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**THE CONFLICT PREVENTION COMPONENT OF THE
EMP: THE NEED FOR CHANGE**

by Mohamed Salman Tayie

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THE NEED FOR CHANGE**

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The Mediterranean is a border between a wealthy, developed, and stable Europe on one side and a fragmented North Africa and Middle East on the other side. Today, in the region there is no major military threat as was the case in Europe during the Cold War. However, the region is destabilized by a combination of wide-ranging inter-state and intra-state conflicts, socioeconomic risks and low-intensity violence. Most of these conflicts and risks have their sources along the south shore and at the sub-regional levels, e.g. territorial and border disputes; ethno-cultural rivalry; the low-intensity violence of terrorism. However, we should also not overlook the future importance of potential conflicts over water supplies, particularly in some cases the situation is complicated by the fact that there are connections between the territorial and ethno-cultural sources of conflicts, “intractable conflicts” (Biad, 1997: 2).

The “security environment” of the Mediterranean countries is characterised by a substrate of basic instability -made up of underlying factors such as economic and social underdevelopment and inadequate political institutions in the Southern and Eastern rims, widespread cultural and ethnic differences, sharp South-South and North-South cleavages-which represent diffuse and interdependent factors of risk throughout the region. This structural instability of Mediterranean security is aggravated by more proximate causes such as the link between conflict, demography and migration, the vulnerability of strategic communication lines, the diffusion of unconventional weapons, and the transregional impact of long-standing internal and external conflicts (such as the confrontation between regimes and Islamic oppositions or the Arab-Israeli conflict).

This interdependence and transnationality of risk factors in the Mediterranean region is not matched by a coherent set of national and multilateral security policies. Quite to the contrary, the security perceptions and needs of regional states differ widely and co-operative security schemes are absent or weak. EU countries feel threatened by instability and conflict in the non-EU Mediterranean countries and would like the latter to co-operate in conflict prevention by applying their recipes to address the structural and proximate sources of instability in the region. Non-EU Mediterranean governments reject the component of conflict prevention policies which they perceive as Western intervention in their internal affairs, but confronted as they are with multidirectional threats, need Western help to increase their security.

As a result of this security environment, there is a real demand for a new, more co-operative security architecture in the Mediterranean region today. Its development is

nevertheless hindered by numerous political constraints due to the asymmetries of the security agendas of the countries of the region.

Waiting for political conditions for co-operative security to mature, conflict prevention in the Mediterranean area remains the task of the individual countries and of the European Union. It is therefore interesting to note that the European Union, which has included conflict prevention among the objectives of its external relations since 1995, has recently delineated the main features of an emerging conflict prevention system.

Thus, the need for a conflict prevention component on the EMP erupted. Yet, and after decades of academic research and policy experience on conflict prevention, the stark reality is that the international community –international organisations and individual states- can field only very limited political consensus and operational capabilities in implementing conflict prevention policies in the face of a high number of new and recurring conflicts. Consequently, just like conflict management and conflict resolution, conflict prevention remains an elusive goal: so much needed and so difficult to achieve. In addition, experts lament that there is still 'little agreement amongst theoreticians and practitioners on the most effective practical methodologies'

In its initial phase, research on conflict prevention methodologies focussed on early warning, a natural choice since prevention requires first that potential conflicts be detected and their causes and dynamics understood. Priority on early warning oriented research towards 'detection tools' (e.g. indicators) and formalised systems for data collection and classification. However, the sophisticated results of this first wave of research often remained remote from the policy-making needs of conflict prevention. This is why more recent research on conflict prevention methodologies, striving to develop viable conflict prevention capabilities, shows a strong shift of emphasis from warning to response, and adopts a bottom-up approach that focuses not only on the individual conflict, but also on the "end-user", i.e. the state/institution that tries to prevent and manage conflicts.

The list of EU instruments directly or indirectly relevant to the prevention of conflict is long. Yet, this means that all the efforts exerted on the part of the EU in this respect can be identified with or getting excluded from the efforts for conflict prevention, with no clear parameters being available at hand. Thus, the focus and effectiveness of its action in this area can and must improve, specially when it comes to emergency cases and rampant situations. That is, the conflict prevention mechanism must be able to respond in a timely and tailor-made fashion, with an appropriate mix of instruments, to the specific situations as they arise. Ultimately, this is not just a question of streamlined decision-making and management procedures but, more fundamentally, of the common political will to respond.

An assessment of potential conflict situations is being made in all Country Strategy Papers with the support of appropriate potential conflict indicators, such as: the balance of political and economic power, the control of the security forces, the ethnic composition of the government for ethnically-divided countries, the potential degradation of environmental resources and so forth. For those countries where the above analysis has highlighted

conflict risk factors ("countries with conflict potential"), conflict prevention measures are to be taken targeting conflict prevention in various sectoral programs (in fields such as transport, rural development, energy, environment, health, research or education), with systemic analysis of the security sector (Communication from the European Commission on Conflict Prevention, 2001: 11, 14).

The new civilian and military crisis-management tools currently being developed in the context of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) could be used to deal with the earliest stages of incipient conflict. Though initially designed for crisis management they could be just as effective in a preventive, "pre-crisis" role. (Communication from the European Commission on Conflict Prevention, 2001: 11, 14). Yet, when this comes to the EMP, it is obvious that these instruments would represent a source of distrust and insecurity for the Southern Mediterranean countries.

That is why the fundamental premise that stands out in terms of the Union's integrated approach to conflict prevention is that "co-operation programs are increasingly based on the countries' own strategies since it is now well recognized that ownership is a condition for success allowing for consideration of countries' own situation, history and culture." This notion has taken the concrete expression of that the country (countries) that is (are) the focus of EU's preventive efforts is (are) fully associated in the EU's conflict prevention planning (Barbe and Johansson, 2001: 4-5).

Moreover, there are conflict prevention centres that are less instruments to gather information than ones to manage procedures seeking to settle disputes and prevent latent or potential conflict between more or less consenting parties. They might be given the task of developing and performing, among others, functions of preventive diplomacy, such as "procedures of clarification, mediation and conciliation for settling disputes between parties by peaceful means of their own choice". They could be asked to perform fact-finding missions and set up local round tables for analysis and recommendations whose outcome would be deferred to the Senior Officials. Some sub-regional centres could be directly addressed by parties and thus act as an element of decentralised early warning. In this way, they could be enabled to perform an essential job in securing good neighbourly relations.

For a conflict prevention mechanism to successfully develop within the framework of the EMP, its political context must be assessed from these principle points of view: the character of conflict in the Mediterranean area after the Cold War; and the fragmentation and heterogeneity of strategic and security relations in the area concerned.

There is no doubt that in the last ten years the Southern Mediterranean region has been characterised by a relative increase in intra-state conflict. This is because of the dubbed *protracted social conflict*, which is essentially multidimensional...The internal, religious, cultural and socio-economic factors become inextricable from interstate conflicts...The result is an interconnectedness and overlapping - rather than separation - between internal and international politics" (Aliboni, 1998: 3-6). Moreover, traditional conflicts are still

plaguing the Mediterranean in addition to new ones, which have emerged since the end of the Cold War.

In addition, globalization has recently influenced the conceptualizations of security in the Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries, albeit in different ways. In the North, the change has been in the direction of moving from the concept of national security, where the reference object is the territorial state, to the concept of international security, emphasizing interdependence, to the concepts of world security, fundamental security and global security and emphasizing global risks. In the South, there has been an increasing emphasis on the expansion of the concept of security to incorporate developmental dimensions and linkages with regional and global processes (Marquina and Selim, 2003: 1- 2).

In the post-Cold War period, thus, patterns of conflict in the Near East and North Africa countries are similar to those observed globally, as far as the incidence and causes of domestic ("intra-state") conflict are concerned, but differ from global patterns as far as inter-state (international) conflict is concerned, because of a higher than average propensity to and persistence of international conflict.

An implication of this pattern of conflict should have been that, in principle, the EMP's conflict prevention policy would be targeted more towards south-south inter-state conflicts and on intra-state conflicts in the south than towards the northern half of the EMP or in its north-south dimension. The focus whether north-south or south-south remains an important element for the relevance of EMP preventive diplomacy. One also has to recall the limitation embedded in the EMP in order to avoid duplications and interferences. One may wonder whether this limitation excludes EMP preventive diplomacy from the Arab-Israeli conflict circle. If so, the tendency for the EMP conflict-prevention policy to be concentrated on the least relevant sector of the EMP in terms of preventive diplomacy (the north-south sector) will be reinforced (Aliboni, 1998: 3-6).

Moreover, analysis of the political and institutional contexts of the EMP provides the broad parameters for sketching out what kind of conflict prevention arrangements are allowed and could be developed in these contexts. The following parameters seem to be the most important: the EMP, in fact, must be considered an inter-regional entity combining countries with political and economic features that are very different if not at odds with one another. That is, there are many diverse security agendas in the EMP which prevent the area from acquiring a homogeneous strategic perspective. And not to forget the strategic interests of the other international actors in the region.

The basic security concerns have to take into consideration both the "internal and external fragility" of the Arab state. That is, vulnerability to external pressures and dependence on the outside is typical of Third World regions (and small countries). However, the extent and nature of external vulnerability in the Mediterranean-Middle East is specific to this region: on the one hand, due to its unique endowment with strategic resources of global relevance (most notably energy), no other region in the contemporary world has experienced the same degree of foreign intervention and competition. On the other hand, the reactions of Middle East and North Africa countries to external penetration have been particularly intense. The

conclusions reached by structural analysis of regional patterns of conflict are therefore that state fragility and external vulnerability specifically combine in the MENA to produce a high incidence and persistence of interstate conflicts.

Thus, it seems clear that Conflict prevention is likely to be the most important goal the EMP can attain. The EMP in itself can be thought of as a macro-measure of systemic (pluralism, market economy, good governance, etc.) and structural (regional integration, shared institutions, etc.). Besides its structural and systemic ability to prevent conflict in the medium- and long-term, the EMP is supposed to develop an ability to prevent conflicts from being settled violently in the short- and medium-term. In this sense, the EMP is expected to develop preventive diplomacy and its attendant intra-state- and inter-state-related instruments. However, security co-operation is almost excluded from the EMP not only by the encroachment of the as yet unsolved Arab-Israeli disputes, but also by the strong Southern perception of interference from the North (political, military, cultural); this hardly allows for the use of military instruments in the EMP for purposes of co-operative and collective security.

Conflict prevention was not mentioned in the Barcelona Declaration. It was first introduced by the 1996 “Action Plan”. Subsequently, while CP has been constantly mentioned in the Euro-Med Charter for Peace and Stability. As far as CP is concerned, the EMP institutions would dispose of a set of specific instruments, 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 conflict prevention centre or centres), or deferred to incumbent international courts.

There are two main schools of thought in the Mediterranean on how to deal with conflicts. The first school is advocated by the EU and focuses almost exclusively on the task of conflict prevention. The second school argues that conflict resolution must precede conflict prevention. This school is mainly articulated by Arab actors in the Mediterranean.

The EU has progressively developed its own doctrine on conflict prevention since 1993, adapting its external action to a changing international environment. It has developed mechanisms for civilian and military crisis management that could be extended to Mediterranean security issues. The EU has been engaged in the Mediterranean using a full range of capabilities: association and free trade area agreements, co-operation, development assistance, social and environmental policies, humanitarian assistance, civilian and military crisis management, political dialogue and co-operation in the area of Justice and Home Affairs.

The Arab countries argue that the conflict preventive approach of the EU is highly questionable at different levels. First, the exclusive emphasis on conflict prevention bypasses the present security agenda in the Mediterranean and focuses on a future agenda. Consequently, the EU will lose its relevance for those actors that are at present in conflict.

States usually pay more attention to their present conflicts rather than to the ones which could emerge in the future, and tend to focus on the frameworks which could provide a mechanism for conflict resolution rather than to those which provide the promise of a new world. This is because engagement in a conflict entails a pattern of resource mobilization, which could only be changed after the conflict is resolved, something that contradicts with the mere nature of the preventive policies. Second, international relations cannot be compartmentalized. The continuation of current conflicts is likely to have a negative influence on the possibilities of establishing a future-oriented cooperative model of Trans-Mediterranean relations, as current conflicts will necessarily affect future relations (Marquina and Selim, 2003: 10-12).

The issue of security perceptions between the north and the south shores of the Mediterranean should be raised. In the North, there is a wide-spread feeling that Western civilization is threatened by “multidimensional” and “multidirectional” phenomena emanating from the South, such as the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and ballistic weapons, immigration pressures, terrorism, and Islamic fundamentalism. From the southern viewpoint the North is seen as being responsible for the instability in the price of energy and raw materials, debt pressures, cultural intrusion, racism, and xenophobia. These types of ‘distortions’ of each other’s perceptions should be examined, beginning with the idea that faulty perceptions are partly due to the lack of information about each other’s intentions (Biad, 1997: 2-6).

On the Southern side, a sense of Northern unilateralism and intrusion strongly prevails. Thus, the most important concern of the majority of Southern Partners is to avoid interference from the EU. The EU’s Mediterranean initiatives have raised suspicion and resentment among policy-makers and the wider public of the Arab countries. They are being seen as intelligence and monitoring operations rather than confidence building measures (Attina 2000: 16). Hence, consensus in the EMP framework is as necessary as it is difficult to achieve. Relations are based on a significant wish to co-operate but, for the time being, on a very low common denominator and weak political context. The Southern Mediterranean countries are much less equipped than the EU and its member states. Furthermore, the latter are definitely preponderant within the EMP institutional set-up. If this asymmetrical character of the EMP is combined with the weakness of its political context and the limits it puts on actual action, it is clear that, in interacting with the EU, the EMP suffers important limitations: EMP joint action entailing the use of military instruments for whichever kind of peace support operations is largely unlikely as yet; this trend tends to exclude or make unlikely an EMP joint military action.

The main attributes of the regional security partnership model are summarized as it follows.

Pre-conditions

- awareness of the countries of the region for interdependence and the local effects of global problems,
- relaxed or no power competition in the international politics of the region and restrained use of violence in international conflicts.

Conditions

- consensus of the governments of the region on building security cooperation by reducing violence in international relations, improving international and domestic stability, and promoting peace and economic growth,
- no system of opposite military alliances.

Structures and means

- written fundamental agreements,
- operative agreements, multilateral offices and international organizations,
- a set of international and internal measures and mechanisms of conflict management and prevention,
- involvement of extra-regional powers (very probable).

Consequences

- reduction of the gap between the security doctrines and cultures of the countries of the region,
- increase of defence de-nationalization,
- development of security community (possible) (Attina, 2004: 6-7)

In fact, the building of the security partnership in the Mediterranean lacks the pre-condition of the restrained use of violence because conflict and war ravage the Middle East (Attina, 2004: 16). Attention must be directed also to an important obstacle hindering negotiation in the Mediterranean region, i.e. the divide of security culture. The security policies and decisions of the states are intrinsically influenced by past experiences in security problems. More precisely, recent experiences and beliefs, traditions, attitudes and symbols are intimately related and add to one another in shaping the country's security culture. This culture shapes the preference of national governments for certain security instruments (or combination of instruments) rather than others that are also available. However, culture is never static. Learning from recent experiences is responsible for culture change as it is interaction with the security culture of other states and regions as well as the influence of new ideas, practices and experiences.

The current security culture of the European countries is linked to three recent experiences: (1) the arms control negotiations of the Cold War and détente times; (2) the Helsinki Process with the three-decade long elaboration of new ideas and the formation of the mechanisms of comprehensive and cooperative security; and (3) the formulation of new defense policies in the 1990s to react to unexpected crises and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to countries and non-state actors insensitive of the conventional logic of military strategy.

The security culture of the contemporary Arab countries contains various distinct views. One of them is the Arab nation view, which advocates for an Arab trans-state community as the building block of peace and security in the area. In the 1990s, another view contrasting with this traditional view came to the front. A reformist view developed, especially in North Africa, with great emphasis on civil society security, achievement of better

conditions of life and the need for economic reforms in agreement with the traditions of the Arab culture and Islamic religion.

Moreover, security cooperation at the region level is unfamiliar to the Arab security culture. Building regional security through co-operative means creates strong suspicions in governments attached to national military power and the traditional view of strategic secrecy. Also comprehensive security is suspicious concept to Arab political elite and policy-makers (Attina, 2004: 12-14). For these reasons, the Mediterranean lacks a single unifying security concept around which security arrangements could be developed (Marquina and Selim, 2003: 1).

When talking about security issues in the Mediterranean one notices that a major handicap is the lack of any common definition of 'security'. Response to a security threat should not be based on an imposed formula that carries with it the risk of being perceived as intrusive in the eyes of the southern countries: Rather such a response should be based on a co-operative approach that parts from a common definition of risks and responses. In the first place, there are needed mechanisms for political consultation on security issues so that partners might exchange views about conflicts which take place in the region (Biad, 1997: 2-6).

Asymmetry in military organisations on the two rims of the Mediterranean basin is an important obstacle. On the Northern rim, national armies are linked to a single alliance, NATO. The development of the common foreign and security policy of the European Union further increases the co-ordination of the national defence systems of the European members of the Partnership. On the Southern rim, instead, national military power and, in few cases, loose bilateral defence agreements are the only means available for a single state to overcome any security dilemma with potential or real enemies. Arab countries are deeply concerned with any infringement of the norm of territorial sovereignty and the practice of foreign inspection on the national territory (Attina 2000: 16-19).

There is a lack of 'cross-pillar' functioning in the EMP; each basket is run in a more or less autonomous way, without much coordination with the others. And for these measures to be effective, a real 'carrot' should be offered by the EU. The European States have first of all have to muster the necessary political will to invest sufficient means and offer the neighbouring States *real benefits*. (Biscop, 2005: 8)

From the beginning however, all efforts to add substance to this dimension have failed in the large part due to the unwillingness of the Southern Mediterranean partners. Foremost to explain this lack of political will is the Middle East conflict. The eternal conflict between Israel and Palestine is the main stumbling-block for an enhanced security partnership between both shores of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes abuse the conflict as a ground of legitimacy. Significant steps towards a resolution of the conflict are a necessary prerequisite for a security partnership to really take off. Proposals for a security partnership that ignore resolution of ongoing conflicts are not taken seriously. Since EU enlargement on 1 May 2004, the importance of the Middle East conflict for the EMP has

become even more pronounced, for with the accession of Cyprus and Malta, and with Turkey having a special status as a candidate member and as a NATO Ally, the partners comprise only the Mediterranean Arab countries and Israel.

The dissatisfaction with the EU's limited investment in the financial and economic chapter is a second reason. It is often felt that the EU puts undue emphasis on the security aspects of the EMP, to the detriment of the economic basket which the Mediterranean partners consider to be the field for priority action. Moreover, there is certain distrust with regard to ESDP itself. With the Gulf War and the intervention in Kosovo in mind, there is a fear to become objects of 'Western interventionism'. It is not difficult to imagine how the debate on 'pre-emption' can fuel this fear of 'interventionism'. Research shows however that more important than actual distrust is a generalized lack of information about ESDP – which can of course easily be abused to create distrust.

On a more general level, in the partner countries there is limited interest in the Mediterranean as an organizing concept of policy, both among policy-makers and academics. The EMP is mostly seen as a way of addressing bilateral relations with the EU; regional dynamics and South-South regional integration between the Mediterranean partners receive far less attention. It should also be acknowledged that Mediterranean partners are less familiar with notions such as comprehensive and cooperative security and confidence and security-building measures. Furthermore, large parts of public opinion are often not in favour of security cooperation with 'the West', which again would have negative consequences for the regimes' internal power base. (Biscop, 2005: 10-13)

A crucial drawback in the conflict prevention mechanism in the EMP is the absence of an agreed upon definition for the process of conflict prevention within the framework of the EU. According to the European Commission, conflict prevention is defined as “[a]ctions undertaken over the *short term* to reduce manifest tensions and/or to prevent the outbreak of recurrence of violent conflict.” It is obvious that this definition is contradictory with the Communication on Conflict Prevention presented by the Commission, from April 2001, where the Commission distinguishes between conflict prevention as projecting stability (long term) and conflict prevention as reacting quickly to nascent conflicts (short term, i.e. crisis management). In the Communication, long term conflict prevention appears to imply actions supporting regional integration, building trade links, supporting democracy, rule of law, civil society, gender equality in development policy, etc., while the short term actions encompass early warning systems, rapid reaction mechanism, special representatives. (Barbe and Johansson, 2001: 10)

Other than the definition itself, it is necessary to make a point concerning the sometimes rather minor differentiation in EU discourse between conflict prevention and general external policy aims of the Union (humanitarian assistance, development aid, supporting democracy, promotion of human rights). The confusion is compounded by the integrated approach adopted by the EU in matters of treating the root causes of conflict. In this context, the Commission states that “development policy and other co-operation programs provide, without doubt, the most powerful instruments at the Community's disposal for

treating the root causes of conflict.” These root causes are often a result of: lack of government legitimacy, repression of minority, proliferation of arms, economic scarcity, migration, lack of vibrant society and regional instability. This has caused many analysts to question if EU has conceptually fused normal peaceful relations between countries into a broad, umbrella concept of conflict prevention. There, still, the danger implied in the confusion between EU’s general external policy aims and a conflict prevention program, in that leads to a clear securitization of normal, peaceful international relations.

Moreover, the EU does not evaluate appropriately the impact of its conflict prevention policies against their purposes. In fact, the EU seems to rely on the assumption that development cooperation and support for democratization and conduct of elections in and by itself support long-term or structural conflict prevention. They often do, of course, but the experience of recent years is not uniform. While development cooperation, aid and support for democracy, human and minority rights are factors which may contribute positively to conflict prevention, however, their impact should be carefully assessed and not be used blindly as a cure-all formula.

There is also a lack of coherence between purposes (conflict prevention) and instruments (EU development policy instruments). That is, the central issue for the Union is one of coherence in deploying the right combination and sequence of instruments in a timely and integrated manner. (Barbe and Johansson, 2001: 11)

The challenges which face the Union as it sets about improving its coherence and effectiveness for conflict prevention are similar to those which it faces throughout its external action: to establish and sustain priorities for action; to ensure the coherent use of what is now a very broad range of resources in pursuit of those priorities; to deploy those resources in a pro-active, flexible and integrated way; and to build and sustain effective partnership with those who share our values and priorities at global, regional, national and local level. Addressing these issues in the context of conflict prevention can give impetus to its efforts towards greater coherence in all external action. It is an ambitious political undertaking and will be achieved only with the exercise of political will (Barbe and Johansson, 2001: 16).

Proposals to enhance the security dimension of the EMP are abundant. Firstly, the EU could step up its efforts to communicate about the aims and nature of ESDP. The absence of a strategic concept for ESDP was an important cause of suspicion regarding the true intentions of the EU. Perhaps in a later stage such a dialogue about the Strategy could lead to a truly joint reflection on the specifics of the Mediterranean region, along the same lines as the Strategy – the challenges posed by the security environment, the objectives, and their policy implications – in order to arrive at a common document at the regional level which could put down guidelines for cooperation and serve as a framework for an enhanced security partnership similar to the way the Strategy does – or should – for EU external action.

Moreover, the conflict prevention strategies have to be adaptive and not to be brought out in the fashion of one size fits all approach; but, to be tailored to the unique characteristics of the case at hand and to the overall political contingency in which it takes place, structured according to a coherent methodology and customised to the aims and means of the specific institution establishing it.

These steps would all contribute to increasing confidence between both sides of the Mediterranean, thus preparing the ground for a deepening and institutionalization of the security dimension of the EMP in the longer term, in which further-reaching steps can then be imagined. These steps should take into account the need for a strong multilateral dimension, as an important South-South confidence-building measure.

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