

# Reforming the Security Sector: A Euro-Mediterranean Challenge?

**Eduard Soler i Lecha**

Mediterranean Programme Coordinator  
Fundació CIDOB, Barcelona

## Human Security and Security Sector Reform

Aside from rare exceptions, the security sector reform is not among the priorities of the EU when it comes to dealing with the political reform in the Mediterranean, despite the fact that the European Security Strategy highlighted its importance. A number of questions arise when analysing this situation: What do we understand by security sector reform? How is the concept of human security involved? Why would the EU be interested in encouraging these processes among its southern and eastern Mediterranean neighbours? What has been done so far? What should be taken into account when promoting this issue in its policies towards the Mediterranean area?

The concept of security sector reform encompasses a variety of areas: the armed forces, police, gendarmerie, intelligence services, the prison system, the judicial system and the public institutions in charge of supervising the sector. There are also different viewpoints as concerns the meaning of the term 'reform'. Whilst for some it refers only to its modernising aspect, that is, a means to enhance security forces' efficiency, others believe it must play a democratising role. From this viewpoint, the reform must be aimed at bringing security forces under democratic civil control and ensuring they perform in accordance with human rights norms and citizens' fundamental freedoms.

This second approach is connected with the new concept known as "human security," made popular by the 1994 UNDP Report on Human Development, which can be defined as an attempt to shift the focus of who should be protected. According to this conception, citizens' security should be prioritised over

that of the State (or regime). Thus, a security sector reform from a democratising perspective not only relates to this new concept of security but is an essential part of it.

## Why Promote the Security Sector Reform in the Mediterranean?

The Barcelona Process and European Neighbourhood Policy documents, as well as the European Security Strategy published in 2003, underline a shared interest in promoting democracy and rule of law in the Mediterranean. To be consistent with this objective, the EU and its southern and eastern Mediterranean partners should include the security sector reform on its reform agenda.

In order to embark on a democratic security sector reform in the Mediterranean, the area clearly needs to undertake a series of political reform and democratic consolidation processes that in some cases are conspicuously absent. However, it is also evident that no democratising process will be complete without a thorough security sector reform.

Nonetheless, and despite the growing interest that the security sector reform is awakening in the Arab world and other international forums (UNDP, but particularly NATO), the security sector reform has little bearing on European policies towards the Mediterranean. There are, however, two exceptions: the case of Turkey, insofar as candidate country for accession, and Palestine (in the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy, ESDP). With these exceptions, Europe's

**The EU and its southern and eastern Mediterranean partners should include the security sector reform on its reform agenda**

involvement in the Mediterranean security sector reform has been scarce and partial.

### **The Experience of Turkey**

It is worth keeping in mind that matters related to the role of the Armed Forces have traditionally been a key issue on Turkey's domestic political reform agenda. The continuous military interventionism in Turkish politics has been viewed with concern, not only in Turkey but also by the EU. Thus, civil-military relations have become one of the aspects that European Commission reports have taken into account when evaluating whether Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria, which are required before starting accession negotiations with a candidate country.

The fact that substantial progress has been made in the security sector reform in recent years and, in contrast to EU relations with other Mediterranean countries, this issue has become consolidated on the Euro-Turkish agenda, is intimately linked to Turkey's process of accession to the EU. This, in addition to the will to consolidate democracy in the Turkish Government and Grand National Assembly, has led to the reform of the National Security Council (MGK) and brought about rapid progress in the zero-tolerance policy related to torture and improvements in the state of Turkish prisons. All of this has been supervised and supported by various EU structures.

Certain aspects are yet to be improved, and many analysts believe that the Armed Forces still play an excessive role in the country's politics and society, and that civilian control mechanisms remain insufficient (Cizre, 2006). Indeed, the political tension of spring 2007 has recently surfaced this concern. However, progress achieved in the past six years suggests that substantial improvements can be obtained when the EU and competent authorities share the same objective.

To what extent could reformers have achieved such progress without the perspective of accession? This is a central issue when it comes to defining and implementing a European or Euro-Mediterranean policy for promoting the security sector reform, since the EU is not in a position to offer the accession incentive to other Mediterranean countries, with the exception of the Balkans.

### **The Experience of Palestine**

Palestine's experience of security sector reform has a series of distinctive features that make it a special

## **Substantial improvements can be obtained when the EU and competent authorities share the same objective**

case in the region. Three aspects should be noted. Firstly, the Palestinian National Authority is not an internationally recognised State. Secondly, the Palestinian territories are under Israeli occupation and, therefore, in a situation of open conflict. Thirdly, the Palestinian National Authority has various active police forces, including the Palestinian Civil Police and Presidential Guard, as well as armed militia such as the Izz ad-Din al Qassam Brigades and al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (Fiedrich, 2005).

In view of this situation and with the publication of the 2002 Quartet Roadmap, which established the achievement of good governance of Palestinian institutions as one of its main objectives, it became a priority for a number of countries and institutional organisations to create a unified police force in the Palestinian territories that held monopoly of violence and was under civil and democratic control. It is under this conception that the EU decided to launch the ESDP civil mission known as EUPOL-COPPS, which began operations on 1st January 2006. The mission, with a three-year mandate, should contribute to launching the Palestinian Civil Police Development Programme with a view to establishing a transparent police organisation featuring a clear legal framework to constitute a strong police service capable of meeting society's needs (CITPax, 2006).

Although there are missions that define it in an even more precise way, EUPOL COPPS is an ESDP mission aimed at promoting the security sector reform. However, this experience is not yielding the results expected and the contingent dedicated to the mission has been considerably reduced following the new escalation of violence in most of the Palestinian territories in 2006 and the European blocking of the Government of Hamas after its victory in the January 2006 elections, which also led to the interruption of this area of cooperation.

To summarise, the experience of European intervention in Palestine illustrates some of the EU's deficiencies in being able to act effectively in the security sector reform in a conflict situation. However, the EUPOL COPPS mission also highlights the importance attached by the EU to the security sector reform, not only from a democratising perspective, but also as a

vector for achieving long-lasting peace. Independently of the difficulties involved in its implementation, it is also worth mentioning the emphasis the mission has placed on the need to understand the police sector as a service to citizens, which may inspire new European actions in the field of police reform.

### **Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation and the European Neighbourhood Policy**

As mentioned above, the experiences of Turkey and Palestine are exceptional not only due to the specific circumstances of both countries but also because it is unusual for the EU to become so deeply involved in matters related to security sector reform in Mediterranean countries. Cautiousness has characterised the EU's actions in this area and neither the 1995 Barcelona Declaration—the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's foundation text—nor subsequent texts approved in this framework mention the need to carry out a security sector reform in member countries.

Indeed, only after the Euro-Mediterranean conference in Valencia in 2002 did the issue of police begin to appear on the agenda. However, much more sensitive matters related to the Armed Forces remain absent from Euro-Mediterranean discussions on security matters and political reform. This may be due to the Partnership's inherent principle of non-interference with the domestic affairs of its members and the fact that the domestic and international political context in these countries is less conducive towards and even advises against the launch of such reforms.

The creation of a new cooperation framework, the European Neighbourhood Policy, raised some hopes

### **The action plans could be a good instrument for the gradual progress of a security reform agenda following a strictly bilateral logic**

that this situation would change. Heiner Hänggi and Fred Tanner (2005) believed that the action plans could be a good instrument for the gradual progress of a security reform agenda following a strictly bilateral logic. However, the action plans approved so far contain scarce reference to security sector reform,

referring only to the police and judicial reform and, as a general rule, from a perspective of European interest and as a modernising rather than democratising factor. A good example is the greater attention paid to border control issues in these documents.

### **Perspectives for the Future**

The security sector reform is becoming an essential matter for agents wishing to promote political reform processes and more stable regional contexts. One of the objectives of Europe's foreign policy, as well as of all the States that comprise the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, is a more stable and democratic Mediterranean. Consequently, there is no reason not to gradually begin to introduce the security sector reform with its multiple facets into the Euro-Mediterranean agenda and European Neighbourhood Policy.

However, if the EU does adopt an active role in this area, it should take four matters into account. The first is that these efforts may be in vain if actions are not simultaneously implemented to solve the causes of regional instability. Regional conflicts hinder any political reform process, particularly in the area of security, since they legitimise (internally and externally) the strongest possible Armed Forces that are given a degree of autonomy to deal with real or latent threats. The second is that it should be aware that other organisations are promoting, or may be prepared to encourage, security sector reform processes. Among them, it is worth noting NATO's will to enhance this dimension in the Mediterranean Dialogue framework. Not only that, some EU Member States also have an active policy in this sector, especially in the area of training. Therefore, these agents need to look for areas of collaboration and synergy to prevent unnecessary overlapping or contradictions.

Thirdly, and maybe most importantly, it is necessary to encourage agents that are in a position to domestically bring pressure to bear in favour of a security sector reform. They may include members of civil society, the political class, the media and even certain sectors of the Armed Forces and other security forces. If this domestic pressure does not exist, all efforts will be fruitless given that external pressure will easily be seen as interference in the State's domestic affairs aimed at weakening it.

Forth and lastly, it is necessary to define the incentives that the EU is willing to offer states that voluntarily

decide to accept the EU's cooperation in promoting security sector reform. The issue is not confined to this sector; it is a general concern of the European Neighbourhood Policy and should be resolved if there really is a will to have a bearing on the processes of political and economic reform in the Mediterranean. If it does not offer the necessary incentives, the EU runs the risk of facing a legitimacy crisis.

All the same, as regards the security sector reform, it is even more necessary to set up this structure of incentives and find suitable methods to evaluate the progress made given the limited impact of these matters on Europe's policies toward the Mediterranean. A recent report by the EuroMeSCo network (Soler i Lecha et al, 2006) presented a number of recommendations regarding the need to incorporate the security sector into the Country Reports and European Neighbourhood Policy's Action Plans, underscoring the need to find and process factual information on the matter. To do so, it is of vital importance to associate domestic agents with this task, thus contributing to a heightened social awareness of the need for such reforms.

The EU can use this information in cooperation with the partner country to design medium and long-term strategies in the field of security sector reform. In line with the European Neighbourhood Policy's philosophy, in the event of substantial and sustained progress, these partners should take part in foreign, security and defence policies, and in programmes and agencies related to these matters.

Meanwhile, it would be advisable to open all options of collaboration, training and experience sharing to countries bordering the Mediterranean, regardless of their progress in terms of security sector reform. Opening these areas of cooperation will lay the foundations for greater mutual trust and, in the not so distant future, for Mediterranean Partners to advance in security sector reform processes.

## Conclusions

The security sector reform, a matter that is barely present in the EU's policies towards the Mediterranean, is gaining ground on the political reform agenda in the Mediterranean and the Arab world (Luethold, 2004). It would therefore be advisable for the EU to strengthen and in some cases begin

to define the means to contribute to the success of these security sector reform processes. Such an approach would be in line with the European Security Strategy and the philosophy of the Barcelona Process and European Neighbourhood Policy, and would encourage a human security doctrine in its relations with its environment.

This issue is clearly not the only one nor is it the most urgent in the aim to turn the Mediterranean into an area of shared peace, where democracy is the rule rather than the exception. Resolving regional conflicts and the need to initiate political reform processes are, in some cases, preliminary steps towards the consolidation of the will to undertake security reforms. However, this does not exempt the EU from designing a global strategy to promote security sector reform and, in the case of the Mediterranean, to accompany it with regional strategies that are sufficiently broad to act on a case by case basis, adapting to the specific requirements of each country and moment.

## References

- CITpax (Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz), "EU Civil Missions in the Palestinian Territories: Frustrated Reform and Suspended Security" *CITPax Middle East*, Special Report, No. 1, 2006
- CIZRE, Ümit *Almanac Turkey 2005: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, DCAF-TESEV Series in Security Sector Studies, Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2006
- FRIEDRICH, Roland *Security Sector Reform in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, Ramallah: PASSIA, 2005
- HÄNGGI, Heiner and TANNER, Fred. Promoting "Security Sector Governance in the EU's Neighbourhood", *Chaillot Paper* No. 80, Paris: ISS, 2005
- LUETHOLD, Arnold "Security Sector Reform in the Middle East: A Nascent Debate" in Alan Bryden and Heiner Hänggi (eds.) *Reform and Reconstruction of the Security Sector*, Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004
- SOLER i LECHA, Eduard; MIRALLES i SOLÉ Débora; CIZRE Ümit & AYTAR, Volkan. "Drawing Lessons from Turkey's and Spain's Security Sector Reforms for the Mediterranean", *EuroMeSCo Research Report* No. 52, October 2006.