini-CSCE, is perhaps most typically expressing such endeavor of cooperative security. So far, this mini-CSCE failed almost completely from being built up. This was due essentially to the fact that any security cooperation between Israel and the Arab partners proved unfeasible in the absence of a political settlement, even less so in front of the negative evolution that unfolded from the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin up to the breaking out of the second Palestinian upsurge still underway as of today. Obviously, there are other reasons. Broadly speaking in terms of the “security complex” concept, as worked out by Wæiver and Buzan, while the MENA area is one such complexes, the Euro-Mediterranean area is not.

The idea of establishing an area of cooperative security and security cooperation was negotiated for a long while with the aim of agreeing a Charter for Peace and Stability, which was supposed to clarify and define a common concept of security on which common security could be built on. This attempt failed at the ministerial conference of Marseille in November 2000 when the establishment of the area of peace and security was put off to an indefinite date. The initiative has been more pragmatically taken up, though, with reference to the emerging European Security and Defense Policy-ESDP in subsequent developments.

The ESDP was born because of the painful European experience of impotence with wars in the Balkans. The ESDP, for the time being, is geared to pursue the so-called Petersberg tasks (established in the WEU framework in 1992 and then incorporated in the Amsterdam Treaty: humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking) and allow for EU interventions to manage crises abroad, if so it needs be. It is supported by a rapid reaction force of 60,000 troops that became operative at the end of 2002. The Force is under the political control of an intergovernmental Political and Security Committee instituted within the framework of the Council and the command of a Military Committee and an intergovernmental Chief of Staff. This force must be used within the framework of international legality, so as its use, when applicable, must be strictly authorized by international or regional security organizations. Thus, unlike it was the

case with the Balkans in the nineties, the EU is now able to intervene. For the time being, the EU force has replaced NATO peacekeeping forces in the FYROM and has intervened recently in Congo.

The idea of using ESDP to introducing security cooperation in the EMP has been first of all pointed out by the already quoted EU Common Strategy for the Mediterranean, which states “the European Union intends to make use of the evolving common ESDP to consider how to strengthen together with its Mediterranean partners cooperative security in the region”. Ultimately, in the Action Plan adopted at Valencia (23 April 2002) by the EMP Ministers, the latter stated “The Conference agreed that the political dialogue ... must focus among other things on ... effective dialogue on political and security matters, including on the ESDP ...”. How can ESDP actually play a role in fostering security cooperation in the EMP? Would this development eventually represent a come back of cooperative security in the EMP framework?

Southern countries' security cooperation with the EU and the Northern countries in general is not that supported by Arab public opinion. Governments pursue such cooperation, however, for it is very important for strengthening their armed forces, thus allowing for national external security and regime's internal stability. As noted, the cohabitation with Israel in the Euro-Med framework prevented the Arabs from accepting that framework to be turned into a multilateral endeavor of security cooperation, let alone cooperative security. Another stumbling block was the underdevelopment or non-existence of EU foreign, security and defense policy. The EU security initiative in the EMP was not backed by congruous capabilities actually. The development of the ESDP is in fact introducing such capabilities now and making the idea of security cooperation in the EMP more realistic.

The problem of the multilateral shape such cooperation is conceived of in the Barcelona Declaration remains. However, it can be superseded or eased by the more bilateral shape EMP relations should assume with the neighborhood policy. If the EU will manage to develop its ESDP and will run it more bilaterally with its Mediterranean partners, even though cooperative security (being multilateral by its definition) will not be attained, security cooperation will. This will be anyway a step forward in terms of broad cooperation.

ESDP relations with NATO stand presently as an obstacle in concretely developing security cooperation in the EMP. The question stems from the still undefined agreement between NATO and the EU about the role of ESDP with respect to NATO. In principle, this role was determined by the 13 December 2002 NATO-EU accord, whereby EU-led operations can take place autonomously unless there is an interest by NATO to operate. Subsequently, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg argued that the EU should have anyway a planning unit of its own, whereas such unit appeared to NATO as a duplication endangering the spirit and the sense of the December 2002 agreement. While this is not a question to be dealt with here on its own merit, the Southern partners are just unable to grasp the meaning of such Atlantic contest. A good number among them has already initiated a fruitful bilateral security relationship within the plural NATO Mediterranean Dialogue. In principle they would not be unwilling to do the same in the EMP framework, provided that cooperation is arranged in a substantially bilateral way. However, it is clear that this cannot be done unless NATO-EU relations on this question become more transparent and reasonable.

Thus, beside promotion of democracy, we have here another case in which EMP development depends on a more cooperative transatlantic relationship. The significance of a sound transatlantic cooperation with respect to the EMP – more in general, EU policies towards the Arab-Muslim region – can be better understood if we think of the value an EMP or EU crisis management cooperation would add in terms of third-party interventions in the regional conflict, be it in Palestine or Iraq. Again, the future of the EMP seems very much linked to transatlantic cooperation.

Conclusions

The EMP suffered from its strategic dependence on the Middle East peace process and the negative evolution of such process. This negative evolution has prevented the EMP from acting as a security framework and, at the same time, weakened its dimension of comprehensive security, that is EMP social, economic and cultural cooperation potential. This potential, by regulating issues as important in trans-Mediterranean relations as migration, organized crime, terrorism, trafficking, clandestine migration, and so forth, goals is still today seriously undeveloped. Developing that potential constitutes in itself a task worth pursuing.

In this paper we discussed two issues – democracy promotion and security cooperation – retaining considerable significance in terms of present evolution in international relations. If the EMP will succeed in dealing with these two issues in particular - and other of the same kind, in general – it will acquire a significant role not only in regional, but also in transatlantic and international relations.

It can become a contribution in improving transatlantic relations. At the same time, improved transatlantic relations are also a condition for it to succeed. In any case, the interplay between the two terms is normally neglected. It seems, in contrast, very important and worth being monitored and managed carefully.

What the EMP will become, however, depends very much of what the new EU neighborhood policy will be and the way it will work. In principle, the impact of this new policy seems more bound on weakening current regional link – as the EMP – and put them in a wider multi-regional perspective. From another point of view, however, a change in the shape of EMP multilateral relations (from multilateral to bilateral) may prove beneficial, in particular by allowing for increased security cooperation.