

PERCEPTIONS
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**CONFIDENCE-BUILDING, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND ARMS CONTROL IN THE
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP***

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PERCEPTIONS AND CONFIDENCE

The setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean co-operative security regime is taking place between—and overlapping with—the OSCE's long-standing experience on the northern side of the Mediterranean basin and the attempts of the Working Groups on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) in the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process on the southeastern side of the same area.

Yet the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's (EMP) 'area of peace and stability' can hardly be compared to these adjoining experiences, because, despite the use of the same methodology (attaining security through co-operative means), the politico-strategic contexts are basically different. While there is consistency and a direct functional relation between the strategic context and the actors in the CSCE/OSCE and in the Middle East peace process, the same is not true in the Mediterranean where the relationship is only indirect and sometimes even tortuous. An important aspect which contributes to defining this difference is the fact that the EMP is inter-regional, whereas the OSCE and ACRS correspond to strategically consistent regions.

This uniqueness of the EMP as an area of co-operative security is shown by a brief analysis of the different perceptions that underlie security policies and perspectives on the European as well the Mediterranean side of the partnership.

The EU states do not perceive actual threats as emanating from the states in the south of the Mediterranean but from a set of conflicts and factors internal to those southern states, as well as from south-south inter-state conflicts. Intra-state conflicts in the south cause instability, political vacuums and economic underdevelopment with important spill-over effects in Europe (terrorism, migration, etc.). Also, they trigger south-south inter-state conflicts or delay or hinder their resolution. Ultimately, these inter-state conflicts may involve the Europeans. In a world in which globalisation is increasingly coupled with regional economic integration, unstable adjoining regions in the Mediterranean cannot play the role of regional partners that Mexico or the Asian Pacific countries play with respect to the USA or Japan. From the EU point of view, Mediterranean instability is not only a factor of tension but could well lead to a missed opportunity. Hence European interest in the stabilisation of the Mediterranean.

However, differently from what tends to happen in the OSCE and West European contexts, the southern intra-state and south-south inter-state conflicts which affect European security cannot be directly tackled by the EMP co-operative regime. This is explained by the high degree of institutionalisation of the OSCE-European context (the Council of Europe, the Pact of Stability, the

OSCE institutions) and the absence of institutions in the EMP. Also, it should be noted that the Barcelona Declaration stresses that “this Euro-Mediterranean initiative is not intended to replace the other activities and initiatives undertaken in the interest of the peace, stability and development of region, but ... it will contribute to their success”, in particular “the realisation of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace settlement in the Middle East”. This statement in the Declaration is a consequence of the fact that—unlike the US—the EU is not a fully-fledged security actor in the EMP sphere, and for this reason it cannot easily act as a guarantor or a mediator. It cannot get directly in touch with the factors which affect its security perceptions in this area.

This lack of strategic status in an important neighbouring area which affects its security compels the EU to search for an increased role in the Mediterranean area. That is why, from the European point of view, the EMP seems directed firstly at building up the Mediterranean partners’ confidence in the EU as a harbinger to the upgrading of its security and its security status and role.

If the Mediterranean point of view is now taken into consideration, unlike the European perspective, security perceptions are not affected by EU intra-state and inter-state conflicts. It is felt that no intra-state conflict can really shake the authority of the states in the EU and trigger inter-state violence in Europe. Then again, prospects for violent inter-state conflicts in the EU are really very remote. Factors affecting security perceptions in the south of the Mediterranean are related rather to north-south inter-state relations, ie. relations between the two halves of the Euro-Mediterranean circle. In many respects this is true for Turkey as well as for Israel, but it mostly concerns the Arab countries.

Post-Cold War military or peace-related interventions in the Middle East (and elsewhere) have been regarded by governments and the public in the Arab world as violent conflicts or actions of enforcement against the Arabs or Arab interests. In this view, threats do not come from the EU in itself but from the unilateral supremacy of the trans-Atlantic alliances of which the EU is an important part.

As a consequence, the ongoing process of transformation within NATO and the related process of establishing a European Defence and Security Identity within the EU and the WEU, are both regarded by the Arab Partners with suspicion and concern. This was evident recently with respect to Eurofor (new European land-based rapid reaction force) and Euromarfor, (new European rapid reaction joint naval force). These two multinational forces, organised by France, Italy, Portugal and Spain and made available to both NATO and WEU, have been regarded by Arab countries as if they were directed against them. In fact, though set up by Mediterranean members of NATO and WEU, they can operate everywhere they would be needed: in the Mediterranean as well as in the Indian Ocean area.

The EMP’s attempt at establishing a co-operative security scheme in the inter-regional north-south circle encompassed by the Mediterranean is regarded by the Europeans as a contribution to the transformation of the Western Cold War security organisation. This link should be made transparent, however, so as to avoid misunderstandings with those Mediterranean governments that may look at the use of the EMP as a divisive element in the trans-Atlantic sphere. At the same time, the sincerity of the co-operative task of the EMP should not lend itself to misunderstanding either. For this reason, if the EMP is to survive and solidify, the demand arising from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to build up confidence in relation to European and trans-Atlantic military and security processes, which they see as a threatening trend, must be taken by the EU as a most serious and

urgent task.

In conclusion, confidence-building is by far the most urgent and primary task to be implemented by the EMP. Even though the partners may be able to establish measures for conflict prevention and arms control in the early stage of the EMP's co-operative security regime, a solid and diffuse build-up of confidence and trust is the key to the development of the entire process.

The Mediterranean partners should be sensitive to the EU's quest for status in the Mediterranean and its interest in getting more closely in touch with intra-state and south-south inter-state developments in the (MENA) (Middle East-North Africa) region. More information could be the avenue for meeting EU demands and increasing EU confidence. A special unit within the EMP political consultation mechanism could be devoted, for example, to monitoring the bilateral tracks of negotiations. This could be done without infringing the Barcelona Declaration's commitment or not interfering with Arab-Israeli negotiations.

The absence of direct military threats in the north-south Mediterranean sphere may give the public and governments the feeling that military Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) are not of the utmost importance and functionality in the EMP environment. On the contrary, the European partners should pay special attention and give priority to information on and transparency in developments concerning their military or military-related initiatives. But in the Mediterranean, these measures should not be expected—as was the case in the European theatre—to evolve into measures of arms reduction or control. The evolution of the CBMs and CSBMs is less important and more remote here than in previous European experience. Their most important task is to establish transparency and a culture or habit of transparency. When transparency has made mutual confidence solid and durable, there will be room for thinking of acceptable forms of evolution.

CONFLICTS AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

Conflict prevention is likely to be the most important goal the EMP can attain. The EMP in itself can be thought of as a macro-measure of systemic (pluralism, market economy, good governance, etc.) and structural (regional integration, shared institutions, etc.) conflict prevention. Besides its structural and systemic ability to prevent conflict in the medium- and long-term, the EMP is expected to develop an ability to prevent conflicts from being settled violently in the short- and medium-term. In this sense, the EMP is expected to develop preventive diplomacy and its attendant intra-state- and inter-state-related instruments.

While there is today a tendency in scientific literature and in the policies of the states and international agencies operating in the field of conflict prevention to focus on preventive diplomacy, the necessity must be stressed of combining short- and long-term actions for conflict prevention to meet the special requirements of the EMP environment. In particular, a preliminary, important action aimed at developing initial confidence has to be regarded as an indispensable middle-term structural systemic measure of conflict prevention: a measure bound to affect the traditional culture of inter-state relations to make more intrusive, far-reaching co-operation possible.

A reflection on conflict prevention prospects in the EMP has to be predicated on an analysis of conflicts in the EMP sphere and their typologies. Analyses that have been made in this respect indicate two main trends: (a) in contrast to the eastern Europe where a classical post-empire cycle is

taking place (with an absolute first-stage increase in fragmentation and intra-state conflicts), in the Mediterranean there are very diverse situations with remarkable tendencies toward post-conflict attempts at peace-building, reconstruction and stabilisation; (b) with a low level of conflict and conflict potential in the EU and, conversely, a high level in the southern and eastern regions of the Mediterranean area, the EMP inter-regional (i.e. north-south) context—as was argued above—is basically characterised by absence of violent conflicts and potential violent conflicts are almost nonexistent or very remote. In the north-south circle of the EMP, tensions and political crises are more likely to emerge than violent or armed conflicts.

A first implication of this pattern of conflict should have been that, in principle, the EMP's conflict prevention policy would be targeted more towards south-south inter-state conflicts and on intra-state conflicts in the south than towards the northern half of the EMP or in its north-south dimension. However, in the Barcelona process as it stands today, the emphasis is on the inter-state and north-south dimensions and the intra-state dimension seems to be excluded. For example, minorities are not even mentioned in the declaration. The inclusion in the Barcelona Declaration of “the long term possibility of establishing a Euro-Mediterranean pact”, if interpreted as a reference to the OSCE's Pact of Stability, may promise a focus on intra-state conflicts as roots of inter-state conflicts. But, what is known of the efforts being deployed in the Senior Officials committee to work out a blander version of that pact in the shape of a ‘charter’, suggests that the question will be evaded. This has been confirmed by the outcome of the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Barcelona process that took place in Malta on 15-16 March 1997.

The focus whether north-south or south-south remains an important element for the relevance of EMP preventive diplomacy. If the EMP mechanism of preventive diplomacy concentrates on the north-south (basically conflict-less) aspects of the EMP, neglecting or down playing south-south inter-state conflicts and, most of all, intra-state conflicts with international implications, the EMP conflict prevention capacity will be very weak.

Much depends also on the structure and tasks of mechanism for political consultation and preventive diplomacy that the EMP will be able to set up. The mechanisms envisaged in the Revised Draft of the Plan of Action (RDAP), a document provisionally adopted by the Senior Officials before they decided to revert to the ‘charter’ formula, contemplated political consultations, information and communication, and a couple of instruments drawn from the CSCE/OSCE experience. If this structure is maintained, the mechanism will be an institution-like arrangement with the possibility of intervening whenever intervention is consented to by the parties concerned. If intervention is excluded, the combination of information and communication with a “regular and privileged Political Dialogue” may maintain some significance in terms of preventive diplomacy, but the main relevance of such an arrangement of “political co-operation” would be in terms of confidence-building (especially if it is sustained by a common declaratory policy, as in EU Political Co-operation).

To conclude, one has to recall the limitation embedded in the EMP in order to avoid duplications and interferences, in particular, with the Middle East peace process: “this Euro-Mediterranean initiative is not intended to replace the other activities and initiatives undertaken in the interest of the peace, stability and development of the region”. One may wonder whether this limitation excludes EMP preventive diplomacy from the Arab-Israeli conflict circle. If so, the tendency for the EMP conflict-prevention policy to be concentrated on the least relevant sector of the EMP in terms of

preventive diplomacy (the north-south sector) will be reinforced.

In co-operative security regimes there is an obvious bias towards preventing conflicts, if only because whenever conflicts are not prevented it becomes more difficult to succeed in carrying out security co-operation. What is going to be the place and reach of conflict prevention in a co-operative regime like that of the EMP? The actual political background is uncertain and not very promising. At the same time, an effective capacity to prevent relevant conflicts is crucial to the success of a co-operative security arrangement like the EMP. A focus limited to the north-south area would make EMP preventive diplomacy rather irrelevant. However, a gradual extension of the focus to inter-state conflicts in the south and to intra-state conflicts could be accepted if a strong mechanism of information passing based on a network of focal points, and regional security and situation centres were firmly established in the meantime and not subjected to significant limitations. An effort should also be made to increase seminar diplomacy and to utilise elements of civil society like the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo)¹. If these CBMs work, the EMP will be enabled to set up effective preventive diplomacy as soon as the attendant political conditions emerge.

A second implication of the EMP pattern of conflicts is related mainly to current disputes in scientific quarters about the elusive concept of conflict prevention and its most appropriate conceptual framework. The most important tendency today is to try to streamline the scope of conflict prevention to make it as operational and focused as possible. In this sense, there is—as already pointed out earlier—an understanding to separate conflict prevention (a web of medium- and long-term policies aimed at structural and systemic transformations) from short-term actions of preventive diplomacy specifically aimed at preventing the eruption of violent conflicts, i.e. before they must be managed or subjected to enforcement or other kinds of intervention. Preventive diplomacy is defined by Michael Lund as a definite stage in the life-cycle of a conflict, characterised by, among other things, the exclusion of coercion or military-related instruments. Other interpretations—like that of Bruce W. Jentleson—see preventive diplomacy as characterised by its function of excluding the occurrence of violence in opposition to war diplomacy which is supposed to be mainly directed at limiting or terminating violence.

The conceptualisation of preventive actions and measures is important in view of the aforementioned differentiations in the stages and nature of conflicts which seem to prevail in the initial typologies of Mediterranean conflicts. For example, the more restrictive definition provided by Lund would prevent EMP preventive diplomacy from being applicable to post-conflict or intra-conflict situations like those that can be found in the EMP area.

In trying to adapt the preventive diplomacy conceptual approach to the Mediterranean reality through analysis of the Arab-Israeli experience, two Egyptians authors² propose to define preventive diplomacy as “all non-violent efforts that seek to pre-empt the eruption or escalation of violence inter-state conflicts ...”; they note that the successful mechanisms and structures of conflict prevention developed by the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty are “part of a comprehensive endeavour to solve the conflict between the two countries” and that the preventive measures included in the treaty work, at one and the same time, “as both security arrangements and confidence building measures”.

Though this approach may not be shared by those who concentrate on conflict prevention today, there is no doubt that differences in Mediterranean conflicts, the stabilising impact provided in many

cases by the end of the Cold War and the importance and ramifications of the post-conflict stage through which the Arab-Israeli conflict is passing, call for a preventive policy capable of intervening in various stages of the conflicts and, more broadly speaking, a highly pragmatic approach to situations that may change or recur over time.

ARMS CONTROL AND LIMITATION

Arms control and limitation is an important task of the EMP process on both the conventional and the non-conventional sides³.

The RDAP lists a number of CSBMs that reflect the EMP's aims in an accurate way. Of the CSBMs listed by the Senior Officials, two would bring about new international commitments for the partners: the institution of a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the introduction of the concept of defence sufficiency (linked with that of legitimate security concern).

These aspects of the EMP exercise are encountering a number of stumbling blocks which are partly emerging from the gap between the co-operative culture accumulated by the Europeans in twenty years of CSCE/OSCE experience and the more traditional attitude prevailing in the southern Mediterranean area, and partly re-emerging from the well-known experiences in the Middle East negotiations and the ACRS.

Broadly speaking, one can note that on the European side the concept of arms control is linked to the one gradually matured with the East-West experience and the end of the Cold War, ie. it is close to the "neo-liberal school" of thought. As Fred Tanner pointed out, this approach "sees in arms control a possible means to facilitate the development of a common security regime ... more a vehicle to shape perceptions of states and less an instrument to adjust their military capabilities ... one avenue of co-operation among states that will lead to the removal of the security dilemma". Conversely, both Arabs and Israelis seem closer to the traditional view, that is less concerned with the management of conflicts than with the management of military balances.

It must be pointed out that the EMP sphere fails to include a set of eastern countries in the Gulf, such as Iran and Iraq, which have an essential impact on regional security. Conversely, Israel's concept of national security is linked to the necessity of taking these countries in consideration. Another known vicious linkage is related to the institution of military or military-related CBMs and CSBMs. The Arab (especially Egyptian) literature on the subject reminds one that, in the Arab view, CBMs can be introduced only when there is a situation of strategic balance (ie. when Israel's nuclear armament is eliminated), otherwise their introduction could perpetuate the very situation that should be changed. Also, linkages are made between (Arab) conventional forces and (Israeli) nuclear weapons as well as between nuclear arms in the hands of Israel and the Arab legitimacy to developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and related delivery means.

It is interesting to report here the implications for EMP policies suggested by Mark Heller, a member of Israel's Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, in relation to arms control in the area⁴:

"The objective of EMP policies, including those on WMD, should be to replace the traditional defense posture with a comprehensive regional security system. This must be generated primarily from within the Middle East region itself, and if the arms control elements of it are viewed as a near-term outcome, there is little that the EMP can realistically do to bring that about. But if arms

control is viewed as a long-term process, EMP can make some modest but significant contributions:

1. The first is to support the Arab-Israeli process, both in terms of political and material support for the existing tracks and in terms of encouragement of positive involvement by parties currently outside the process;
2. The second is to consider expansion of EMP so that it overlaps more fully with the Middle East threat environment. If this happens, then any regional measures on material limitations will, at least from Israel's perspective, apply to the relevant zone;
3. Meanwhile, EMP should encourage a variety of CSBMs of a declaratory and perhaps operational nature, e.g., declarations of 'no first use' of force, greater transparency in defense budgets, pre-notification of military exercises, and reporting to registers of arms transfers. These are feasible even before a comprehensive regional security is in place, precisely because they help reduce threat perceptions without actually compromising defense capabilities;
4. Finally, the EMP can institute some EMP-specific supply-side controls, by agreeing to refrain from intra-EMP WMD transfers, including dual-use technologies and components".

It is easy to see that this simple agenda would be met with many objections from other sides.

With respect to arms control and limitation, non-military and military-related confidence building, slowly evolving confidence-building, conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy are bound to be more easily accepted by the partners and must be selected as focal points of the EMP's action in the first stage of its life. Only some degree of success in strengthening confidence and conflict prevention capacities can pave the way for arms control and limitation in a second stage. In the meantime, three points seem especially relevant in preparing for future progress:

(a) arrangements (like EuroMeSCo) aimed at making security and strategic thinking in the civil society, diplomatic circles and military establishments more homogeneous are an essential building block on the way to conflict resolution in the EMP area (which is in the end less intellectually homogeneous than in the East-West sphere); as repeatedly stated in this paper, confidence-building is a priority in the EMP, but building confidence by narrowing or closing gaps in security and strategic thinking is the most important among priorities:

(b) the notion of non- or slow evolution in confidence-building should be elaborated, particularly in the military field, to ease the linkages that paralyse the Middle East negotiations and, consequently, the EMP process;

(c) in this sense, the negotiation principle put forward by the RDAP, predicated on 'differentiation of circles of participation and sequencing', can be very helpful. While the tendency is likely to be that of interpreting 'differentiation' as different groupings of countries in relation to varying initiatives and issues, this rule of flexibility could be made more helpful if it were used to identify 'different circles' of issues or regions giving way to different tiers or clusters of negotiations; proper sequencing can help to implement differentiation and overcome linkages by putting forward issue-linkages: as noted by Sverre Lodgaard⁵ in concluding the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) project on Confidence-Building and Arms Control in the Middle East, "sequencing may be considered across issue areas, i.e. between arms control and other fields of

activity, and within the field of confidence-building and arms control”.

1 The Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission is the network of the Euro-Mediterranean public-policy institutes dealing with international relations and security; EuroMeSCo was established in Sesimbra Portugal) in June 1996.

2 Abdel Monem Said Aly and Gamal A.G. Soltan in the paper presented at the EuroMeSCo meeting in Cairo, 15-16 February 1997.

3 On this point see: Tanner, Fred, ‘The Mediterranean Pact: A Framework for Soft Security Co-operation’, *Perceptions*, Ankara, Vol. 1, No. 4, December-February 1996/97, pp. 56-67.

4 In the paper presented at the meeting mentioned in note 3.

5 ‘Confidence Building and Arms Control in the Middle East’; this unpublished document is a personal account by the former director of UNIDIR, Dr. Sverre Lodgaard, on the first two years work of the UNIDIR project on Confidence-Building and Arms Control in the Middle East.

**This article has been the basis of a report for the Round Table Conference on the follow-up of the Barcelona Declaration.*