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SOME SUGGESTIONS ABOUT MESCO GOALS AND RULES**

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## WHY A MEDITERRANEAN STUDY COMMISSION? SOME SUGGESTIONS ABOUT MESCO GOALS AND RULES

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### **The Mediterranean Today**

The institution of a Mediterranean Study Commission (MeSCo) requires a definition of the Mediterranean area and a rationale for Mediterranean solidarity or identity. Why get together and who should get together?

These two questions are partly inter-related and the debate about them is long-standing.

Let me start with the last question: who should get together? For those, like the Egyptian economist Samir Amin, who advocates the "delinking"<sup>1</sup> of the Mediterranean region from the dominance of the great international capitalist powers, principally the US, in order to create a kind of co-prosperity sphere between Southern Europe and the Arab countries the Mediterranean sea, the countries which should get together are more or less those around the basin.

But this is a Mediterraneo-centric approach, that is, one which considers the Mediterranean area as its focus or center; another approach considers the Mediterranean basin as a frontier or a boundary towards which many internally cohesive areas gravitate. This second approach includes initiatives such as the following:

1. The Arab-European dialogue, which began between the European Community and the Arab League after the 1973-74 oil crisis;
2. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) in the Mediterranean), which originated as a proposal put forward by the Spanish and the Italian governments in September 1990, included the US, Russia (then the Soviet Union), Western Europe, the Arab countries on the Mediterranean and on the Gulf as well as Iran. Today the 1990 initiative is heralded by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and other international bodies.

In the few years which elapsed since the CSCM proposal, there has been a trend toward expanding the scope of the CSCM and changing the Mediterranean frontier.

- the East-West dimension within the Mediterranean has disappeared;
- Russia's leadership is now committed to taking the country westward and to establish firm links with the Group of Seven;
- Central Asia has emerged as a gray area which has to find its way between its Islamic background and the "westernization" it underwent within the USSR;
- the US interest in the Mediterranean area, as the southern flank of the Atlantic Alliance, is shifting increasingly eastward, to the Near East, where the US is committed to help solve the Arab-Israeli crisis, and to the Gulf, where its military presence after the Gulf war of

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<sup>1</sup>. Samir Amin, *Delinking. Towards a Polycentric World*, Zed Book Ltd, London & New Jersey, 1990.

1990-91 definitely increased and stabilized.

As a result of these changes, the frontier is today exclusively North-South and it stretches through what international security analysts refer to as the southern branch of a wider arc of crisis (the "new arc of crisis"), including in its eastern branch the areas east of Western Europe, from the Balkans to Russia--an area which goes well beyond the Mediterranean basin, very similar to the "big game" area envisioned by the Victorian promoters of the British Empire.

This leads to the question of whether we should enlarge the CSCM to include Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and if so, should we enlarge the notion and the membership of the Mediterranean Study Commission accordingly?

To answer this question, it is useful to return to a geographical notion of the Mediterranean basin. During the Cold War, as many other times in its history, the Mediterranean area was unified by a an overwhelming global conflict and by the American dominance. With the end of the Cold War, there has been a tendency toward fragmentation. Relevant strategic stakes and goals in relation to the new arc of crisis in the South and its Mediterranean branch are in flux. On one hand, there are trends, like unconventional proliferation and Islamism, which go beyond the Mediterranean and the new arc of crisis in the South; on the other hand, there are trends towards sub-regionalization and localization.

In the Arab countries I visited in order to prepare this session of the Mediterranean Study Commission, I perceived feelings that reflect a very divided Mediterranean: to put it very briefly, the Near East is focussing on peace negotiations, debating the possibility of establishing a regional economic cooperation and looking at the US as its essential interlocutor; in contrast, the Maghreb feels less involved in these negotiations and considers its main external problem as being related to reshaping or streamlining its relations with Europe and the European Union.

In all the Mediterranean Arab countries I visited, the European Union is regarded as impotent and egoistic. This is not to suggest that there are warmer feelings toward the US. But there is the acknowledgement of an American commitment (to bomb the Serbs and lift the arms embargo on Bosnia; to further the Arab-Isreali negotiations; to integrate migrants in the American society; etc.), whereas Europe seems totally absent, indifferent and sometime even hostile (though many Arab and American judgements are definitely unfair).

This general Arab feeling aside, The European role is perceived very differently in the Maghreb and in the Mashreq: for the Maghreb, the European Union remains the natural, unavoidable interlocutor; in the Near East the European Union is somehow regarded as a more distant and loose option. A similar feeling is growing in Turkey, but both Turkey and Egypt (and Italy)--as always at the juncture of different worlds--seem interested in keeping a fair balance between Western Europe, the US, Africa and the Near East.

To conclude this discussion, it seems to me that the main trend in the Mediterranean today is fragmentation, because of the absence of unifying factors--be they internal or external-- and because of the presence of trends working beyond the Mediterranean area proper (e.g. the new arc of crisis, unconventional proliferation, Islamism). For the time being, two main inter-regional arrangements seem to be emerging:

(i) a Middle Eastern area, probably heading towards the establishment of cooperative regional

- links, in association with a strong political and military American presence, and a strong economic European and Japanese assistance; Turkey tends to be part to this arrangement, politically, militarily and economically;
- (ii) in addition, there is a North African area (to which Egypt is equally part) which is seeking to shape closer economic (and, perhaps, political) ties with the European Union.

### **Questions About MeSCo Membership**

Now, to return to the question of who should participate in the Mediterranean Study Commission, I thought that the Commission should neither accommodate too many or too distant members, nor to limit itself to the Middle East or to the Maghreb. In the end, I felt that the simplistic geographic notion of Mediterranean had to be adopted. Consequently, I addressed invitations to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Palestinians, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy, France, Spain and Portugal.

This decision is based, first of all, on the wish to make the MeSCo a manageable, affordable and workable entity. It is also based, however, on several more substantive reasons:

Despite changes over time in the strategic environment and their implications for the international role of the Mediterranean, the area remains fundamentally unified by a deep cultural and ecological homogeneity. Though characterized by cultural and religious differences, the Mediterranean cannot be divided accordingly, because these differences spring from a very ancient shared cultural and ecological background.

Moreover, geographic proximity and a number of evident economic and financial complementarities are potentially factors for a strong synergy for economic development. This potential was not exploited in the crucial modernization stage in postwar Europe because of a set of political and ideological cleavages. Unless Islamism emerges as another such cleavage, the end of the Cold War and the settlement about Palestine should allow Mediterranean interdependence to start working and to yield dividends.

Finally, it is precisely because the Mediterranean is a frontier between changing, powerful forces and because the countries bordering the basin find themselves exposed to these changes and powers, that they are interested in developing forms of cooperation and transparency to provide as much prevention, stability and security as they can to their area. This is not to say, as advocated by the Mediterraneo-centric schools of thought, that their Mediterranean solidarity will precede their fundamental loyalties towards Europe or the Arab world or Islam, and so on. However, no Mediterranean country can sensibly ignore the fact that it has a Mediterranean dimension and that this dimension constitutes an important interface between cooperation and conflict.

### **Former Yugoslavia and Other Non-Mediterranean Countries**

Two points on membership still merit attention: what should we do with respect to the former Yugoslav countries bordering on the Adriatic sea? How should we account for external or distant countries with ties to the Mediterranean area, like Russia, the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and so on?

Apart from geography, Mr. Matvejevic's essay on the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup> reminds us that the Slav peoples on the Eastern side of the Adriatic sea feel no less Mediterranean than do Italians on the western side. Still, despite Muslim involvement in Bosnia, the present crisis in the former Yugoslavia is only remotely related to the set of security and cooperation issues that prevail in Mediterranean North-South relations. In a sense, there are elements of intra-European and East-West conflict in the former Yugoslavia that are totally absent from the Mediterranean stage. In any case, the on-going crisis and its unpredictability make it difficult to decide on the possible MeSCo membership of Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Albania.

The question remains open. My suggestion is that the next MeSCo Secretary, one of the member Institutes, or a non-Mediterranean scholar could address the question and report to next meeting.

As for non-Mediterranean countries and institutes, many would be interested in participating. But, once again, the risk is that the MeSCo could become unmanageable and financially unsustainable for the hosting institute. The solution I suggest is already clear from the structure of this first meeting of the Mediterranean Study Commission. The MeSCo should feel free to invite guest speakers and observers. This would not only be a way to meet requests from non-Mediterraneans entities to participate, but, most of all, it could be a way to account for the fact that Mediterranean destinies are influenced to a large extent by external factors. A closed club of Mediterranean institutes would clearly be a mistake.

### **Other Questions Related to Membership**

There are other questions related to membership. What types of institutes should be members of the MeSCo? The Italian International Affairs Institute (IAI) which initiated this exercise, is a private, non-profit, non-university institute of international relations, interested in international security and cooperation and strategic affairs. It is an independent association with the aim of carrying out research work and to make it available to decision makers in the government, political parties, the business world, and the military to contribute to policy making and to improve interaction and cross-fertilization among them. This kind of institution already exists in Southern European countries, from Portugal to Turkey, and in Israel. Though there are similar institutions in the Arab countries, those existing in the Arab countries are either part of universities or tied to governments.

In preparing the first MeSCo meeting, I did made my best to identify the most suitable institutes with the help of my colleagues in the troika. I may have made mistakes, for which I wish to apologize. These mistakes can be corrected by future MeSCo secretaries. I would, however, keep strictly to the above requirements because they will endow MeSCo with a distinctive identity and expertise. As a frequent participant in "Mediterranean" meetings, I am convinced that reference to the "Mediterranean" is almost invariably too general, and meetings become irrelevant and rhetorical. Consequently, sticking to a well defined kinds of institutions is crucial for Mesco's effectiveness.

Another requirement to preserve the viability of MeSCo is that no more than one institute

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<sup>2</sup>. Predrag Matvejevic, *Mediteranski Brevijar*, GZH, Zagreb, 1987.

should represent each member country. I have already received many complaints from countries in which there is a multiplicity of (often very distinguished) institutes. As MeSCo institutes are meant to be private, it is not easy to identify a "national" institute. Clearly this is a very difficult question, which should be left to the experience and diplomatic tact of the Secretary. My suggestion is that institutes which become MeSCo members should act as "national" representatives: they should not necessarily send their staff members to MeSCo meetings; rather they would be expected to identify and send participants from their country who have expertise in the research subjects and themes dealt with by the Commission.

The implementation of this proposal would be facilitated if members could send more than one participants. This in turn depends on funds available to hosting institutes, which are generally insufficient. In sum, it will be up to each member institute to find a sensible solution on this point.

### **MeSCo Goals**

I have three models in mind in order to help to define MeSCo's goals:

- the former IISS European Study Commission;
- the former East-West Conference of the European Directors of the Institutes of International Relations;
- the Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA).

In all of the above, there are aspects which may be relevant to MeSCo.

The European Study Commission had the task of giving Europeans a framework for discussing security questions in a non-Atlantic circle. Though it was a European "club", it was very much open to Americans and other guests. The Commission singled out issues that seemed important for Europeans to have their own debate on. It was devoted to encouraging the birth of a European security identity.

The East-West West Conference aimed at making encounters and discussions possible between European Institutes in the framework of the Cold War (which in the sixties was very cold). The official nature of the Eastern institutes made the exercise almost useless, until the emergence of the CSCE process allowed this club to work more freely and make its contribution to the overall process that brought Europe to the end of the Cold War and the signing of the Paris Charter.

TEPSA's task is to organize joint research among its member institutes (and other individuals from other institutes or universities) on subjects broadly relevant to European integration and Europe's external relations.

Borrowing from these experiences and taking Mediterranean circumstances into account, I think that the Mediterranean Study Commission should be a club of Mediterraneans--open to contributions from other sides--which should organize an annual meeting on issues relevant to Mediterranean cooperation and security. This exercise should foster a Mediterranean consciousness and, most of all, understanding, rather than a Mediterranean identity.

Consciousness and understanding should allow the MeSCo to reach another goal: to

contribute to any CSCE or CSCM-like process which may eventually start in the Mediterranean--perhaps even to contribute to its implementation.

One MeSCo feature which seems to me to be very important is its private nature. As an example of non-governmental cooperation -- cooperation at the level of civil societies-- it would seem more apt to foster democracy and dialogue than pressure on governments to adopt Western-like democratic institutions. The debate on cultural differences ought to pass through private institutions to be fruitful. The dialogue will never be the result of international conditionality. The MeSCo may do good work in this field.

As for joint research, it could be a very useful form of cooperation. If MeSCo stabilizes, it should be very attractive for Foundations and acquire the necessary authority and credibility to attract funding. This should become an important task for MeSCo's leadership. However, I do not believe that MeSCo will be able to reach the same level of activity as say, TEPSA in the short term. TEPSA activity in Western Europe is sustained by an intense institutional network and by an integrated political and economic environment which for the time being is non-existent in the Mediterranean. Consequently, I think that MeSCo must try to organize joint research, but should not be too ambitious; it should be very flexible and avoid making the mistake of dealing with problems of systemic coordination among Mediterranean institutes that cannot be solved at the moment.

But MeSCo should not be too pessimistic either. We have successful examples of research cooperation in the Mediterranean. For example, the Institute for International and Strategic Studies in Lisbon is organizing a research project among the Western Mediterranean institutes dealing with security in that area. In the past, the IAI and the Al-Ahram CPSS organized a number of successful joint research projects.

Two more important goals should be indicated for MeSCo: mutual information and institution-building. Exchanging information is a very difficult task, because very often institutes have scarce resources and are so committed to accomplishing their activities that they have no resources left to list and analyze their own activities. Also, institutes receive so many questionnaires that in order to fill all of them, they would have to devote one person to the job and not every institute can afford to do so. Nevertheless, the Secretary must put pressure on MeSCo members to send information about their activities. This is important in itself, but also because it would be the basis for setting up the appropriate agenda for the annual meeting. Issuing a newsletter, as IAI is doing, can be helpful.

Finally, MeSCo should be an incentive for the creation of new think tanks or the improvement of existing ones. Thanks to many training programmes funded by Foundations, governments and Western international institutions, like NATO and the European Community, Western institutes have hosted a good number of colleagues coming from Eastern European and Russian institutions in the last few years. Such a programme could be encouraged and managed by MeSCo and its member institutes.

### **MeSCo's Functioning and Continuity**

The way the Commission may work was already set out in the first issue of the "MeSCo

Newsletter".

The MeSCo should be managed by a Secretariat based at the institute responsible for organizing the annual meeting of the Commission. This responsibility should be assumed by a different institute each year. The host institute should cover the on-site expenses; each participating institute should cover the travel expenses of its representatives.

The main function of the secretariat should be to organize the annual meeting. Its primary objective should be to serve as a link between the member institutes in order to prepare an agenda for the annual meeting. The secretariat should also designate the paper writers for the annual meeting.

Thanks to the grant obtained from the Ford Foundation, I was able to travel and personally visit most of the institutes involved in the Commission. I believe that personal contact made by the Secretariat, whenever possible, is crucial to the success of the exercise.

The MeSCo secretary should be assisted by his/her predecessor and successor. This troika is designed to ensure continuity in the MeSCo. Whether the troika is sufficient for this purpose is something that the Rome meeting of the MeSCo institutes should carefully take into consideration. The rotation system among institutes is the most logical one. However, past experiences show that this may fail to provide continuity. In the case of TEPSA, for example, rotation had to be replaced by a permanent Secretariat in Bruxelles. But it seems to me that a permanent Secretariat for MeSCo is inappropriate. MeSCo was born to promote cooperation and exchanges and I think that rotation is an important element in this process. In conclusion, I think that this is an open issue and I hope the institutes' gathering in Rome will make constructive suggestions.

The Newsletter may work as an important factor in ensuring continuity (and, of course, information exchange). The IAI has published two issues (the second one is being distributed during the Rome meeting) and will publish a third issue to report on the first meeting of the Commission. Then we will stop. I think it is difficult, though not impossible to rotate the responsibility for publishing the newsletter, though it is not impossible. This is the last question we have to address at this meeting.

With this, I conclude my report and thank you all for coming and collaborating in the the MeSCo initiative.

## **Questions to be dealt with at the 1st MeSCo meeting and responses suggested by the outgoing Secretary**

### (1) Which countries should be members of MeSCo?

At present, it seems that the geographic notion of Mediterranean should be the criteria for membership: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Palestinians, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy, France, Spain and Portugal.

### (2) Should former Yugoslav countries bordering on the Adriatic sea be members of the MeSCo?

The next MeSCo Secretary, one of the member Institutes, or a non-Mediterranean scholar should address the question and report to next meeting.

### (3) Should external or distant countries with links to the Mediterranean, like Russia, the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and so on, be included in the MeSCo?

They should be invited as guest speakers and observers.

### (4) What types of institutes should be members of the MeSCo?

Preferred members should be private, non-profit, non-university institutes of international relations, interested in international security and cooperation and strategic affairs. They should be independent associations with the aim of carrying out research and making it available to decision makers in the government, political parties, the business world and the military in order to contribute to policy making and to improve inter-action and cross-fertilization among them.

### (5) How many institutes should represent each member country?

No more than one institute. Institutes becoming members of MeSCo should act as "national" representatives. They should not necessarily send their staff members to MeSCo meetings; rather they should send participants from their respective countries with expertise in the research subjects and themes dealt with by the Commission.

### (6) Should MeSCo organize joint research among its members?

MeSCo must try to organize joint research, but should be flexible and avoid making the mistake of dealing with problems of systemic coordination among Mediterranean institutes that cannot be solved at present.

### (7) How should continuity be provided to MeSCo?

No suggestion is provided by the Secretary.

### (8) Should the newsletter, if any, be rotated along with the Secretariat?

No suggestion is provided by the Secretary.