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RE-SETTING EURO-MED SECURITY AGENDA

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A disappointing balance-sheet

In its three-years life the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) has duly progressed in implementing its agenda of economic cooperation. Less so in shaping out the varying aspects of the security cooperation envisaged by the first and third chapter of the Barcelona Declaration, i.e. “hard” and “soft” security respectively¹.

The balance sheet, after the second ministerial meeting in Malta (15-16 April 1997) and the ad hoc ministerial meeting held in Palermo (4-5 June 1998), is somehow disappointing. Cooperation in the field of soft security didn't see any significant progress. As for hard security, only few CBMs have been approved. At the meeting of Palermo, the Presidency's concluding remarks point out the intention of the Parties to pursue talks on the Charter -the instrument that is meant to regulate security relations- but no significant change in the negative or reluctant Southern attitudes towards the approval of such instrument seems really in sight.

Seemingly, the factor that hinders progresses in the EMP's “area of peace and stability” is the standstill in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). The connection was very clear and obvious at the time of the Malta ministerial meeting. Though it is out of question that a success in the MEPP would allow the EMP to proceed towards some more or less significant implementation of its “area of peace and stability”, it must be pointed out that MEPP standstill is but a proximate cause of EMP difficulties, notably in relation to “hard security” cooperation. In fact, there are structural causes which hinder EMP's implementation even beyond the fact that a final resolution of the conflict in the Middle East is lagging behind.

This paper tries to list out such structural causes so as to come to some suggestions aimed at making the EMP's search for security cooperation and cooperative security more achievable than it looks today.

Obstacles to security cooperation in the EMP

The EMP's ambition to establish an “area of peace and stability” predicated on cooperation is exposed to a number of challenges of strategic as well as political and institutional character.

From a strategic point of view, the “Mediterranean” area is fragmented in a number of diverse disputes and conflicts which are only loosely linked to one another or are not linked at all. On the other hand, it doesn't make sense to talk about a “Mediterranean” Islamism or a “Mediterranean” proliferation. Furthermore, South-South

¹ Hard security contemplates cooperation in a number of political, military and military-related fields aiming at preventing conflict, establishing confidence-building measures (CBMs), limiting and controlling conventional armaments as well as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and inhumane weapons. Soft security refers to cooperation in the struggle against terrorism, international organized criminality, drug trafficking, and illegal migration

threats come from a range of countries which goes beyond the area contemplated by the EMP (e.g. threats coming from Iran and Iraq). With respect to this fragmented reality, the multilateral cooperative security scheme put forward by the EMP may look incongruous.

In a political perspective, it must be pointed out that for the Arab countries the EMP is primarily an instrument geared to upgrading their political and, most of all, economic relations with the European Union. They don't conceive of the EMP as a tool for solving the most important outstanding disputes in the area, like the Arab-Israeli conflict or the Western Sahara issue. This limitation is embedded in the Barcelona Declaration, which states that the EMP as a security initiative "is not intended to replace the other activities or initiatives undertaken in the interest of the peace" in the area. Finally, there are institutional challenges to EMP's congruity with Mediterranean security: do EMP institutions fit with its security agenda?

The first such challenge concerns the EU-centric character of the EMP. The EMP has not been endowed with its own secretariat. It is the Commission that acts as the *de facto* secretariat of the EMP. Besides, the Senior Official Committee is chaired by the six-month revolving EU Presidency. Such arrangements exacerbate the sense of estrangement of the Southern Partners with respect to the EMP by confirming that the latter is fitting less with their security than with that of the EU.

Another crucial institutional challenge concerns less the EMP than EU institutional capacities. The EU is not regarded by its Southern Mediterranean Partners like a credible political and military power. The EU is perceived mostly as a "civilian power", with no reasons and means to get involved in "hard" security policies in the area. The Southern Partners are fully aware of the weakness of the Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) as well as the weakness and ambiguities of the role the Western European Union (WEU) in securing a military arm to the Union. Political power is still residing in the European national capitals. As for military power, it is shared between the European capitals, the United States and NATO.

All in all, the entire politico-military organization of the West is a state of flux. In such a state of flux, however, the new role of NATO, the multinational forces (like Eurofor or ISFOR) and the *ad hoc* coalitions for managing crises internationally (like in Albania or Northern Iraq) remain more definite and clear than the role of the Union and the defense and security identity it aspires to.

Re-Setting Euro-Med Security Agenda

There is no doubt that, in initiating the EMP, the EU has intended to make a heavy political investment in the security partnership. This wish stems from two factors. One historical and cultural factor is the European familiarity with and trust into the CSCE process. The second factor is the EU need to promote its CFSP and its defense and security identity as well as its political cohesion (in front of its outgrowing Eastern relations).

Promoting a cooperative security scheme dealing with "hard security" issues in the Mediterranean for the sake of reinforcing the CFSP and strengthening EU cohesion is a very good and legitimate goal to be pursued. It seems clear, however, that for the time being political conditions are not as ripe as to make such functional relationship to work. Consequently, while EU's EMP agenda doesn't need to be changed for the future, it needs however to be re-set for the time being.

How should the EU re-set its EMP agenda so as to make it more fitting with real political conditions and, perhaps, more successful? In the following five responses are suggested: soft security predicated on a firmer conception of comprehensive security; conflict prevention; sub-regional articulations; enhanced institutionalization of the EMP with respect to the CFSP; institutional re-balancing in the EMP between EU and non-EU components.

Soft security in a comprehensive security framework - The earlier European thinking about Mediterranean security is basically predicated on the importance of non-military factors of security in the area as well as the achievement of “stability”, through the notion of “comprehensive security”.

While there is no doubt that in the longer term and in a wider international context of security cooperation arms control and anti-proliferation policies have to be pursued, in a shorter-medium term perspective EU security interests are better reflected by its earlier conception rather than the ambitious chapter on the “area of peace and stability”.

As a consequence, in the implementation of the EMP, priority should be given to cooperation in the fields of socio-economic development and soft security. In this sense priority should be given to the achievement of what have been termed “Partnership-Building Measures” in the statement of the British EU President at the end of the ad hoc ministerial meeting in Palermo.

Developing this cooperation is not easier than developing “hard” security cooperation. In fact, interests are uneven and unevenly defined between the North and South of the Mediterranean. They entail thorny questions, as for example in regard to terrorism or migration. The point made here is that, though interests differ strongly, there are strong interests on both sides of the basin to deal with soft security-related fields. This may bring about the cooperation in the field of security the Partners proved unable to promote so far by concentrating on “hard” security.

Conflict prevention - The EMP was not established to act as a conflict resolution instrument. Since its beginning and by its very concept, it is directed to act as an instrument of conflict prevention. This is the substantive meaning of the clause of the Declaration stating that the EMP initiative “is not intended to replace the other activities or initiatives undertaken in the interest of the peace” in the area.

In the talks held by the Senior Officials subsequent to the inception of the Declaration, this focus has been somewhat neglected. On the contrary, it should be given priority.

True, the MEPP standstill and other unsolved conflicts in the area will not help easing the work of the EMP, even if the latter would leave aside conflict resolution and emphasize conflict prevention, instead. In any case, the medium-longer term learning effects and advantages of a working political dialogue on conflict prevention cannot be overlooked. In the end, the cornerstone of a cooperative security scheme, like the one the EMP would like to achieve, is a good capacity of conflict prevention, made possible, in turn, by a good mechanism of political dialogue.

Sub-regional articulations - Beside the necessity to move more explicitly towards Partnership-Building Measures (thus de-emphasizing the search for operational and structural CBMs), Mr. Cook’s concluding remarks in Palermo recognize the need for some sub-regional articulation in the implementation of the EMP. A sub-regional approach could fit well with real political conditions in the EMP area, as it would account for the fragmented nature of Mediterranean relations. Most of all, it would account for

the substance of the current situation, which concentrates on two separated key-crises: Algeria and the standstill in the MEPP, respectively in the Maghreb and the Mashreq.

Consolidating EMP's role in the CFSP framework - The EU-centric character of the EMP should be modified by giving the two EMP institutional Committees more independence from the EU and Commission structures. The EMP should have a minimum of autonomy in regard to secretariat and Presidency.

On the other hand, while the Europeans cannot make up for the inherent weakness of the CFSP as it is regulated by the Amsterdam Treaty, they are certainly not prevented from improving EMP's definition in terms of the existing CFSP. The definition of the EMP as a "common strategy" or a "joint action" would make the management of security cooperation easier and would reinforce the whole of the EMP.