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**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS OF THE CONFERENCE  
ON “SECURITY, SECURITISATION AND REFORM:  
BACK TO INTEGRATIVE PARTNERSHIP”**

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS OF THE CONFERENCE ON “SECURITY,  
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In the framework of the Barcelona process, the European Union (EU) has had two main approaches linking policies and expected results in terms of security: (a) an earlier approach which contemplated security as a result of reforms, especially political reforms, in the Southern Mediterranean Partners’ domestic arenas; (b) subsequently, the EU evolved – and is still evolving – an approach whereby security is the result of the securitisation of a set of factors, chiefly immigration, terrorism and cultural relations.

Today the latter is far more important than the former. It reflects a frightened, less opened and less liberal EU. The task of the conference is, on one hand, to debate these two different perspectives on security, securitisation and reforms and, on the other, to provide suggestions and recommendations with a view to making the EU return to its integrative policies and identity – the sequence linking security to reforms – and/or establish a fairer balance between the two approaches.

Securitisation is a normal process in domestic as well as foreign politics. Securitisation takes place when “an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object”,<sup>1</sup> for instance to cultural identity or the EU’s institutions or whatever. If there is an existential threat, securitisation is a legitimate political act. At the beginning of this decade, a widespread and pervasive process of securitisation arose in the EU in relation to terrorism, immigration, organised international crime, cultural relations and links among these challenges, all largely perceived in Europe as “existential” threats or risks. Are those factors really existential threats or risks? Are there any important differences between them? Or are there real linkages, in particular between terrorism and migration? Are there misperceptions? In other words, to what extent is securitisation justified and to what extent is it the right response to widespread perceptions in Europe?

To respond to these questions, one may reflect on how the present process of securitisation has emerged. The process was, no doubt, jump-started by Al Qaida’s attacks on New York and Washington and the various US responses to them, chiefly the war on global terrorism declared by the US administration. Attacks in Europe (Madrid, London) and North Africa (Casablanca) helped to confirm the EU and Southern Mediterranean governments’ perceptions of threat, with repercussions on immigration, cultural relations and international crime. However, it is important to note that the widespread and strong European process of securitisation has also been made possible by the failure of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) to generate an effective political dialogue between the parties in its first five to six years of life, that is before 11 September 2001.

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<sup>1</sup> Ole Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, Working Papers, No. 5, 1993, Copenhagen. More in detail: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, London, 1998.

In this sense, we have to remember that a process of securitisation regarding the democratic identity of the EU already emerged with the end of the Cold War. As a consequence of the fall of the Communist empire, instability affecting Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean area (at that time dubbed the “arc of crisis”) was perceived as an existential threat to that identity. A known staff member of the EU Commission illustrated the European perception towards the Mediterranean as follows:

“Europe wishes to see at its southern rim a group of countries that will not:

- be at war with each other;
- be destabilized by socio-political conflicts;
- export terrorism or drugs to Europe;
- threaten Europe’s social stability by continued or even sharply increased flows of illegal immigration.”<sup>2</sup>

In particular, the EU leadership was fully aware that the need to manage social instability stemming from immigration would easily have affected European rule of law and, more broadly speaking, its liberal environment. In this perspective, in order to avoid testing European democracy, they expected the EMP Partnership to stop migration by successfully bringing development to the other side of the Mediterranean.

Rather than responding to these perceived threats with a process of securitisation, however, the EU introduced a wide-ranging process of engagement and desecuritisation, that is by initiating the process of enlargement in Europe and the Barcelona process in the Mediterranean. Enlargement has succeeded (although it is now showing signs of integration fatigue), but the EMP has definitely been less successful. There have been important political and institutional reforms in Central-Eastern Europe, the Baltic countries and, more recently, other European countries. No reform whatsoever has taken place in the Southern Mediterranean – besides cosmetic processes analysed today by the literature on semi-authoritarian regimes.

The poor success of the EMP desecuritisation process – in particular, the failure of the security/reform sequence – combined with the fresh perceptions unleashed by the events of September 11 gave the green light to securitisation trends that had been present in Euro-Med relations since the beginning but had been kept at bay by desecuritisation. It is to this re-emerging wave of securitisation that the EU is failing to respond in term of desecuritisation, mostly because early desecuritisation failed. The early desecuritisation of the EMP has almost vanished. Reforms have been neglected. Securitisation is reinforced daily by new measures and policies. Today, the prevailing approach is security by means of securitisation.

Why has it been so easy to sideline desecuritisation and its cooperative processes? What are the effects of doing so? With respect to the first question, let’s to pick up two central issues: the EU’s seemingly unstoppable process of re-nationalisation; the ways and limits to reforming promotion policies.

There can be no doubt that the end of the Cold War changed the basic security posture of Western European countries and set in motion a process of re-nationalisation; this process has largely been facilitated by the imbalance between EU enlargement and

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<sup>2</sup> Eberhard Rhein, “Europe and the Mediterranean. A Newly Emerging Geopolitical Area?” , *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, July 1996, pp. 79-86.

deepening. While enlargement has continued, the EU members proved unable to approve a common Constitution only a few years ago. The new treaty of reform, recently signed in Lisbon, also seems to be in danger. As a result, we are witnessing an unmistakable weakening of the EU's communitarian dimension and an equally unmistakable strengthening of the role of national governments. The Union for the Mediterranean goes in this same direction. This will have two consequences worth mentioning. First, securitisation will prevail because, while desecuritisation is a response more broadly in tune with the EU's identity, securitisation is more typically attuned to the identity and manner of national states. Second, the national governments are tending to retain and even increase their control over factors that impinge directly on national stability and domestic consensus, as the very process of re-nationalisation makes it easier to respond at national level than to provide innovative and integrated responses at the Union level.

One has to add that, not only does the national dimension sideline the communitarian dimension, but the latter is more often than not made instrumental to national goals and requirements. Many EU policies (externalisation, policies aiming at setting up borderlands, rather than a neighbourhood, around the EU<sup>3</sup>) and instruments (arrest and evidence warrants<sup>4</sup>) are in line with the reinforcement of national capabilities rather than those of the Union. There are instances in which the EU just looks like an opportunity for outsourcing.

Thus, in the face of the newly emerging threats, securitisation is prevailing and the reform approach is being neglected. One has to note, however, that the road to reform and its promotion have not proven very easy nor have reform promotion policies been coherent and effective. Double standards have dominated their implementation. There is confusion between long and short-term objectives and expectations. Meanwhile, the securitisation of cultures, Islam in particular, prevents the implementation of policies towards Mediterranean civil societies that would be suited to the task of promoting democracy from inside. In other words, many factors have coalesced to overshadow the EU's desecuritisation approach; one important factor must not, however, be overlooked and that is the weakness of the policies intended to implement desecuritisation and reforms in the EMP. This is a point that the conference's concluding Round Table should try to tackle.

What are the consequences of the fact that securitisation is getting the upper hand in European policies towards the Mediterranean?

As a recent report issued by the EU-ISS<sup>5</sup> points out, the main risk is the weakening of the EU *acquis*: attaining security by means of reform is one of the most important aspects of the communitarian *acquis*. It is rooted in the treaties and the Copenhagen principles.

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<sup>3</sup> Recently, Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Borderlands: The Middle East and North Africa as the EU's Southern Buffer Zone", in D. Bechev, K. Nicolaidis (eds.), *The Present of the Past: Borders, Conflicts, and Memory in the Mediterranean*, I.B. Tauris, London (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Francesca Galli, *The Legal and Political Implications of the Securitisation of European Counter-Terrorism Measures across the Mediterranean*, unpublished.

<sup>5</sup> R. Aliboni, G. Joffé, E. Lannon, A. Mahjoub, A. Saaf, A. de Vasconcelos, "Union for the Mediterranean. Building on the Barcelona *acquis*", Eu.ISS Report, Paris, June 2008.

Second, attaining security by means of reform is in tune with the normative character of the EU identity. Securitisation much less so. Reforms are at the heart of the approach set out in the European Security Strategy. In this sense, if reforms are excluded or sidelined, the EU's normative action is thrown into question and the EU identity with it. On the other hand, it is true that the impact of EU normative action has proven limited.<sup>6</sup> This is why a rethinking of the instruments and policies intended to stimulate reforms is needed – as already pointed out – rather than a shift from the reform approach to securitisation.

Third, there is no doubt that the securitisation approach is generating contradictions between the goals of the EU policies in the realm of terrorism and immigration and the values and principles upheld by the EU. Policies in the Freedom, Security and Justice area discriminate between the regimes of internal and external rights; therefore they cannot be just. Furthermore, freedom tends to be assured to EU citizens; less so to other human beings.<sup>7</sup> Again, the EU identity is threatened and the normative action at the root of EU policies is contradicted by the use of means that do not comply with the rule of law.

In conclusion, securitisation may have its motivations, yet it should not exclude or sideline the reform approach. What is badly needed is equilibrium. For such a balancing act to be possible, however, the roles of the communitarian dimension and the EU identity must be recovered, on the one hand. On the other, the ways and means to carry out an effective policy promoting reform have to be further explored.

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<sup>6</sup> On normative power and its limits see Nathalie Tocci, *Profiling Normative Foreign Policy: The European Union and Its Global Partners*, CEPS Working Document No. 279 / December 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Collinson, "Security or Securitisation? Migration and the Pursuit of Freedom, Security and Justice in the Euro-Mediterranean Area", *EuroMeSCo*, No. 19, November 2007, [www.euromesco.net](http://www.euromesco.net)