Euro-Mediterranean Political and Security Dialogue

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With the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), 2008 became the year of the great debate on the Mediterranean, on its centrality and on the complexity characterising relations among shoreline countries. Indeed, the Mediterranean project had not been so euphoric since 1995, the usual atmosphere being rather dismal, particularly after the summit 10 years into the Partnership, a summit nearly marking the end of a process that had, according to its detractors, long suffered from numerous shortcomings.

From the start, the launching of the idea of a 'Union' has been a source of mistrust and concern relative to the future of the Barcelona Process. However, its evolution over the course of different reactions, its transformation and its final adaptation to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) will, in the end, be why it will be considered a lifeline for the said Process. With the Union for the Mediterranean, 2008 will be considered the year when the Mediterranean was finally offered an improved EMP framework. Is it really though? Will there be a greater chance for the different dialogues, in particular the political and security dialogue, to gain better perspectives, knowing that we are still part of the EMP, with its priorities and constraints? Did the latter provide the proper content for the Euro-Mediterranean political and security dialogue, and did it lend this content the best treatment?

The establishment of the Barcelona Process in 1995, instituting the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership between the European Union and the countries in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region, brought great hope with it for several reasons. Finally, the Mediterranean Sea, long considered a border between two worlds, was aspiring to become a common space for peace, stability and shared prosperity, a space for dialogue through which one hoped to settle all conflicts. Hence, the launching of this process was accompanied by a great wave of enthusiasm relative to the oldest conflict known to the Mediterranean in the modern era, namely, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Madrid Peace Process had just begun to blossom, allowing for all sorts of hopes; the European Union could already see itself playing a major role in this conflict and in the region in general. It felt strong and powerful, and launched its political and security policies at the same time, thus attempting to distance itself from its powerful American ally. The proposed Partnership was conceived, according to several experts, as a mechanism for conflict prevention through dialogue, understanding and the exchange of wealth and values.

To a large extent, this vision, too optimist and nearly utopian, did not work. The EMP did not manage to resolve nor prevent any of the conflicts that the region has undergone or is undergoing; nor has it managed to create grounds for understanding on the basis of common values relative to democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law, and issues such as those relating to terrorism or immigration remain points of discord.

In the case of conflicts on the south shore of the Mediterranean, the EU, and the EMP in particular, have no influence, nor did they play any role in the bloody crisis that Algeria experienced for a decade, nor in the Western Sahara conflict, nor even in the minor conflict of Leila/Perejil Island between Morocco and Spain. Whenever the mechanism for handling conflicts established within the framework of the Partnership should have come into play, it always failed.

Concerning the Middle East conflict, even before the second Intifada and the doubts about the Oslo peace

process, European engagement has often been judged insufficient and lacking resolve by Arab Partners. After the said Intifada, all European efforts died out. Indeed, Israel and the United States did everything they could to make sure that the EU would play no role, or at least only a minimal one.
This is essentially due to the weakness of the European position, which, in turn, is due to the division of its members on the attitude to take towards certain international matters and its incapacity to establish a common, homogenous foreign policy.

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This fragility, already extant in the time of the Europe of the 15 (the Balkan conflict, for instance, was not an arena of success for the EU either, and only the intervention of NATO put an end to the conflict in 1999), became manifest after the enlargement of the EU and the admission of new Member States, some of which were also new NATO members. At that point, the division appeared between the "Europeanists" and the "pro-NATO" faction, leaning towards American positions. The Iraq War showed the extent of the divergence between the "old" and the "new" Europe, and above all showed the dimension of the US role in a region that Europe, or at least certain European powers, consider their own.
Insofar as structural political problems associated with democratisation, at the time the EMP was launched, the enthusiasm filling the future partners was on a level with the ambitions of the process engaged. Despite not necessarily matching agendas, the stakeholders of the process believed they were in a position to each attain their separate objectives. For the European Union, the hope was to manage, through the concept of free trade, to convince the South Mediterranean Countries to share its values, in other words, to coax Arab Mediterranean Partners down the path of democratisation and reform of political and legal systems. At that point, the Association Agreements made their appearance as the underlying instruments for applying the Barcelona Partnership, with the famous Article 2, which introduced the principle of conditionality. The latter has been considered negative and ineffective.
With the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU proposed a new form of conditionality, this time qualified as positive because it is based on incentives and encouragement rather than sanctions; action plans have been adopted with certain Mediterranean Partner Countries that consider this policy rather favourable, since, in addition, they have been promised greater access to European markets and freer borders.
The South Mediterranean Countries, however, have never really espoused the project of change; reforms have been of unequal importance, different according to each sphere and country.
The Arab South Mediterranean Countries certainly realise the importance and need for change and reforms. Nonetheless, they insist that the process should emerge from within, with no external intervention, hence rejecting the concept of conditionality, whether positive or negative. Wishing to take the initiative, or at least seem as if they had, the Arab Heads of State and Government who were to meet in Tunis at the Summit of the League of Arab States in March 2004 had planned to launch a reform initiative in the Arab world, though this did not occur at the time. The host country, Tunisia, had decided to postpone the summit due to lack of convergence on the topic of reform, certain propositions concerning the need to introduce political and social transformations into Arab countries not eliciting the enthusiasm of all participants. At a second attempt, also in Tunis but this time in May 2004, the Summit's final declaration finally indicated the will of the Arab Heads of State and Government to initiate reforms, allow greater participation for all in political and public life and open up to all elements of civil society. The Algiers Summit in April 2005 confirmed this trend, as have all other summits thereafter. The fact remains, however, that in the eyes of all observers, nothing has really changed in the Arab world: certain superficial alterations have been effected but no profound transformation has taken place.
It is therefore clear that conditionality, neither as stipulated in the initial version of the EMP nor in the ENP, is not working. It has not incited Mediterranean

Partner Countries to become more democratic. Yet despite the limitations, there is no denying that the EMP has not spared efforts to improve the situation regarding Rule of Law in the region. Hence, thanks to the EMP, a good number of Arab Mediterranean Countries have made commitments in spheres they had been very reticent to touch on. For instance, within the framework of the National Indicative Programmes, a sum on the budget was allocated to governance quality improvement, the goal being to foster the Rule of Law, in particular by proceeding to modernise the justice system and develop the media, domains that are terribly backward and that these countries had refused to put on the agenda. Today, they are undergoing major reform.

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The consolidation of civil society has always been an important objective within the EMP. This has encouraged certain Arab countries to take the step and accept the principle of support to the civil society proposed by the EU, whether for those elements of civil society intervening on the local level on issues such as gender, the environment, forests or reproductive health, or those of a more general nature intervening in the sphere of the development and consolidation of human rights and democracy, the aim being to contribute to supporting and strengthening the civil society network operating in the domain of consolidating Rule of Law and providing support to underprivileged social groups. Thus many projects relative to these issues have been carried out or are underway. But much remains to be done if –after the fashion of Morocco, often cited as an example of the success of European policy on the matter– other countries aspire to attain what is today called, with great enthusiasm, 'advanced status.'

In any case, whether within the framework of the EMP in its original format or within the framework of the ENP, structural problems persist, which according to certain experts are due to the vagueness of the Euro-Mediterranean political dialogue, often biased by irrational considerations associated with exaggeratedly negative perceptions, elicited both in the North and the South by fundamentalism and terrorism of an Islamic tint, as well as by immigration; these two phenomena disorient dialogue and make it ineffective.

On both the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, Islamic fundamentalism has long been considered a major source of threat to security and stability in the region. A factor of internal political destabilisation, fundamentalism has been combated by South Mediterranean regimes, under the encouragement of the West, with Europe in the forefront.

In this regard, the attitude of the European Union has been rather ambivalent, at first encouraging "vigilance" and measures of prevention against terrorism, measures that necessarily entail infringement of the rights and liberties of individuals, and more particularly, those of Islamists or at times people who simply display signs of religiosity. Then, realising that this anti-Islamist strategy of exclusion represents an obstacle to any efforts towards reform, the EU adopted a new position, pressing the governments involved to accept dialogue with the so-called 'moderate' Islamists and to open the way for their political participation. This new position is based not only on the will to end conflicts through inclusion, but also, and perhaps above all, on a certain conviction that these 'moderate Islamists' show a great deal of interest in reforms concerning Rule of Law and good governance. EU demands relative to constitutional reform, electoral laws, anti-corruption laws and economic reform converge more with Islamists' demands than those of the current governing elites. This European policy reversal irritates the Southern Mediterranean regimes, which continue to reject this logic, the more so since, to the argument that the Islamists will have different positions on women's rights and the application of Sharia in the sphere of criminal law as well as in that of personal status and other spheres, the Europeans reply that they should not be judged on their hidden, presumed intentions but rather on their public positions and

SIGNIFICANT EUROMED PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS: POLITICAL AND SECURITY DIALOGUE

The projects relevant to this sector are grouped together under the categories of Justice, Liberty and Security; Migration; and Education and Training, designed for diplomats. Among the countries participating in the seven programmes are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and, in a few of them, Turkey.

- **Euromed Justice I (2005-2007) – 2 million euros supplied by MEDA; and Euromed Justice II (2008-2011) – 5 million euros (MEDA funds):** Contributes to the implementation of an open, modern judiciary system by strengthening institutional and administrative capacities in Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) and establishing an inter-professional community in order to attain a Euro-Mediterranean space for judiciary cooperation.
  www.euromed-justice.eu
- **Euromed Police II (2007-2010) – 5 million euros (MEDA funds):** Step up cooperation among police forces in the EU and in the MPCs in the struggle against organised crime. Numerous specialised informative and training sessions on police cooperation are to be organised in all partner countries.
  www.cepol.europa.eu/index.php?id=97
- **Euromed Migration I (2004-2007) – 2 million euros (MEDA funds); and Euromed Migration II (2008-2011) – 5 million euros (MEDA funds):** This programme focuses on the entire migration process, from countries of origin to destination countries (statistics concerning migratory flows, production and publication of thematic studies on migration and the like) in order to create a space for European cooperation on migratory issues. The aim is to combat illegal immigration and make legal migration a tool for economic, social and cultural development between the EU and MEDA countries.
  www.euromed-migration.eu
- **EuroMeSCo, Euro-Mediterranean Study and Dialogue on Political Cooperation and Security network (2005-2009) – 4.9 million euros**: Functions as a dialogue manager between the EU and Mediterranean foreign policy institutes via seminars, workshops, conferences, newsletters and a website. In addition, it offers a platform for discussion allowing dialogue on sensitive topics and increasingly strengthening the political cooperation and security process.
  www.euromesco.net
- **Middle East Peace Process (2005-2010) – 20 million euros (MEDA funds):** Supports the Middle East Peace Process and cooperation between Israel and Arab countries on cross-border and legal issues, among others, working towards having both parties regain confidence. The project only concerns Israel, Jordan and Occupied Palestinian Territories. Specifically, its primary initiative consists of establishing the EU Partnership for Peace Programme, with a view to providing support for civil society organisations involved in fostering peace, tolerance and non-violence in the Middle East. It also funds regional and national initiatives with the same end.
  www.delwbg.ec.europa.eu/
- **Malta Seminars for Diplomats, (2004-2008) – 940,000 euros (MEDA funds):** The Malta Seminars are training sessions for European and Mediterranean diplomats on key aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (political, economic and social cooperation), as well as on European institutions.
  www.euromed-seminars.org.mt

For further information:
www.enpi-info.eu

current approaches. In this dialogue of the deaf, a solution seems none too imminent.

In any case, though positions concerning the participation of Islamists in politics diverge, in the struggle against terrorism, there is perfect agreement, or nearly. In late 2005, the partners agreed on a Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism that would simultaneously guarantee the effectiveness of anti-terrorist measures and respect for human rights. The Code of Conduct above all shows the determination of members of the EMP to employ all means to counter terrorism in the region. The final declaration of the Paris Summit in July 2008 establishing the Union for the Mediterranean and that of the Marseille Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in November 2008 both reiterated the need for applying this Code, which means that this point remains one of the top priorities of the Euro-Mediterranean political and security dialogue.

Insofar as immigration, for at least two decades now, many experts have attempted to establish a direct association between security issues and immigration. Few analysts, on the other hand, have attempted to differentiate between a realistic view of the potential threat inherent to immigration and the subjective perception of what this could be.

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In the Euro-Mediterranean context, it is clear that in the Barcelona Declaration, the aim of limiting immigration from southern countries was well established. The perception of immigration as a threat governed European policy, which dealt with this issue solely

from a security angle. It may well be that with 5 million foreign nationals from South Mediterranean Countries (primarily Turks and Maghrebi), Europe could justify a certain degree of concern. The state of poverty in which the great majority of these immigrants live could induce them to embrace violence (as with the case of the inhabitants of French suburbs, for instance, whose movement expresses their discontent), and social exclusion could also foster a type of communitarianism that could easily serve as a breeding ground for supporters of terrorism.

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This fear, however, should not be allowed to turn into systematic xenophobia and total negligence of immigrants' rights, the very same immigrants that Europe has needed and will always need, for both economic and demographic reasons. Indeed, European labour force needs will necessarily generate new waves of immigration that will serve to palliate the demographic deficit and the ageing of the population. Certain European countries such as Italy, Germany, Portugal and Spain have opted to eliminate the policy of 'zero immigration' launched in the early 1990s, adopting the quota system instead. In this regard, South Mediterranean Countries have always insisted on the importance of creating a Charter of Immigrant Rights, which would be a sort of codification of these rights; the 11 September and 11 March events, however, have not allowed progress in this direction.

The situation is certainly not very favourable for Euro-Mediterranean dialogue on immigration, and much less on the worrisome transformation of the region of North Africa into a transit area for Sub-Saharan candidates for immigration to Europe; migratory flows are currently characterised by great mobility, and the South Mediterranean Region, in particular the Maghreb, is becoming a hub for different human movements from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. This entails an increase in illegal immigration as a result of the intense activity of migration rings operating in countries such as Morocco or Algeria. Such a phenomenon changes the content of North-South negotiations on this issue to a certain degree.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership should have served as a framework for solving these problems. The cultural basket of the Barcelona Process prescribes a certain degree of cooperation in the sphere of the circulation and settlement of people in the Euro- Mediterranean Region, yet the EU's attention to this issue has been considered insufficient by the South Mediterranean Countries. Europe seems more preoccupied by the struggle against illegal immigration and human trafficking rings, such that it prioritises only aspects closely linked to security issues.

Europe seems to have wanted to push its borders back all the way to the territory of its neighbours to the south, requesting them to play the role of border guards, not only to counter attempts by their own citizens to cross these borders illegally, but also and particularly to stem Sub-Saharan migratory flows. A number of Euro-Mediterranean Conferences, particularly those of Naples (2003) and Dublin (2004), have insisted on the need to adopt a global approach to immigration. With the new EU Neighbourhood Policy, however, the EMP seems to have taken up a new attitude towards the issue, offering, among other liberties, possible access to free circulation of people, even if this perspective apparently contradicts the will to reduce migratory flows established in European policy. Which leaves the entire problem between both parties unresolved.

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Clearly, the issue of immigration is of capital importance for the Partners on both shores. It is unquestionably political and must necessarily be treated as such; it should be discussed within the framework of political dialogue (though it is often placed under the category of social, human and cultural cooperation, as, for instance, in the Final Declaration of the

Marseille Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 3-4 November 2008) so that solutions of a global nature can be adopted.

Will the near future see a better approach to all of the issues discussed above? Will the Union for the Mediterranean, considered a new chance, truly offer better perspectives for Euro-Mediterranean political and security dialogue, for all that? It is difficult to say for certain. The Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers have reaffirmed that the political and security dialogue within the framework of the Union will continue to put the main emphasis on the political situation in the Middle East, the implementation of the Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism, the further development of dialogue on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and security issues, and the strengthening of democracy and political pluralism through the development of participation in politics and respect for the ensemble of human rights and fundamental liberties, classical elements of dialogue, in addition to stepping up regional dialogue on joint cooperation, good practices and exchange of experiences in the field of elections (on a voluntary basis upon request by any of the partners) and finally, the prevention, reduction and management of natural and man-made disasters. This, of course, is very positive, but it would seem that the UfM is doomed to paralysis from the start and is currently on the back burner. As in the initial version of the Barcelona Process, it is bogged down by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, becoming its collateral victim, as some like to call it. The war waged by Israel in Gaza against the Palestinian Hamas aroused different reactions in the Arab Mediterranean Countries; both on the level of public opinion and that of leaders, the tone was rather one of condemnation than comprehension of a lax European attitude, which was even considered one of complicity, too close to Israeli positions, as per the declarations of the European Presidency at the time of the war. All of this has demonstrated how illusory it is to get one's hopes up. The co-presidency found nothing better to say than to announce that "all meetings planned for the Union for the Mediterranean shall be deferred until further notice," and it was Egypt, forming part of the co-presidency, that formally requested the suspension of the Union for the Mediterranean, assuming the refusal of the Arab States forming part of the Union to return to the negotiations table if it had to be shared with Israel. What will be the outcome? The weeks or months to come may provide an answer. Until then, the Process is at a halt, and all dialogue along with it.

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