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MEDITERRANEAN SECURITY: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS

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With the end of the Cold War, the importance of military factors affecting security has taken a back seat to <u>non</u>-military considerations pertaining to Western European security in the areas beyond the Mediterranean (i.e. North Africa and the Middle East). This has been reflected in the growing body of literature analyzing non-military factors affecting security and the increased attention given to these issues by Western and European security institutions.

This presentation aims to identify the cultural, political and economic factors affecting security in the Mediterranean area, and will consider their implications on policy.

Cultural Factors influence European security in that they may prompt fundamental ideological antagonisms which in turn give rise to an environment that is hostile and potentially aggressive toward the West (and vice versa).

(1) Since the Second World War, Western Europe has developed a "rationalist" culture which has led to the strengthening and enlargement of its democratic political institutions, a strong emphasis on the respect for human and civil rights, and the primacy of international solidarity with respect to nationalist concerns. In the area surrounding Western Europe, however, the end of the Cold War has been accompanied by the re-emergence or reinforcement of "romantic" trends dominated by ethnic, religious, or national values which generally lead to an adversarial identity.

These developments may have a negative impact on the cohesion and integration of Western Europe.

(2) Western Europe--and the West as a whole--is considered the primary antagonist of the identity sought in the Mediterranean area. The nationalistic position is that of traditional Third Worldism, that is, the West prevents or impedes the spread of modernity (by preventing or limiting the spread of economic, technological and scientific development). According to Islamists, on the other hand, modernity may only be reached within the framework of indigenous values and not through assimilation of Western culture: modernization through imitation of the West is a trap which can only lead to subordination.

Islamists are more radical in their rejection of the West than are nationalists. The latter perceive themselves to be on the fringe of what are essentially shared cultural values; their goal is to assume a more central position a culture that is perceived as universal. Islamists, however, do not believe that Western culture is universal and perceive their development as being necessarily in opposition to the West.

The rise of radical Islamism (though there are also major moderate or less radical movements) has intensified longstanding anti-Western sentiments in the regions south of the Mediterranean. The security implications of this trend include fundamental tension which hinders dialogue between Western countries and those of the Southern Mediterranean area.

(3) There has been an increase in immigration from the Mediterranean area (and from Eastern Europe) to Western Europe. Immigrants often form ethnic communities which resist integration into the European host culture. As this is occurring in a period of significant

demographic fragility in Europe (where the growth rate is virtually zero in a rapidly aging population), immigration is strongly perceived as a threat, and has led to intolerance and racism. This has resulted in restrictive legislation on immigrants and refugees, which is in sharp contrast to the "rationalist", democratic nature of European society and exacerbates the fundamental tension referred to earlier.

(4) These elements of tension are amplified by the mass media, particularly because of the one-way flow of messages (images transmitted are almost exclusively Western--and these are compounded by those of Western tourists). On one hand, mass media send "European" images across the Mediterranean, giving rise to distortions, conflicts, imitations, and anomie (e.g. French, Italian and Spanish coverage of the Gulf War which was received in the Maghreb); on the other, mass media bring Europeans "European" views of the Southern Mediterranean, particularly of the Islamist movements, which are generally stereotypical and negative, fuelling hostility and mistrust toward the region.

Thus the tension felt by the South with respect to the North is mutual. From a European point of view, the pressures of current cultural trends are putting democratic institutions to the test, and creating a perceived threat to the European way of life.

Political factors also contribute to hostility toward the West.

(1) Western Europe, as an integral part of the West, is allied with the so-called moderate Arab regimes (i.e. those which are cooperative at the international level). Thus it often finds itself involved in inter-Arab rivalries. This is less of an issue than it had been during the Cold war when such rivalries contributed to the East-West confrontation. What is more relevant today is that opposition groups (Islamist and others) within Arab countries see the West as supporting what are usually authoritarian and repressive regimes.

The situation is marked by contradictions. Should they gain power, the most extreme Islamists would form regimes which would be at least as repressive as the current ones, if not more so. In any case, it is certainly true that the West neglected the issue of democracy in Arab-Muslim countries, partly because of the pressures of the Cold War. In light of the preceding considerations of cultural factors contributing to tensions across the Mediterranean, it is clear that the West's failure to support unifying democratic elements in Arab-Muslim countries was a mistake.

"Democracy" is currently an important ingredient of European policies toward the countries south of the Mediterranean. This must be carefully addressed because it risks clashing with the current sensitivity about identity. In any case, the democratic ingredient of European policies is crucial, at least with respect to those regimes or groups which are, or which claim to be, close to the West.

(2) The West and Western Europe are involved in the two major crises under way to the south of the Mediterranean: the Arab-Israeli crisis and the Iraqi crisis. Their involvement is a source of a hostility toward the West which will persist as long as the crises remain unresolved and even afterward, as the resolution will favour some groups at the expense of others. Thus the management of these crises must be carried out so as to support those groups which are willing to cooperate with the West and which are open to democracy.

(3) The lack of international cooperation between the European and Arab worlds constitutes a negative political factor in trans-Mediterranean relations. The Cold War made such cooperation difficult; the end of the Cold War should encourage Western Europe, and particularly the European Community, to develop a policy of cooperation with the Arab world, and to avoid being confined to a marginal role of indirect support or of involvement

at the sub-regional level (Maghreb). Such a European initiative would not be a "duplication" within the Atlantic framework.

A significant impediment to the establishment of inter-regional cooperation between the European Union and the Arab world is the asymmetric level of institutionalization and cohesion of the two sides; the absence of a solid and articulated inter-Arab cooperation weakens the prospects for a successful policy of inter-regional cooperation.

Economic Factors affect European security in two main ways:

(1) The marked income disparity among most countries in the area and economic/social underdevelopment fuel opposition (particularly Islamist) to Arab regimes, thus increasing instability. International and bilateral cooperation has recently made more effort to address these problems, launching major adjustment and restructuring programmes. The European Community has established a new programme (the renewed Mediterranean policy). This programme, despite an increase in funding, remains a modest effort, considering EC interests in this region. It is weakened by the fact that member states hesitate to assign increased importance and resources to a common cooperation policy as opposed to national ones. The EC should play a greater and more autonomous role in supporting programmes and projects aimed at increasing employment in the short-medium term--an objective which is less important to the restructuring and adjustment programmes supported by the IMF and the World Bank.

(2) International economic cooperation, however, is limited by the severe disintegration and fragmentation of the regional economies and by the lack of cooperation between States with extremely unequal demographic and income distributions. The Arab-Israeli conflict constitutes a fundamental disruption of relations between the countries of the region.

This state of disintegration is a destabilizing factor and threat to West European interests. It results in market fluctuations and trade restrictions, weak infrastructures, threats to oil and other energy supplies, and the lack of mobility of goods and people (which contributes to migrations to Western Europe).

Progress in the current Arab-Israeli negotiations (end of the boycott, border openings, etc.) would have a very positive effect on international cooperation because it would restore market continuity. In any case, intra-regional cooperation and integration must also be increased. Attempts so far, including the Arab Maghreb Union, have been disappointing. Furthermore, the EC has never made serious efforts to make its cooperation policies contingent on progress in regional cooperation. As in the political arena, increased regional integration is necessary in the economic field if international cooperation is to be successful.