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**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
EURO-MED CONFLICT PREVENTION CENTRE**

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Paper prepared for the Working Group on the Euro-Med Charter for Peace and Stability
October 1999

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of conflict prevention with a specific emphasis on conflict prevention at a regional level (the Euro-Mediterranean area) in post-Cold War relations. Despite the uncertainties that accompany any conflict prevention measure, it is always somewhat possible to define in advance a general strategy. This study offers a set of clearly defined rules, principles, and mechanisms that form the basis of a strategic planning doctrine that can be applied whenever such crisis situations emerge. The research project clarifies the distinction between the immediate causes and the underlying causes of any particular crisis. It also spells out the short, medium and long-term phases of setting up such a Centre that include creating a Euro-Mediterranean Maritime crisis information and early warning network and agency (EMMA) and also investigating the feasibility of setting up a Euro-Mediterranean Maritime Coastguard (EMMC). The study concludes by articulating clearly what the objectives and functions of a Euro-Med Conflict Prevention Centre (EMCPC) will be given developments taking place in the European Union's common and foreign and security policy and the more general geo-strategic changes taking place across the Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the concept of conflict prevention with a specific emphasis on conflict prevention at a regional level (the Euro-Mediterranean area) in post-Cold War relations. Despite the uncertainties that accompany any conflict prevention measure, it is always somewhat possible to define in advance a general strategy. This study offers a set of clearly defined rules, principles, and mechanisms that form the basis of a strategic planning doctrine that can be applied whenever such crisis situations emerge.

Since the launching of the Barcelona Process in November 1995 the twenty-seven Foreign Ministers agreed on the need to develop and sustain Partnership Building Measures. While recognising the constraints that currently exist, a commitment was also made to focus on the concept of global stability and the need to develop common perceptions of the factors that contribute to it.*¹

The Annex to the Chairman's Formal Conclusions at the Third Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministerial meeting in Stuttgart in April 1999 provide a specific framework for elaborating a Euro-Med Charter for Peace and Stability for the first time. The guidelines emphasise that the Charter will serve as a functional instrument for the implementation of the principles of the Barcelona Declaration.*²

The Annex stipulates that the establishment of an enhanced political dialogue, in appropriate institutional framework and on adequate levels, will have priority. It is also stated that the dispositions regarding partnership-building measures, good neighbourly relations, sub-regional co-operation and preventive diplomacy will be developed in an evolutionary way and progressively strengthened. It is within this context that the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Conflict Prevention Centre (EMCPC) should take place. The primary function of the Centre will be to enhance political dialogue in order to prevent tensions and crises as outlined in the annex. This will include establishing specific arrangements for conflict prevention and elaborating upon partnership building measures that promote crisis prevention.

The Guidelines for Elaborating a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability already spell out the parameters within which the modus operandi of a Euro-Mediterranean conflict prevention Centre can be set up. These include: encouraging consultations between countries to establish structures for crisis prevention meetings, developing procedures of clarification, mediation and conciliation for settling disputes between parties by peaceful means of their own choice, encouraging judicial settlement of differences and disputes, acceding and adhering to appropriate international conventions, and setting up a structure of workshops that identify root causes of instability and tension.

THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT PREVENTION

The first step that needs to be taken prior to the setting up of a Euro-Med Conflict Prevention Centre (EMCPC) is to identify the circumstances in which effective action could be considered and the means most suited to a given situation, in order to prevent a conflict breaking out or escalating. The concept does not of course presume that a conflict will necessarily break out.

An operational definition of prevention means intervening at the right moment to prevent social, ethnic and political tensions from developing into violent conflict. In practice this means pressuring a state to start negotiating with the relevant groups or communities concerned and to introduce the structural reforms needed to defuse the crises.

There is no doubt that this is a demanding task. Adequate resources are required to identify and monitor inequalities and tensions between different linguistic or ethnic communities in addition to the analytical capacity to pinpoint the causes and potential development of the situation. A particular effort must be made to ensure that the analysis, diagnosis and recommendations for action remain unbiased and objective.

Conflict prevention therefore consists of concerted actions whose aim is to deter, resolve and/or halt disputes before they erupt, that is to say before any escalation of internal or external violence occurs.^{*3}

Conflict prevention requires accurate knowledge, a precise assessment of the problem and 'mobilization', which are complex in organising due to the varied nature of interethnic conflicts. It is therefore essential to be able to distinguish symptoms of

instability as a set of distinctive preliminary signs such as repressive measures, the radicalization of political rhetoric or excessive arms purchases.

The difficulty in distinguishing the possible variables that could lead to a conflict breaking out hampers decisions on the measures to be taken. Conflicts often evolve in a manner that often contradicts predictions. Certain preventive measures sometimes have the opposite effect to that expected. This is quite often due to the fact that an incorrect interpretation of the aim of an external intervention occurs.

It is clear that more than one preventive measure can be adopted in any given situation and that what may at first seem the most appropriate or have proved effective in other instances may prove unsuited to a given situation in practice. On the other hand, the need to adapt to each specific case does not imply that having a set of clearly defined rules, principles and mechanisms is an invalid approach.

Despite the uncertainties that accompany any conflict prevention measure, it is always somewhat possible to define in advance a general strategy for identifying the causes as well as the means to be employed in any intervention. A first step in this direction is to define clearly the objective of intervention. Conflicts are a fact of life, due to the combative nature of our species. A conflict free society is unimaginable. The challenge is to find peaceful solutions instead of remaining neutral while conflicts are resolved.*⁴

Two preliminary questions that also need to be addressed are how can conflicts be prevented by extraregional actors and how can a state or international organisation make decisions that will defuse tensions before the outbreak of violence?

A basic problem with conflict prevention is that international relations until recently have been governed by the fundamental principle of non-interference by individual states or by the international community in any country's internal affairs. Since the League of Nations was created in 1919 and some would argue even since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, sovereignty has been an essential part of the law by which countries conduct their relations with each other. As this principle is enshrined in the UN Charter, bilateral negotiation has been the sole possibility open to a state or international organisation wishing to act inside another state.

NATO's war in Kosovo was the first direct challenge by an alliance of serious countries to the internal untouchability of dictators. Although NATO accepted that Kosovo was part of the sovereign country labelled Yugoslavia, it was not prepared to allow Mr. Milosevic carry out his campaign of ethnic cleansing.*⁵

One must therefore ask whether the recent decision by the international community to intervene within the borders of a sovereign country creates a more conducive atmosphere in contemporary international relations for the establishment of a conflict prevention centre in the Mediterranean?

ACHILLES HEEL OF CONFLICT PREVENTION

Overcoming problems associated with co-ordination are important, but they will add up to nothing if not accompanied by political will. The problem with the concept of conflict prevention is that it raises as many ambiguities as it seeks to resolve. The prevention of conflicts should not be confused with the management of conflicts, during the stage of the outbreak of hostilities and armed confrontation and the resolution of conflicts following the cessation of hostilities.

Political choice is inherent in conflict prevention – it often implies adopting a political position, which excludes the idea of political neutrality: there can never actually be truly neutral mediation between parties as numerous post-Cold War conflicts have demonstrated.

Political will is therefore absolutely crucial in conflict prevention. Its absence can often be attributed to a lack of means, too high costs or the lack of vital interests. In any case far from being an abstract mechanism, conflict prevention is a reflection of the consequences of the actions of government. The failure of conflict prevention measures often results from the absence of common perceptions, the primacy of special political and economic interests and insufficient political will as it does from the inadequacy of available conflict prevention mechanisms. Given the heterogeneous make-up of the Mediterranean area, specific attention needs to be dedicated this point.

The decision to act quite often does not result from a direct attack on a state's vital interests (territorial integrity, economic interests) and not even from the first signs of a potential conflict, but rather from the perception of a momentum that is contrary to the interests of international or regional stability.

It is also clear that the psychological and financial costs of taking no action, even if they are difficult to quantify, are much higher in the long run.

The traditional approach of the concept of prevention which only covers diplomatic mediation, is limited in that it does not take into account all the various political options which include the option of using force. In contrast, an approach that is too all embracing runs the risk of becoming entangled with a state's overall foreign and security policy.

Some observers argue that the role of conflict prevention should not be given too high a priority for a number of reasons. These include the fact that there is an absence of a major risk of destabilisation at the international level, the sometimes hypothetical nature of predictions that a conflict will break out, non-interference in internal affairs, and constraints imposed by reduced defence budgets.

It is also a fact that prevention is a daunting political task for any country or international organisation to undertake. Prevention means intervening before there are many casualties, hence before public awareness of the problem takes place. By definition successful prevention means that nothing happens which means that there will be no public opinion and no political benefits to be derived from success.*⁶

OBJECTIVE OF THE EURO-MED CONFLICT PREVENTION CENTRE

The main objective of the Euro-Mediterranean Conflict Prevention Centre is to nurture a political, economic and cultural dialogue amongst Euro-Mediterranean partner countries. A Euro-Mediterranean conflict prevention will therefore have to focus on intensifying sub-regional co-operation in the Maghreb and the Mashreq if it is to contend effectively against security challenges across the Mediterranean area.

When setting up a conflict prevention centre it is worth considering two prerequisites. The first stems from the fact that conflicts are multidimensional in nature. The second is that it is in the interest of the international community jointly to solve conflicts and overcome bureaucratic obstacles through the creation of a single conceptual and institutional framework.^{*7}

The conflict prevention mechanism that should be adopted needs to be specifically designed to tackle existing and potential risks and threats. Such contingency plans should focus on developing crisis-management principles and procedures for the entire Mediterranean area.^{*8}

A concept that should be considered is that of creating flexible forces that can be deployed in each security eventuality that emerges. In order for this to become operational multilateral agreements on intelligence exchange and air space surveillance, and substantial investments in facilities for the reception and sustaining of peace-enforcing and peace-keeping units, needs to occur. Sensitive regional defence issues should be tackled at a later date.

One example of a type of conflict prevention force that can already be introduced at this point in the partnership process is that of investigating the feasibility of setting up an early warning communications network across the Euro-Mediterranean area. At the moment there are no elaborate mechanisms to contend with security crises such as an accidental collision at sea between transport tankers crossing through the choke points such as the Straits of Sicily, or the alarming rate of degradation which is currently taking place in the environmental sector. One must also mention the proliferation of drug consignments which are reaching ever deeper into the civil societies of the Mediterranean, and the accentuation of illegal migratory flows from south to north which risks destabilising the legal structures of the state.

A concerted effort should be made to immediately take incremental steps towards setting up an information mechanism that can assess the significance of such security issues and their likely impact on Euro-Mediterranean relations in the near future. Once this has been realised the co-operative maritime security network can be instructed to draw up policy positions on security issues that are regarded as the most serious.

Ideally, one should also investigate the feasibility of setting up a Euro-Mediterranean Maritime Agency (EMMA) that would be mandated to co-ordinate the co-operative security network with objectives similar to those carried out by a coastguard. The EMMA should initially carry out stop and search exercises in two principal areas: maritime safety

and maritime pollution. At a later stage it could also include monitoring other aspects of security that include narcotics trafficking and the transport of illegal migrants.

Such an early warning mechanism should be open to any of the Euro-Mediterranean partner states that wish to participate. In order to ensure that such a security model can become operational in the shortest period possible, the EMMA should consist of sectoral types of soft security co-operation.

Any two or more EMP members can start co-operating in specific sectors, such as that pertaining to maritime safety without having to wait until all partners are ready. This will enable the EMMA to evolve along sub-regional lines before it becomes feasible to establish a fully-fledged Euro-Mediterranean Coastguard at a later date.

Areas where co-operation can be strengthened include conducting simulation exercises of oil spills, ensuring that international standards are observed during the cleaning of oil tankers, and monitoring the activities of non-Mediterranean fishing boats that are operating in the Mediterranean with a particular emphasis on over-fishing.

At a later stage the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership member states should investigate the feasibility of setting up a Euro-Mediterranean Maritime Coastguard (EMMC). The EMMC would be mandated to carry out stop and search exercises in four principal areas: maritime safety, maritime pollution, narcotics trafficking, and the transport of illegal migrants. Such an early warning and crisis prevention mechanism should be introduced in accordance with the principle of consent and open to any of the Euro-Mediterranean partner states that wish to participate in such a flexible soft security arrangement. In order to ensure that such a security model can become operational in the shortest period possible, the EMMC should consist of sectoral types of soft security co-operation.

For example, any two or more EMP members can formulate co-operative alliances in specific sectors, such as that pertaining to narcotics trafficking without having to wait until all partners are in a position to introduce such measures.

In addition to strengthening political and security channels of communication, the establishment of such a Euro-Mediterranean early warning and conflict prevention network will assist in cultivating more intense crisis management mechanisms in an area where these are lacking. In order to ensure that such a flexible security arrangement moves beyond the conceptual stage in the shortest time-frame possible, its primary mandate may be limited to the following codes of conduct: fact-finding and consultation missions, inspection and monitoring delegations. Such traditional rules of engagement may also be supplemented by operations that include the facilitation of humanitarian relief particularly in times of natural disasters.

At a later stage, situation centres may be set up around the Mediterranean to monitor activities under this mandate.*⁹ Consideration should also be given to opening the doors of the maritime security arrangement of EuroMarfor to its southern Mediterranean neighbours (at least offer observer status in the short-term). This will help dispel the negative perceptions that have been generated since the establishment of this maritime

security force. Once the EMCPC is operational this force can become the actual confidence building enforcer of EMMA.

Arriving at such a threshold will ensure that elaborate forms of confidence building and crisis prevention measures that seek to further advance regional disarmament as spelt out in the guidelines of the Charter for Peace and Stability will be functional. The introduction of a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability will also assist in creating a climate where the partner countries can develop command and control mechanisms to intervene as early as possible in crisis situations. Acting only after an aggressor has acquired territory or access to natural resources is to force the unwelcome choice between a massive military response and a major strategic debacle. The later the international community and security organisations intervene, the larger the cost and the less chance to restore stability.

Conflict prevention should be regarded as a series of political options ranging from the non-coercive to coercive measures – diplomatic, political, economic, military instruments appropriate to the evolution of a dispute before it erupts into conflict in the spirit of Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations.** (Article 33, para.1 of Chapter VI (Pacific Settlement of Disputes) of the Charter of the United Nations stipulates that ‘The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their choice).^{*10}

FUNCTIONS OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONFLICT PREVENTION CENTRE

The Euro-Mediterranean conflict prevention centre should be based on Article VIII of the United Nations Charter. This calls for the creation of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies, and their activities are consistent with the purposes of the UN.^{*11}

The initial objectives of the conflict prevention centre should focus on the following: the formulation of principles and codes of conduct to shape the relations between participating states. These principles would include those of the Barcelona Declaration and therefore be similar to the principles found in the Helsinki Final Act. These include:

- Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty;
- Avoidance of threat or the use of force;
- Inviolability of frontiers;
- Territorial integrity of states;
- Peaceful settlement of disputes;
- Non-intervention in internal affairs;
- Respect for fundamental rights and fundamental freedom, including the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion and belief;
- Equal rights and self-determination of peoples;

- Co-operation among states;
- Fight against terrorism, organised crime and drugs;
- Fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law.

Once the conflict prevention centre is fully operational a more intense set of objectives should be undertaken. These include:

- Monitoring political, military, and economic matters of interest to countries and the Euro-Med Partnership process itself;
- Supervising and operating communications among focal points which have already been established as a CBM;
- Maintaining and updating background information for crisis prevention and management;
- Being prepared to provide facilities in case a contingency staff is set up with respect to a given crisis or conflict;
- Supporting briefings to the public and private bodies;
- Providing a continuous flow of information to members according to mandates;
- Providing information to media

At this stage a decision will have to be taken on what the scope of instruments will be at the disposal of the Centre. These would range from fact-finding and observer missions, diplomatic and economic forms of pressure and the deployment of troops. The introduction of economic and diplomatic sanctions can be supplemented by the use of force if there is an escalation of violence.^{*12}

A distinction of “soft” and “hard” types of measures needs to be conducted in order to ensure that the application of such measures corresponds to the types of disputes to which they are being applied. A basic formula that can be adopted is one in which non-coercive strategies are adopted in the early stages of a dispute whereas coercive strategies are applied when hostilities have escalated. A short, medium, and long-term based strategy is appropriate irrespective of the intensity of the dispute. Particular attention needs to be given to long-term implications if any action taken is to be regarded as credible.

In order for a conflict prevention mechanism to be effective it is also important to be able to distinguish between the immediate causes and the underlying causes of any particular crisis. An adequate conflict prevention strategy presupposes an ability to identify the immediate internal causes of the dispute which can be classified in four categories: structural (weakness of the state’s authority, ethno-geographic distribution); political (the nature of the political system, interethnic relations, elites); economic and social (discrimination); and cultural (cultural rights and mutual perceptions).^{*13}

Attention must then be directed towards the underlying causes (historical memory and perceptions, relational models) that form the fertile ground in which the immediate causes flourish. Analysis of these causes will make it possible to define the means to be applied in a conflict resolution approach.

When it comes to time-scales – whereas the immediate causes can be tackled in the short-term, the underlying causes call for more long-term measures. Yet both should start together in order not to undermine medium to long-term preventive measures.

When it comes to the internal and external dynamics of a crisis situation – a decision needs to be taken as to whether they should be addressed together or separately? Even though it will ultimately depend on the willingness of the indigenous parties to find a lasting solution to crises as they emerge, a comprehensive solution calls for an approach that combines both the internal and the external dimensions of a crisis. In other words, conflict prevention measures should be regional in nature as any internal conflict will inevitably have a regional dimension and implications.

The CPC should also be in a position to put forward proposals for the further elaboration of Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), and other security-related issues of arms control, and in particular the proliferation in the Euro-Mediterranean area of weapons of mass destruction and long-range ballistic missiles.^{*14}

Arms control should be regarded as including not only arms reductions or disarmament, but also measures to strengthen regional security and the diminishment of the use of military force as an instrument of national policy. The objectives of CSBMs are to prevent war by misunderstanding or miscalculation, to reduce the possibility of surprise attack and to reduce the ability to use military forces for the purpose of political intimidation or for carrying out foreign policy. It is therefore essential that this take place in a transparent and thus predictable manner.

CSBMs can be further categorised into two levels of analysis: technical-military CSBMs, which are at the tactical operational level of military policy and political-military CSBMs, which can be considered to be declarations of intent concerning the planned use of force.

CSBMs could include the following:

- Exchanges of information between military establishments;
- Prenotification of military movements;
- Prenotification of major military movements;
- Establishing a treaty for the prevention of accidents at sea;
- Establishing a Search and Rescue agreement that would incorporate the concept discussed above in relation to the setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean Maritime Coastguard;
- Declaratory statements of intent. This includes identifying the relevant participants, identifying and defining the zone of operation, examining the preconditions for negotiations and implementation, and assessing alternative methods of verification compliance and prospective arms control agreements.^{*15}

The EMCPC should also serve as a centre of excellence when it comes to organising seminars and conferences on topics that support regional stability across the Mediterranean area. The intention would be to promote education and training in support of conflict prevention and arms control, and to function as a communications and data

base centre. These seminars could be composed of government and military officials and specialists from think-tanks and academia.*¹⁶ Such an exercise could follow the structure of the already existing confidence building measure, the Euro-Med Information and Training Seminars for Diplomats.*¹⁷

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CONFLICT PREVENTION CENTRE

The purpose of the new body will be to enhance stability and security across the Euro-Mediterranean area. The EMCPC will be a forum within which regional participants can take stock of and review all other activities contributing to peace and security in the area.

The EMCPC framework will not replace already existing conflict prevention initiatives such as the Middle East peace process, nor would it replicate the measures already considered and the arrangements already adopted by participants.

When it comes to an appropriate conceptual framework for regulating the Euro-Med conflict prevention centre's actions these should take into account the following administrative and institutional procedures. At a political level the establishment of a democratization process over a period of time that would include setting up institutions, a constitution, an electoral system, human and minority rights and the media needs to take place. Similar actions also need to take place in the economic field (privatization, the banking system, budget) and the military dimension (civil-military relations, defence industry, arms control).

Both conditionality and accountability need to be clearly defined concepts when it comes to economic and financial assistance. The possibility of sanctions (negative) and an incentive scheme (positive) should be attached to the implementation of reforms. Criteria for membership into international security institutions such as Nato, the OSCE, and the WEU should be clearly spelt out.

One should also examine the use and participation of the armed forces to humanitarian missions and tasks. The goal of this endeavour would be to indicate the relations between armed forces and civilian institutions to arrive at a more rational and efficient use of their various specialist capabilities.

In a region as heterogeneous as the Mediterranean area is, the main sponsor of the Euro-Mediterranean conflict prevention centre, the European Union, should act as a mediator, facilitator and/or guarantor. The role of decision-making and action should be left as far as is possible to the main actors directly involved in a crisis. This will assist in guarding against the perception that the EU is trying to impose its political will upon the Mediterranean area.

The EU has a wide range of mechanisms in the economic, political and social domains that will enable it to influence decision-makers at the local level when it comes to complying with preventive measures. It is only once the majority of local actors, both at

governmental level and the public at large, perceive that more will be gained by compliance, that preventive measures will be able to attain their true objective.

This is not meant to exclude the participation of extra-regional powers in the EMCPC. On the contrary, all those actors that affect the region's security dynamics should be encouraged to join as partners. A formula for involving the United States in the Centre is essential if the EMCPC is to be regarded as a credible conflict prevention mechanism.

When setting up the structural design of the EMCPC it is crucial that a series of guidelines be taken into consideration to ensure that the new regional body is able to function smoothly. Basic questions that will have to be addressed include: who will be responsible for commissioning missions, which unit or committee will be responsible for deciding upon operations, and which component of the CPC will be accountable for the implementation of measures that are adopted?

Given the geographical and geopolitical proximity of the European Union to the EMCPC it seems logical to examine the various obstacles that the EU itself has had to overcome in order to gradually develop an effective common foreign security policy structure. The recent appointment of a High Representative and the setting up of a policy planning and early warning unit offer interesting insight into the type of mechanisms that the EMCPC can adopt at an early stage of development.

The numerous teething problems that conflict prevention or similar post-Cold War operations have encountered throughout the 1990s also offers plenty of food for thought when it comes to drawing up a EMCPC command and control structure. Should the regional CPC adopt a Contact Group type of approach to regional security challenges or does it make more sense to adopt a UN Security Council or OSCE type of decision-making process? Is it perhaps more feasible to introduce a limited version of NATO SitCen?^{*18}

It is also essential that the EMCPC's relationship to the eventual Euro-Med Charter for Peace and Stability is also made clear from the start. The numerous roles that the EMCPC can play in this regard include those of enforcer of the Charter, co-ordinating body of measures introduced as a result of the evolution of the Charter, or an agency that monitors actions undertaken by security networks that are set up once the Charter is introduced. This will assist in removing any risk that proponents of the Charter for Peace and Stability may perceive the EMCPC as a regional security arrangement through a competitive lens.

The EMCPC should also tap into the large number of already existing academic institutions, public-policy institutes and non-governmental organisations, such as the EuroMeSCo network of public-policy institutes, that are tackling the technical and analytical dimension of conflict prevention. The bringing together of researchers and specialists from different Mediterranean countries to monitor regional developments, warn concerned parties of potential conflict situations and suggest alternative policies that might further their prevention will help to ensure that the proposed centre will become one of excellence in the shortest time-frame possible.^{*19}

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM POST-COLD WAR CONFLICT PREVENTION

The establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Conflict Prevention Centre is certainly an initiative that will help manage security and stability across this very heterogeneous region of the world. The setting up of such a regional framework will also dispel perceptions that the Mediterranean has been neglected by the international community since the end of the Cold War. The risk of such a view settling in at the start of the new millennium is particularly high given that post-Cold War great powers and international organisations have now upgraded their attention in an adjacent region of the Mediterranean, namely the Balkans.

It would also be a strategic error if the United States and the European Union dedicate political and economic resources to the Balkan stability pact at the expense of other important strategic areas, including the Mediterranean area. Foreign policy strategists that are seeking to establish peace and stability around Europe should introduce policies that seek to balance regional interests and not turn regional security into a zero-sum-game.

It is precisely because of the importance of such a regional security initiative that the creation of the EMCPC needs to be implemented in a coherent and consistent manner. First, the setting up of the EMCPC should be gradual. No country should feel undue pressure or even force to participate in the initiative but allowed to contribute to the endeavour at their own pace. Countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region will have to recognise for themselves that it is in their own self-interest to become actively engaged in such an exercise. Failure to do so will prevent them from being able to forge closer political and economic ties with one another and strengthen security ties with international institutions such as the Europe Union.

Second, the European Union must guard against promising the Mediterranean area more than it can deliver. The introduction of the EURO, the enlargement process, and development of a common foreign and security policy already means that the EU plate will remain very full for the next few years. The EU is thus better off offering the region a conflict prevention framework that does not totally rely on its services to function.

In order for the creation of the EMCPC to be successful it is essential that the Euro-Mediterranean partner countries of the Mediterranean become more vocal, open, and engaged in the post-Cold War regional security environment that is evolving around them. Otherwise they will have no one but themselves to blame for being marginalised from the wider security framework that is emerging. With the EU due to compile a common strategy document on the Mediterranean by mid-2000 the timing to adopt such a stance could not be better.

In retrospect, a number of additional lessons can already be learnt from past conflict prevention attempts. These lessons should serve as a guide when setting up a Euro-Mediterranean conflict prevention centre.

The first is that individual governments acting alone to prevent conflicts are ineffective. National biases and interests are far too strong. It is more logical that analysis and

proposed solutions should come from an ad hoc unit created for this purpose, which is international in its composition. The setting up of a conflict prevention unit by the EU in early 1997 is a good example of the type of model that can be adopted.

A second lesson is that appropriate mechanisms should be set up for political, not charitable reasons. This will help ensure that the political will is available when the time comes to set the structures in motion.

A third important point is that of identifying prevention with discretion. Measures taken to prevent the escalation of conflicts need to be kept as low key as possible to give confidence building measures a chance to flourish.

Fourth, parties to the conflict should be aware of the fact that the cost of conflict exceeds the cost of avoiding it.

Fifth, third parties should be convinced that certain developments are just a prelude to serious conflict which might affect some of their valued national interests, and that the cost of preventive action is lower than attempts at conflict resolution afterward.

Sixth, third parties should have the capacity to anticipate conflict and intervene in a timely and proper manner.^{*20}

Ten years after the end of the Cold War it is in both the EU's and the countries of the Mediterranean's interest to strengthen relations. Steps that can be taken to realise this include processing in the shortest-time frame possible the EU membership applications of Mediterranean candidates, upgrading relations with Turkey, and developing a more proactive Euro-Mediterranean partnership process that includes the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Conflict Prevention Centre.

Such measures will assist in the complex task of identifying Euro-Mediterranean common interests, a prerequisite to being able to nurturing a common Euro-Mediterranean political will. This is the strategy that should be incorporated in the Common Strategy document on the Mediterranean that the European Union is currently compiling.

Two positive turn of events in the western and eastern sectors of the Mediterranean also offer external powers such as the EU an excellent opportunity to move ahead with attempts to establish a conflict prevention network across the Mediterranean. At a meeting in Algiers earlier in 1999 North African countries decided to try and reactivate the moribund Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) that was created in 1989 and seeks to create a common market between Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya. An UMA summit is being planned for late 1999.^{*21}

Further east, interest in moving ahead with the Middle East peace process has continued to increase since the election of Ehud Barak as Israeli Prime Minister and chances for a comprehensive regional peace have never appeared better. This positive pattern of regional dynamics therefore offers a window of opportunity to advance a conflict prevention network in a geo-strategic area where it is necessary. In addition to the intrinsic value of such an initiative, the establishment of a EMCPC will also increase visibility of

the Euro-Mediterranean Process as a whole, a factor that to date remains lacking. It is only through such credible partnership building measures that the EMP will remain sustainable long-term.

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- 16) Soltan, Gamal Abdel Gawad, and Aly, Abdel Monem Said, “The Middle East Experience with Conflict Prevention”, The International Spectator, Vol. XXXIV, No.2, April-June 1999, p.108.

17) *Chairman's Formal Conclusions*, Third Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Ministers, Stuttgart, April 15th-16th 1999, paragraph 13.

(In the course of the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership process, the necessity for shaping a culture of dialogue and cooperation among the European member states and its Mediterranean Partners has continually been emphasised. As one of the results, the European Commission has entrusted the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta, to run a semi-annual Information and Training Seminar for Euro-Mediterranean desk officers of the 27 partner countries. The first six Euro-Med seminars in October 1996, March 1997, November 1997 and May 1998, November 1998 and April 1999 consisted of a series of presentations with a primary objective of familiarization with the Euro-Mediterranean Process. Subject areas examined were: the EU institutional setting and decision-making patterns, the question of how to deal with the EU in practical terms, and the selected aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and its implementation. An additional feature in recent years was the Euro-Mediterranean Internet Forum, a project that the European Commission entrusted the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies to design and to operationalise. This project aims at facilitating the flow of information between the Euro-Mediterranean partner countries and became fully functional at the second Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meeting in Malta).

18) Aliboni, R., *op.cit.*, April 1998.

19) Soltan, G., and Monem Said Aly, *op.cit.*, and Aliboni, *ibid.*

20) Soltan, G., and Aly, Monem Said, *ibid.*, p.32.

21) Khalaf, Roula, "Turbulent North African neighbours look to strengthen trade and investment ties", *Financial Times*, 3rd August 1999, p.6.