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**CONFLICT PREVENTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

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1. The Barcelona Declaration has established in November 1995 a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) which includes (a) the members of the EU; (b) two Mediterranean countries that are candidates to become members of the EU (Cyprus and Malta); (c) Israel; (d) Turkey; (e) the Palestinian National Authority; and (f) seven Mediterranean Arab countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and the Lebanon).

The Barcelona Declaration plans the creation of an "area of peace and stability". In establishing such area, common action to prevent conflicts appears of primary importance. The Declaration says that the Parties will:

a - consider practical steps to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as well as excessive accumulation of conventional arms;

b - refrain from developing military capacity beyond their legitimate defence requirements, at the same time reaffirming their resolve to achieve the same degree of security and mutual confidence with the lowest possible levels of troops and weaponry and adherence to CCW;

c - promote conditions likely to develop good-neighbourly relations among themselves and support processes aimed at stability, security, prosperity and regional and subregional cooperation;

d - consider any confidence- and security-building measures that could be taken between the Parties with a view to the creation of an 'area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean', including the long-term possibility of establishing a Euro-Mediterranean pact to that end.

In 1996, under the Italian and Irish EU Presidencies, the Senior Officials Committee, which conducts political consultations among the EMP member states, is working out a broad "Plan of Action" confirming the basic orientation of the EMP towards conflict prevention.

2. The "area of peace and stability" the EMP is pursuing belongs to the family which peace research studies use to refer to as "cooperative security" arrangements. Cooperative security is geared to secure peace and security (or, in the event, "stability") by increasing, strengthening and institutionalizing consensus rather than by force or coercion. From a conceptual point of view, cooperative security is preliminary to the implementation of collective security. The latter includes elements of legal, collective coercion to deter aggression and to counter and defeat aggression whenever it occurs.

There is no doubt that peace-enforcement is excluded from the tasks of the EMP area of peace and stability. Whether and to what extent the management of crises and conflicts would be feasible in the EMP circle, if preventive diplomacy failed to stop their eruption, remains to be

seen. What today the Euro-Mediterranean Partners agree upon is limited to conflict prevention in the medium-long range and to the possibility of establishing a minimum of common preventive diplomacy as to prevent crises from erupting and conflicts from becoming violent.

In conclusion, the EMP is a **cooperative security** arrangement aiming basically at **conflict prevention** in a broad sense.

3. What is the common ground of the EMP cooperative security framework? Maybe, singling out a common ground is the most new and problematic issue that has been tabled by the establishment of the EMP.

The EMP area of peace and stability looks like an area with a security common ground only loosely defined, somehow squeezed between two adjoining areas wherein security common grounds are much more firm or definite.

In both the area encompassed by the OSCE -- on the north of the Euro-Mediterranean framework -- and that envisaged by the Madrid-process multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) -- on the south of that same framework -- there are definite, though very different, nexuses between conflicts, risks and threats, on one hand, and national security perceptions, on the other hand.

This is not the case within the EMP. There are no violent conflicts between the two Northern and Southern halves of the Partnership and the outlook for such conflicts to emerge is practically nil. With the important exception of Greek-Turkish relations and the less important one of Libya, there are no political disputes and, whenever there are disputes, they are only very seldom perceived as direct contentious situations between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean countries. Northern and Southern perceptions of security are different and differently motivated. The Arab, Israeli and Turkish Partners perceive threats and have enemies that are not at all considered as such by the Europeans, though sometime may be regarded as risks by the latter (e.g.: the Israeli nuclear armament, Iran).

In a sense cultural and religious extremism is perceived from both sides as a risk or a threat, but evaluations differ substantially about what to do with political Islam and the boundaries between political-military violence and terrorism.

Europeans would like to receive from their southern Partners a commitment to stability and peace. Their southern Partners would like to obtain from the Europeans more stringent political support, as it is especially the case with the Arabs, with respect to domestic stability and international relations. The Europeans are reluctant to extend the kind of political support the Arabs would like to obtain, particularly in relation to domestic situations. As for international support, it is weak and ambiguous because of intra-European lack of cohesion and trans-Atlantic constraints. The southern Partners have the feelings that they may risk to trade stability and peace for nothing.

This situation has made the idea of a Pact of Stability very poorly applicable to the EMP, whereas it was rather successfully implemented within the CSCE/OSCE framework. While the

idea of a Pact related to economic relations (co-development, migration) is strongly wished by Southern Mediterranean countries (especially the maghreb countries), the very idea of a political or security Pact is hardly accepted in the trans-Mediterranean relations, particularly in the European relations with the Middle East.

In the CSCE Pact of Stability a number of Central European countries and the Baltic countries have traded their commitment to stability against EU commitment for them to be economically and politically integrated in the European alliances. This clear exchange cannot be envisaged in trans-Mediterranean relations.

4. This is not to say that there is no common ground in the Mediterranean. But there are limitations principally related to time-frames, scopes of action and the character of conflict prevention policies that can be conducted by the EU.

A first limitation concerns the scope of EU action in dealing with conflicts in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area. As it is known, there is an understanding among the Euro-Mediterranean Partners whereby the EMP's security policies will not intrude in the peace process of the Middle East. This means that -- at least in principle -- the EMP is not geared to act or to contribute to the management of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which remains from a multilateral point of view the task and the realm of the Working Group on ACRS.

Nonetheless, beside the major Arab-Israeli conflict there are other conflicts wherein a EMP mechanism of political cooperation and preventive diplomacy may act effectively and legitimately.

First, within the scope of the very Arab-Israeli conflict, there are areas wherein a EU action inevertheless feasible. In principle, the understanding referred to in the above is related to the Middle East process of conflict resolution and thus it doesn't exclude European interventions to prevent conflicts. Medium-long term prevention in the Middle East peace process is already operated by the Europeans by mean of their economic and technical cooperation and financial support. Short-term prevention cannot be excluded either. It may be feasible on the margin of the process, as it is exemplified by the mechanism set up after the last crisis in South Lebanon with the participation of France (a participation which might have been secured through the EU as well).

Beside these more reduced possibilities in the Near East (the Arab-Israeli conflict circle), in North Africa and elsewhere in the Mediterranean basin there are other conflicts where a concerted action or contribution by the EMP may be feasible. Much depends on intra-European cohesion, on Arab solidarity and trans-Atlantic harmony.

Second, as the North-South Mediterranean relationship is largely predicated on non-military factors, particularly on social, cultural and economic factors, there is a common ground which makes conflict prevention in the long-term largely feasible and fitting with the area requirements of security and stability.

In conclusion, there is a common ground for an EMP policy of conflict prevention, but the room for such scope is not immediately and easily available: it must be carefully searched and strengthened. It is principally related to social, cultural and economic factors; it seems more effective in the long- (as conflict prevention) than in the short-ter (as preventive diplomacy); it tends to have a marginal and case-by-case role with respect to the major Arab-Israeli conflict; it is constrained by the influence and the role of the US in the Mediterranean and the objective importance the US have from the point of view of all the Middle Eastern countries; it is affected by the degree of intra-European, inter-Arab and trans-Atlantic solidarity.

5. As already pointed out, conflict prevention can be taken into consideration from two different temporal perspectives: middle and long term and short term.

This distinction becomes more substantive if we refer to different levels or approaches or stages of conflict prevention: **systemic, structural and diplomatic conflict prevention** policies.

Structural policies for preventing conflicts are related to the introduction of institutions in the areas concerned -- in the event the EMP's framework of cooperative security. From this point of view the EMP in itself is a structural instrument geared to conflict prevention in the area, in particular this is the way the goal of instituting an area of free trade in the Mediterranean has to be understood. The instruments for political cooperation should be regarded for the time being as instruments of preventive diplomacy acting in the short term. But they could well turn into instruments of structural conflict prevention whenever they begun to solidify and acquire a more permanent status.

Systemic prevention of conflicts comes from the introduction of democratic institutions and pluralism for political and social consensus to be strengthened and human and minority rights to be recognized. The EMP devotes much of its attention to systemic changes. Contents and directions of systemic changes in the EMP circle, however, are far from reflecting a consensus between the Euro-Mediterranean Partners. The EMP aims at attaining common standard of democracy and pluralism, but simultaneously recognizes cultural diversity and suggests international dialogue for this diversity to be accomodated. This dialogue will not be an easy one. It can be anticipated that the introduction of systemic measures for preventing conflicts, though of strategic and central importance for long-term Mediterranean cooperation, will be very difficult.

A diplomatic approach to conflict prevention (or preventive diplomacy) is what the Barcelona Declaration envisages in its section more specifically devoted to the "area of peace and stability" and is actually the goal the Committee of Senior Officials is currently trying to pursue. During the negotiations of the Declaration there were significant dissents about the way this goal had to be identified. The formula agreed upon is very broad and cautious: the Declaration says that maybe, sometime ("a long-term possibility") there will be a kind of Mediterranean pact. This vagueness reflects actual political reluctance. As we have already pointed out, this perspective is not yet ripe from the point of view of a majority of the Arab countries (and recent developments in the Middle East may even diminish its plausibility). Other, more flexible, formulas are therefore being tried by the Senior Officials Committee.

7. Systemic and structural conflict prevention is a task the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is well equipped to pursue. Even if the Middle East peace process will be weakened or stopped by the events that caused the change of political leadership in Israel and by the changes deriving from the new leadership itself, the EMP structure of economic and social cooperation will not be entirely disrupted because it is predicated on a flexible model of EU-Partners relations (though it may result considerably less effective).

Building up an EMP capacity of preventive diplomacy will be more difficult and problematic. A clarification of the relationship between NATO and the European Defense and Security Identity will be a key factor to allow for the EMP security dimension to take off. A workable balance between monetary-economic and political-social solidarities within the Maastricht-like EU of the future will be another important factor.

For the time being, two tracks may be pursued: (a) the Plan of Action which is being worked out by the Senior Officials Committee, which would set up a basic mechanism for political consultation and early warning on the model of the OSCE Center for Conflict Prevention; and (b) the setting up, on a case-by-case basis (outside the umbrella of a Pact of Stability) of "round tables" related to individual conflicts, with a functional and sub-regional perspective.