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**THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE FUTURE SECURITY  
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MAGHREB**

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# THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE FUTURE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MAGHREB

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This paper aims at defining the European Union (EU) response in terms of conflict prevention within the security relationship with the Maghreb area. Security is understood in a narrow, military or military-related sense and refers to international relations. On the other hand, according to its usual notion, Maghreb is referred to as the area which includes Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. At times, however, Libya and Mauritania may also be taken into consideration.

It must be noted that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's (EMP) agenda as well as its geographic scope make it difficult to separate or distinguish sub-regional levels and related policy responses in the field of conflict prevention (as well as other fields). A "differentiation of circles" (i.e. the possibility of acting according to different sub-regional levels) was actually envisaged by the Draft Action Plan discussed by the High Officials in the talks that took place after Barcelona, but ultimately rejected in April 1997 at the second EMP ministerial meeting in Malta. For this reasons, a number of measures which are proposed in this paper with respect to the Maghreb countries must be understood in the wider Mediterranean framework provided by the EMP. On the other hand, it must be noted that the multi-bilateral, two-tracks structure of relations between the EU and Southern Mediterranean partners in the EMP allow for a large degree of flexibility and differentiation among sub-regions and countries with respect to specific policies and measures.

The paper identifies three main clusters of factors which determine the military dimension and help shaping perceptions in the EU-Maghreb security relationship. Such factors or their combinations give way to trends that may be relevant for the possible eruption of militarily-related tensions or conflict. For each of such trends, the paper tries to set out EU's possible response(s) and the instruments that may sustain the latter.

## **Military factors shaping the EU-Maghreb security relationship**

The first group of factors is related to the regional, i.e. intra-Maghreb, balance of power and the conflicts it gives way. Such a balance has always revolved around Algeria's attempts at asserting its egemony and centrality in the region as well as Libya's attempts towards some sort of "unionist" breakthrough in the Maghreb (intended to be instrumental in reviving pan-Arab Nasserism in the Mashreq). These two trends kept on fostering a set of changing constellations of regional alliances (encompassing Sahelian countries). The most important and enduring outcome of such regional struggle for power consists of the Western Sahara conflict, that was fostered by Algeria through the Polisario with the aim of preventing eventual Morocco's territorial and political aggrandizement from putting Algeria's regional centrality in question. The process of democratization set in motion in Algeria at the end of the 1980s

promoted a trend towards stability based on a scheme of regional cooperation, the Arab Maghreb Union. The Algerian domestic crisis and the sanctions imposed on Libya in the first part of the 1990s have discontinued such a process. Today's relative stability in intra-regional relations is due to the weakening of Algeria and Libya rather than the reinforcement of cooperative trends. As latent as it may be today, instability in the regional balance of power remains a powerful factor of conflict and violence in the region.

The second group of factors regards domestic evolutions. The necessity to face internal armed opposition and the growing political role the army is playing in such evolution, particularly in Algeria, Libya and Tunisia, increases the potential for rearmament and international political tension in the region.

The third group of factors is related to perceptions of threats coming from the North, i.e. from Western countries (and to some extent Russia). The absolute egemony left to the US and its allies by the collapse of the Soviet Union; the Gulf as well as War and other Western-led military interventions (as those in Northern Iraq and Somalia); the ambiguities in the rearrangement of Western military alliances; European attitudes in the Bosnian conflict and with respect to Muslim immigrants, all these factors have created a perception of anti-Muslim feelings in the North, entailing possible political interferences and military interventions by Western countries. What is feared is less an outright military conflict than political interdiction and intrusion by mean of military pressures. Whichever its precise content, these third group of factors contribute with the two other groups noted in the above to shape the military dimension of the EU-Maghreb security relationship.

### **Military-related issues in the EU-Maghreb relationship**

While none of these factors entails military threats whatsoever to the EU or its members, they represent as many military-related factors that affect EU security or EU security perceptions and the EU-Maghreb broad security relationship. In other words, the above-mentioned groups of factors, considered in isolation or in some combination, raise issues that are relevant to EU security and the EU-Maghreb security relationship. Three such issues are worth considering in this paper: (a) arms transfers; (b) Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation; (c) South-North perceptions and the related necessity to build transparency, confidence and cooperation for such perceptions to be duly corrected.

Arms transfers (as seen from the demand-side vantage point) are stirred from all three groups of factors. Most important are intra-regional relations and internal evolutions, however. Usual non-governmental sources - the SIPRI Yearbook and the IISS' Military Balance - provide slightly conflicting reports about levels of military expenditures in the region. Especially when compared to the Middle East, figures are not impressive. Recent analyses [Saferworld: 19] reveals that Algeria's procurement is focussing on arms which may be of use in internal operations.

Intra-regional and South-North relations seem mainly responsible for trends in the field of WMD proliferation. According to recent research work on proliferation in both WMD and delivery-means, the states in the Maghreb appear on the low side of the escalation-spectrum:

only Algeria and Libya are involved and are categorized as “states that possess or seek to acquire some or all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, together with their associated delivery systems, but do not possess the requisite domestic industrial base to undertake such effort with a high degree of autonomy” [Lesser, Tellis :36]. There is no doubt, however, that these two countries -and especially Libya- are part and parcel of the trend that is exposing the southern rim of Europe to strategic threats and political interdiction.

Perceptions of military and political threats from the North are associated mainly with the international environment that is stirring such very perceptions. (It must be noted that, while intra-regional relations and internal developments are factors which affects issues shaping the EU-Maghreb security relationship, perceptions related to threats from the North are all the same a factor which affects the level of armaments and proliferation and an issue in itself.)

### **Issues and instruments to prevent conflict**

A. ARMS TRANSFERS - Monitoring and eventually limiting arms transfers towards the Maghreb countries can be envisaged by the EU - as already seen - for two major reasons: (a) downgrading and containing intra-regional struggle for primacy and power and (b) limiting and preventing violence in domestic conflict, like that in Algeria. Timeframes and instruments in the two cases are different.

For intra-regional conflict to be contained and monitored, Maghreb states' compliance with the UN Register of Conventional Armaments (contemplating seven major categories of conventional arms and excluding WMD) would be a basic and important factor. With respect to the Maghreb states, such compliance appears very limited: Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia failed to return any information to the Register [Arms Control Reporter, 2, 1997]. Algeria and Libya also failed to comply with UN/A Resolution 50/70 D asking for figures on military expenditures. While an Arab justification for not complying with the Register is that it doesn't encompass WMD, thus creating a disparity with Israel, intra-regional conflict and, most recently, internal conflict in Algeria may be a more stringent reason for the weak record of the Maghrebi countries in this field.

Two EU responses can be envisaged with respect to arms transfers. First, the EMP provides a common engagement to comply with a set of basic international conventions on security, such as the UN Register. Commitments within the EMP should therefore be used by the EU diplomacy as to make Maghreb states to comply. Though the EMP per se is a kind of multilateral framework, sub-regional and bilateral channels within the EMP are not excluded at all. As a matter of fact, the EMP multilateral framework is predicated on a set of bilateral agreements between the EU and the varying South Mediterranean nations (all of them including a political dimension) that allow for addressing general question even with individual countries and without necessarily waiting for such all-EMP developments as the Charter or the Action Plan to be agreed upon by all partners.

Arms transfers monitoring could also be envisaged as a code of conduct (for example, on the basis of that enforced within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe-OSCE)

to be negotiated, even on a sub-regional basis, between the EU and the Maghreb countries (see beneath the section on perceptions vis-à-vis the North).

Second, on the supply-side -as recommended by the EuroMeSCo Joint Report- there could be limitations the EU member states could agree upon and enforce. In the framework of the European Political Cooperation and thus of the CFSP, seven (unbinding) conditions have been set out for an arms embargo to be established. The recent Saferworld's report on Algeria points out [27] that out of these seven conditions five of them seems to recur in the case of Algeria, thus making the case for an EU arms embargo on this country compelling.

While a Common position (less likely a Joint Action) could be adopted by the EU Council in relation to an arms embargo, a Common Declaration on the necessity to comply with the UN Register for Partnership relations to be upgraded could be of some help. It would be of no help in the case of Libya. Broadly speaking, the exclusion of Libya from the EMP is hardly allowing for any EU leverage or policy towards this country.

A related argument is that of restrictions on inhumane weapons. Engagement on such restrictions -e.g. the extension of the land-mines's export moratoria already adopted by a number of Mediterranean countries, like Malta, Italy, Greece, Spain, Jordan and Turkey- could be addressed in bilateral as well as multilateral relations within the EMP. In the Maghreb area, Libya has always complained about the impact and size of mined camps in its territory. Perhaps, this could be a way to start a dialogue with this country.

**WMD PROLIFERATION** - The level of Maghreb countries' compliance with international conventional regimes related to WMD is better than that related to conventional arms. As of December 31, 1996, Algeria didn't sign the CCW, while Morocco signed but did not ratify the Convention. The BWC has been signed but not ratified by Morocco and Tunisia. Otherwise, states are complying. Furthermore, all the Maghreb states are part to the NPT (with safeguards, with the exception of Algeria and Mauritania) and (with the exception of Libya) to the CTBT.

Again, the EMP provides the main framework and instrument for the Mediterranean region to come to comply with the main international cooperative regimes related to WMD. The EMP contemplates the establishment of a Zone Free of WMD (ZFWMD) as well vehicles conveying WMD explicitly.

While the first round of post-Barcelona negotiations in the Committee of Senior Officials has made clear that the establishment of a multifarious Mediterranean cooperative regime - let alone that of a ZFWMD - cannot be done unless there is a change in political conditions prevailing in the Arab-Israeli circle, the level of greater compliance with international WMD conventions in the Maghreb should encourage the EU to initiate talks whatsoever with these countries without necessarily waiting for changes in the Middle East. Political consultation on proliferation must be used by the EU as a monitoring device and a confidence-building measure in order to correct and hammering out perceptions which give way to proliferation agendas. In this sense a policy of inclusiveness should be carried out towards Libya -which remains the most unpredictable and thus dangerous proliferator in the region.

SECURITY PERCEPTIONS - The linkage connecting the Barcelona process to the Middle East peace process has prevented the establishment of confidence-building measures (CBMs) within the EMP, particularly those related to military matters. Nonetheless it remains true that, beside the South-South dimension, the EMP -unlike the Madrid process- includes a North-South security dimension which to a large extent may be regarded as separable with respect to the former. The North-South dimension concerns the web of post-Cold War strategic changes which are perceived by the South-Mediterranean countries (more broadly speaking, the Third World countries) as a possible threat to their independence, integrity and security. As we have already said, these perceptions are very diffuse in the Arab (and Muslim) countries, particularly as a consequence of the Gulf War, and other events which took place after the end of the Cold War. Such perceptions are maybe less intense in the whole of the Maghreb region, but cannot be overlooked at least as far as Algeria is concerned (while they are something more than perceptions in Libya). As the Maghreb area, as a matter of fact, remains somewhat aside with respect to the Middle East, tensions within the North-South dimension may be of secondary importance to EMP's Middle Eastern partners but find instead less than a deaf ear in the Maghreb.

As it is known, in pursuance of the Petersberg Declaration (June 1992) the Western European Union (WEU) is conducting a Dialogue with a limited group of South Mediterranean countries that, with respect to the Maghreb, includes Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia (not Libya). The dialogue consists of exchanges of views and information on developments in security and defence issues affecting the Mediterranean area, with a view to establishing transparency and upgrading confidence. This precursor CBM is broadly considered disappointing [de Lipkowski] because it failed to come to establish CBMs proper. The reasons it failed, however, are not related to the Dialogue in itself but to the fact that the EU members are unable and unwilling to give the WEU a proper status within the Union and, while pushing towards making the WEU more "operative", do prevent it from operating (as it was the case, first, in the Great Lakes and, then, in Albania [Silvestri]). It must also be noted that the modest interest of Southern partners in the WEU Mediterranean Dialogue is due definitely to the political vacuum in which the WEU is left by its members rather than by their poor interest or their mistrust in establishing common policies on military or military-related questions.

If the autonomy of the North-South dimension within the EMP is recognized and if one imagines that some wine is put in the empty bottle of the WEU and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), there is room for a dialogue geared at establishing a set of CBMs in the Western Mediterranean area similar to those established in the CSCE framework, or envisaged in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Multilateral Group or activated in the Partnership for Peace (PfP), though in the case of the Western Mediterranean emphases, directions and stringency could be different.

Drawing on CSCE experience, the following CBMs can be listed [Cremasco]: (a) exchange of data on military forces and on arms import and export (which would converge with the global-like obligations referred to in the above, e.g. the UN Register); (b) exchange of data on military exercise and information on movements of troops; exchange of information on hazardous incidents of military nature; (d) a set of joint and cooperative measures, as exchange of visits between members of the armed forces, contacts between military training and academic institutions and military units, participations of observers in military activities and tests of

weapons, joint seminars and conferences among members of the armed forces and/or in conjunction with non-military participants (so called “seminar diplomacy” [Tanner]); (e) naval CBMs; (f) establishment of "open skies" regimes or rules. While taking stock of the CSCE experience, the modulation of concrete cooperation in the region could be drawn from the experience of the PfP, in which a more military integrated and large alliance makes room for a number of activities that allow non-allied countries to cooperate in joint on-the-job activities.

Two specific points should be stressed in relation to the implementation of CBMs in the Maghreb. First, a way should be found to associate the Maghreb countries to the activities or the outcomes of the Torrejon Satellite Center of the WEU. Second, a form of transparency and association should also be found in relation to the multinational initiative of Eurofor and Euromarfor (as suggested by the EuroMeSCo Joint Report). The association of Maghrebi officers in the two above mentioned units could be provided under reciprocity, according to the formula that is adopted in the agreement between NATO and Russia.

Second, the application to the Maghreb or Mediterranean reality of these blueprints is limited because of a number of important political and strategic asymmetries, which are much less important or non-existent in the European context. In order for European-like cooperative model to be adapted to the complex and fragmented reality of the Mediterranean, a preliminary work could be in order with the aim of setting up a joint agenda and some broad guidelines before going into details and implementation. This is the suggestion made by Tanner by pointing out the necessity to prepare a tool box together (i.e. the North and the South of the Mediterranean). Such joint agenda would, first, clarify concepts (e.g., “legitimate security concerns”); second, set out negotiations principles; and, third, establish a set of codes of conduct related to central issues (like arms transfers, links between CBMs and arms control, military-civilian relations).

Pending incongruencies between these aims and the Union’s institutions as well as the reluctance of the Southern partners to engage officially in a straight military dialogue, attempts at common conceptualisation and work could be encouraged in the framework of the civil society, as for example, within the Mediterranean Academy for Diplomatic Studies in Malta (which conducts a kind of “seminar diplomacy” by training diplomats and military coming from both sides of the Mediterranean) and the EuroMeSCo network of Euro-Mediterranean public policy institutes devoted to the analysis of international relations and security (which in 1996-97 run two Working Groups on security with participants from both sides of the Mediterranean and came to publish the Joint Report quoted in the above).

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