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**"THE ROLE AND PROSPECTS OF SOUTHERN EUROPEAN SECURITY
IN A CHANGING EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT"**

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1. Introduction

The dramatic crisis of the Soviet regime and the democratic upheaval in Eastern Europe which has rapidly taken the shape of an accelerated process of desovietisation have made urgent the search for a new political and security order on the continent. Among the Western countries there is a wide consensus on the need to reach a pan-European arrangement within the framework of the Csce and, at the same time, to promote a restructuring of the intra-Western institutions which enables them to effectively contribute to the democratic transition in the East and play a stabilizing role in face of the new risks deriving from the dissolution of the Eastern bloc. The Western countries have indeed made a major effort to develop a coordinated policy in the view of these two general objectives.

Yet, many aspects of the new European architecture remain largely indeterminate. Apart from the uncertainties surrounding the evolution of the Eastern countries' political and economic systems, the West is facing some other political dilemmas which appear to be crucial for the future of Europe.

First, there exist different views regarding the most appropriate way and pace of the integration of the new democracies into the Western institutional framework, as such an enlargement could hamper or at least postpone a further strengthening of the Western integration itself.

Second, even the development of the pan-European process centred on the Csce might in perspective become a weakening factor for the Western institutions especially in the field of security policy. Most Western governments denounce this as a danger to avoid, but it could nevertheless materialize if they proved unable to maintain the cohesion and vitality of the Western institutions.

Third, the pace the integration within the European Community will assume in the future is also uncertain given the divergences existing among the EC countries over relevant aspects of the economic and political union. The role of the

EC as indispensable pole of stability has become increasingly evident, but its effective capacity of sustaining such a role is still open to doubt.

Fourth, the growth of the political weight of the EC is determining an overlapping of its competences with those of NATO especially as far as the relations with the East are concerned. Thus, the Western institutional framework seems to have entered into a phase of major internal changes.

The Southern European countries' foreign policy and its probable future evolution must be assessed against this background. They are clearly interested in taking an active part in the construction of the new European order. To this end the contribution they will be able to make for the solution of the above outlined dilemmas will be decisive.

2. Strategic developments and change in NATO

The strategic environment in Europe is rapidly changing as a result of the Soviet unilateral reductions and especially the virtual disintegration of the Warsaw Pact. The unification between the two Germanys has deprived the Eastern Alliance of a key member state. Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland are likely to leave it in the near future. The WP has thus turned into mere political fiction which largely owes its survival to the common will to make the Soviet withdrawal as painless as possible and to avoid complications for the conventional arms control process.

NATO therefore benefits already today from a substantially greater strategic depth than in the past vis-à-vis a hypothetical - indeed increasingly improbable - conventional attack from the Soviet Union. The threat of a surprise attack, in particular, has actually vanished. Taking note of this major change in the East-West strategic balance, Nato has decided to move away from the 'forward defence' concept. That new strategic reality is bound to have considerable implications for the role of the Southern Region in NATO strategy.

The defence of the Southern Region has traditionally been seen by NATO as connected with that of Continental Europe. First, the probability of a war limited to the Southern Region, i.e. not directly involving Continental Europe, has always been considered very low. Secondly, the Southern Region was of crucial logistical importance in the view of a possible Soviet breakthrough in Central Europe even given the military supremacy enjoyed by the West in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic Ocean. The increasing strategic space at disposal of the West at the centre of the continent tends to make less evident this security linkage between Continental and Southern Europe.

Another factor which can contribute to weaken the perception of such a linkage is the trend towards a declining strategic role of nuclear weapons. While reaffirming the need for a mix of nuclear and conventional weapons, the NATO allies at the same time declared in the London summit their readiness to reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons and to adopt a new strategy making nuclear forces truly weapons of last resort. As for nuclear arms control, NATO has proposed the opening of negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union on the reduction of short-

range nuclear forces once a Cfe agreement is signed and, parallelly, the total elimination of the nuclear artillery possessed by each side. To the extent that nuclear weapons contribute to strategically bind the various regions of the alliances and to create the perception among the member states of being exposed to a common risk, NATO's future lesser reliance on nuclear weapons can reduce the perceived security link between Southern and Continental Europe. This factor is likely to be of limited importance for more peripheral countries such as Portugal and Spain, but could be particularly relevant in the case of Italy whose participation in the nuclear policy and posture of the alliance has always been significant.

Furthermore, there is evidence of a declining Soviet maritime activity in the Mediterranean. The growing constraints from which the Soviet defense budget will suffer in the future will probably have a considerable impact on the Soviet navy, leading to a further decrease in the Soviet military presence in the Southern Region.

For all these reasons NATO military planning is unlikely to assign more importance to the Southern Region than in the past. This would only occur in the case of an enlargement of the Nato competences outside its traditional area: a prospect, however, which encounters a strong opposition by the Southern Region countries themselves.

3. The conventional arms control process

The Vienna negotiations on the conventional forces in Europe (CFE) and the Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSCM) taking place in the context of the CSCE are the focal points of the arms control process on the continent. Following the political revolution in the East, the signing of substantial agreements on the tables of the CFE and CSBM has increasingly appeared as a necessary precondition to pave the way to a new political order in Europe. Indeed, the political problems raised by the Warsaw Pact's crisis and the German reunification have inevitably affected the Vienna negotiations.

A CFE 1 treaty calling for ceilings on all the types of military equipment included in the mandate (tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft, combat helicopters) is likely to be signed in the CSCE summit to be held in Paris between 19 and 21 November. At the same time, a commitment will be agreed to concerning the manpower levels of the unified Germany which, according to the "2+4" treaty, will be reduced to 370.000 troops in four years.

The possible configuration of the subsequent CFE talks is instead a matter of debate. In fact, the yearning of the new democracies to shake off the Soviet hegemony is putting into question the political viability of the current structure of the CFE based on the traditional concept of bloc-to-bloc negotiations. However, giving up this concept in the near term would create major additional complications for the CFE and thus make even more difficult the general goal to bring into harmony the speed of the arms control process with that of political change.

The negotiating countries have demonstrated awareness of this risk, declaring their willingness to begin (immediately after signing the CFE 1) a follow-

on of the CFE 1 -known as CFE 1-A under the same mandate and with the same participants. The extension of the CFE 1 operational concept to the CFE 1-A would avoid the loss of precious time and the possible political complications which could derive from the attempt to work out a new mandate. The central goal of the CFE 1-A is likely to be the establishment of general manpower ceiling.

More far-reaching cuts on conventional weapons may be agreed to in the CFE 2 talks to be launched in the CSCE conference of Helsinki - the so-called Helsinki II - scheduled to begin in 1992. However, the prospect itself of the CFE 2 talks is uncertain because of the unpredictability of the political evolution of the Eastern countries. In any case, the new Eastern democracies are unlikely to accept still being included, in the context of the CFE 2, in a single negotiating group together with the Soviet Union. As a result, the CFE 1 pattern aimed at equal collective limits for the two alliances could be replaced by negotiations on a bilateral or sub-regional basis.

The Southern Region states all have a clear interest in ensuring that the reductions agreed to in the CFE negotiations are not only limited to the Central Region and, in general, that the arms control process does not create a rigid division between the two areas. During the consultations within NATO on the zonal sub-limits the Southern countries openly accused the alliance of neglecting the Mediterranean security concerns. At the same time they wanted to ensure against geographical marginalization. However, at least in the near future the focus of the attention in the CFE will remain centred on Central Europe where a great imbalance of forces has to be rectified. In the CFE 1-A, in particular, a key problem will be the management of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

By the same token, the Southern Region countries are interested in preserving the current design of the CFE exercise. In fact, a rapid evolution of the CFE towards bilateral or sub-regional arms control negotiations would probably contribute to their further marginalization. They are instead strongly supportive of an enlargement of arms control process to other (non-European) Mediterranean countries and Middle Eastern ones. The recent initiative launched jointly by Italy and Spain for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) is a clear expression of this attitude.

4. The balance between Atlantic and European commitment

The rapid change in the European scene has also generated new uncertainties on the role and responsibilities of each Western institution. The risk of an increasing overlapping of competences between NATO and the EC has clearly emerged in the last few months. It pertains in particular to the political level but also, potentially, the military one.

The awareness of the risks of instability inherent in the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the tendency itself of the new Eastern democracies to regard the EC to intensify its political relations with the Eastern Europe countries. In general, an enhancement of the mechanisms of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) is taking place even as a result of the attempt to extend the EC integration process to the

political dimension. The Bush administration has in principle declared itself in favour of a greater political role of the EC. The EC in fact has been given the crucial task of coordinating the economic aid to the East by the Group of Seven. Yet, Washington appears at the same time to be willing to preserve and even enhance the political functions of NATO. The formula of 'new atlanticism' launched by the Bush administration clearly contains this prospect. This, therefore, constitutes a possible source of disagreement and controversy among the Western countries.

Similar problems regarding the distribution of roles could also emerge in the area of security policy. In fact, there is a growing tendency inside the EC to regard the goal of political integration as no longer separable from that of working out a common security policy. Actually, the debate on the so-called European pole of defense is still in an embryonic stage, but it could lead in the longer term to decisions weakening the Atlantic link.

This emerging dilemma between a further strengthening of the EC institutional framework and the preservation of the Atlantic link is viewed by the Southern European countries in a particular perspective. On one hand all of them considered membership in NATO and that in the EC as convergent factors contributing to their stable and definitive integration into the Western system and to the consolidation of their democratic institutions. On the other hand, they also tend to see their European policy as a sort of counterweight to their Atlantic commitment and in particular to their relations with the United States. Such an attitude is especially evident in Spain and Greece, whose public opinions are influenced by strong anti-Atlantic sentiments, but it also appears to have gained momentum in Italy and Portugal.

Indeed, the goal of European integration has been acquiring a growing importance in the foreign policy agenda of the Southern European countries. Their effort to successfully manage the economic impact of 1992 is accompanied by the will to gain a greater political weight within the EC.

This shift of attention and interest towards Europe is likely to make the Southern European countries increasingly supportive of plans and policies aimed at providing the EC an effective capacity of action in the field of foreign and security policy even if it should prove to be detrimental to the Atlantic cohesion and solidarity.

However, this general trend could be reversed if the united Germany should move towards a neutralist stance or if the Southern European countries should feel marginalized because of a growing gravitation of the countries of Continental.

Europe and the EC as a whole towards the East. In these two cases, in fact, they would in reaction probably seek to consolidate the relations with the US and their commitment in NATO. On the contrary, a decision by Washington for a significant reduction of its political and military engagement in Europe - which would however represent a drastic change from the current US policy - would further convince the Southern European countries of the need for a greater political and security cooperation.

5. The relations with the United States and the out of area issue

The foreign and security policies of the Southern European countries have traditionally been marked by a special relationship with the United States. To a large extent, their contribution to the Western alliance has indeed been strongly linked and influenced by the evolution of this relationship.

The more active and autonomous role the Southern European countries are now seeking to play in the international scene, especially within the European institutions and in the relations with the other Mediterranean countries, tends to make the partnership with the US more complicated to manage than in the past. The US in turn is prompted by increasing budgetary constraints and the changing strategic landscape to reconsider its economic and military engagement in Southern Europe.

Generally speaking, the declining resources at the disposal of the Americans and the perception of a diminished threat from the East are convergent factors in an increasing difficulty to preserve a convergence between the US and the European interests in the military sphere as well as to ensure that the economic disputes do not have disruptive effects on the alliance's cohesion.

This is particularly evident in the case of the relations between the Southern European countries and the US. For the latter its military presence in Southern Europe has not lost its crucial geostrategic importance. But this importance has been assuming a different significance. It is increasingly linked with the goal of protecting the US interests in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas rather than with that of facing a Soviet threat which clearly appears to be declining. However, the Southern European countries show growing reluctance to accept without reserves the wide role the US assigns to the Sixth Fleet and its bases in the Mediterranean.

A particular source of concern for Southern Europeans is represented by the US tendency to use its military assets in the Mediterranean for contingencies outside the NATO area. This attitude tends to generate contrasts and tensions as already happened, for instance, on the occasion of the US air raids against Lybia in 1986. As a matter of fact, the security concerns and interests of the Southern Region states regarding the out of area situation are far from coinciding with those of the US. The divergencies on the policies to pursue towards Lybia and the Palestinian question are typical cases in point.

A key issue, in this context, is the US basing in the Mediterranean. Washington has recently solved - after long negotiations - the delicate problem of its military installations in Spain and Greece. The agreements reached with both of these countries will probably have long-term beneficial effects for the US Mediterranean policy. Yet, Washington has to cope with the tendency of the Southern countries to impose increasingly greater restrictions on the use of the US facilities on their territories. They have all made it clear that the requests by Washington for a logistical support in out of area contingencies will be examined on a pragmatic case-by-case basis. In practice, this support is only likely to be granted if and when the host countries regard the US intervention as an effective means of protecting their own interests. This could be the case, for example, of a direct threat to their territories or to some vital economic interests they share with the US such as the protection of the sea lines of communication for oil supplies.

On the other hand, the US bases abroad are key elements of the burden-sharing issue, given the high economic costs of maintaining them. In the light of the growing limits placed on the use of its bases, Washington, under the pressure of Congress, could therefore, sooner or later, become convinced that their utility is not adequately proportionate to their costs and thus take the decision to reduce its military presence in the Mediterranean beyond the already substantial cuts recently announced.

Among the Southern European states there is a clear perception that some of their specific security concerns are unlikely to be met by NATO. This perception regards in particular the out of area threats whose importance is increasing. Consequently, they are seeking to develop some alternative options.

First, they are engaged in an effort to modify their military planning with the aim to provide their military structure with enhanced capabilities of facing out area contingencies. The most evident example on point is the creation by Italy of a rapid intervention force but even Spain and, to a lesser extent, Greece and Portugal are moving in the same direction. However, this effort runs up against difficulties because of the limited financial resources and the public's desire to see reductions in defense budgets.

Second, they are trying to develop an autonomous national strategy towards the areas and the countries relevant for their security.

Third, they are increasingly interested in promoting forms of cooperation with other European partners with similar interests at stake in the Mediterranean area. The emerging coalition between Italy, Spain and France centred on the problems of the Western Mediterranean appears to be especially promising.

Although these policies are pursued outside the context of NATO, they are regarded as complementary to rather than substitutes the cooperation within NATO. However, they can constitute a factor weakening the alliance to the extent that they complicate the relations with the US.

6. A European defense?

The European dimension of foreign policy in Southern Region countries has been acquiring a growing importance as a result both of the development of the European integration process and the search for a viable alternative to the cooperation within NATO. However, it is not clear to what extent they are actually willing and ready to support the objective of constructing a European pole of defense.

Two main connected factors contribute to make them cautious about this prospect: the interest in not disrupting the relationship with the US - a goal stressed especially by Italy and Portugal - and the concern about the possible acquisition by other European countries of hegemonic positions. Furthermore, there are different options regarding the most appropriate forum for working out and implementing an European cooperation policy in the field of security.

In the eighties, the most significant efforts were aimed at the so-called revitalization of the Western European Union. Yet, the results have been modest

because of the paralyzing disputes among the member states: the WEU still lacks definite competences and a solid organizational structure. During the recent crisis in the Gulf triggered by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as was the case previously during the Iran-Iraq war, the role of the WEU as the sole European forum competent for coordinating out of area military activities has been relaunched (a meeting of the chiefs of staff took place in the context of the WEU for the first time). Yet, even this reemerging attention for the WEU appears to be to a large extent linked with the contingent situation as has traditionally been the case in the history of the organization.

In the last few years the need for the strengthening of the WEU has been consistently voiced by France. This goal was for Paris complementary to that of consolidating the special relationship with Bonn and promoting the bilateral cooperation with other European states. According to Paris, the WEU had to become the central point of a network of bilateral as well as multilateral military cooperation agreements. Following the political change in the East and the German reunification France is committed to redefining some major aspects of its security policy including those regarding the European cooperation. However, the French government has confirmed its will to promote an enhanced role for the WEU.

Italy has recently proposed to assign the European Political Cooperation the current functions of the WEU, i.e. the absorption of the latter into the former. Such a proposal, supported also by the President of the EC Commission Delors, is in line with Italy's traditional preference for the EC as the most appropriate institution to try to develop a common European security policy. The EC appears to Italy as offering the most solid and proven institutional context for multilateral cooperation. A fundamental goal for Rome is to prevent the formation of restricted directorates - such as a Franco-German or a Franco-British one - able to marginalize the other European partners.

An intermediate solution for the shorter term would be to reinforce the role of the WEU while at the same time creating formal institutional links between it and the EC. Both Spain and Greece have declared themselves in favour of the gradual creation of a European pole of defense. Portugal, on the other hand, encourages the idea of the European pillar within NATO. Yet it looks favourably on discussion of security issues within the EPC.

Generally speaking, the Southern Region states will be active promoters or supporters of the design of an autonomous European security policy to the extent that this can affectively contribute to overcoming the deficiencies of both a purely national and a Nato-based approach to their own strategic concerns. Therefore, it will be of crucial importance that the European institutions prove to be able to develop an active policy towards the Southern Region.

7. Concluding remarks

The sweeping changes in the European political scene are having profound repercussions not only on the East-West relations but also on the intra-Western ones.

The Western institutional framework is facing the demanding task of adopting its structure and its internal distribution of roles and responsibilities to the new problems of the post-cold war era.

In recent years the Southern Region countries have demonstrated an enhanced capacity for active participation in the decision-making process of the Western institutions. The two general political goals they will probably pursue in the future will be on one hand the preservation of a stable framework of intra-Western cooperation, on the other hand the search for new institutional mechanisms able to effectively address the Southern Region security issues.

The internal reform undertaken by NATO is unlikely to result in the attribution of a greater weight to the security concerns of the Southern Region countries.

Furthermore, the evolution of the strategic environment and the arms control process in Europe push towards a further separation of the Southern and Continental Europe security. This trend, coupled with the growing difficulties encountered by the US maintaining its military engagement in Europe are making the Southern European countries increasingly doubtful of the ability of NATO to contribute to managing their security interests.

As a result, they will probably put a growing emphasis on the need for active European policies towards the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern areas. Their interest in promoting an enhancement of the EPC and the development of an autonomous European security policy appears to be fundamentally linked with such a goal.