

# THE MEDITERRANEAN PACT: A FRAMEWORK FOR SOFT SECURITY CO-OPERATION<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean region increasingly acquires its own distinct political identity. With the end of the Cold War the region has lost its East-West compartmentalisation and security questions have become increasingly indivisible, regardless of diverse sub-regional features. Multilateral policy initiatives such as the Mediterranean Forum or the Barcelona process confirm this trend of regionalisation. But, the destiny of the Mediterranean remains closely linked to developments in Europe and the Middle East.

The region can be described by many attributes, including geography, history and a certain perception of togetherness.<sup>2</sup> The same region is, however, also marked by an arc of crisis that results from mistrust among states, unstable domestic settings, and drastic economic cleavages. The consequences of this arc of crisis are a sense of insecurity, excessive militarisation, emergence of radical movements, domestic violence and increasing illegal migration. The extensive nature of these threats to stability in the region require a comprehensive and trans-regional response. Stability and durable peace can therefore only be achieved if the security co-operation includes an economic and cultural dimension, including human rights, democratic values and fundamental freedoms.

The Barcelona Declaration, signed in November 1995 by 11 Mediterranean states, the Palestinian Authority, and the EU, encapsulated this spirit of equal and comprehensive security co-operation. It contains three chapters that represent the trilogy of policy preferences: politico-security, economic and cultural. The politico-security chapter includes a mandate providing the Mediterranean region with a region-specific security arrangement. It reads: "[The participants] consider any confidence and security-building measures that could be taken between the parties with a view to the creation of an 'area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean', including the long-term possibility of establishing a Europe-Mediterranean pact to that end."

The conceptual and geographical premise of such a pact has been curtailed by the Barcelona Declaration itself. First, even though the Mediterranean is heavily burdened by hard security challenges, such as threats of hot conflicts or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the focal area of co-operation will be in the sphere of soft security. Some NATO countries made sure that the Barcelona Declaration would not venture into the hard security realm. Also, the EU as the key partner of the Barcelona Community does not have any authority nor capability to deal with hard security questions. This could eventually change if the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) decides to enlist the WEU as a defence branch within the Union's framework. This is, however, highly unlikely for the time being. Second, some Middle Eastern countries conditioned their co-operation with the Barcelona process to the commitment to run the Barcelona agenda in parallel, and not instead of, the classic conflict resolution structures that are centred on US engagements in the Middle East. The Barcelona Declaration states ostentatiously in its preamble that "this Euro-Mediterranean initiative is not intended to replace the other activities and initiatives undertaken in the interest of peace, stability and development in the region (...)."

## PROPOSALS FOR A PACT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Proposals for a Mediterranean Pact have been advanced during the Barcelona summit by France and by Malta.<sup>3</sup> The French proposal draws from the Stability Pact in Europe that was worked out for Central and Eastern European states and that originated in the Balladur Plan. The Stability Pact for Europe, finally adopted as a Joint Action under the fragile Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU, is intended to promote good neighbourly relations and to encourage countries to consolidate their borders and to resolve the problems of national minorities. The Pact was not conceived as an instrument of conflict management, but it represented an exercise in preventive diplomacy in which the European Union will have an active role to play as a catalyst. It may be too early for an assessment of the Pact's role in security-building in Central Europe, but it appears to remain a rather static exercise: even though the Pact highlights important norms on minorities, henceforth no measures were created to assure monitoring compliance with minority rights as they were set out in the bilateral agreements among Central European states.

The French project for a Stability Pact in the Mediterranean has been proposed not as an arrangement dealing with current conflicts in the region, but rather as a foundation for a future regional security architecture. In this sense, it is to provide a framework for a political and security-related dialogue, that was launched during the Barcelona Summit. The framework should provide the Barcelona partner states with a platform for promoting voluntary and politically binding commitments. It is not intended to create new institutions, at least not in the first phase, but rather build on the experience of the existing organisations. The Pact proposes to emphasise the internal situation of the participating states in view of the danger of the internationalisation of domestic conflicts. Finally, the French proposal sees the Pact as part and parcel of the Barcelona Process. This would entitle the activities related to this Pact to have access to MEDA financial resources.

In procedural terms, the French proposal should be adopted as a CFSP policy initiative,<sup>4</sup> and a summit in Paris with all 27 Barcelona Partners should subscribe to the Pact in a solemn ceremony just before the second ministerial meeting of the Barcelona Process, scheduled for April 1997.

The Maltese proposal highlights the need to create a pan-Mediterranean security platform to promote an on-going dialogue of the Mediterranean states. It envisages the creation of mechanisms to manage crises in order to prevent them from deteriorating into conflicts and to settle by peaceful means differences and disputes between Mediterranean states. The Maltese initiative has advanced the concept of round tables with the objective of protecting the Barcelona Partnership from sliding into one of the numerous quagmires in the Mediterranean. In this sense, the Pact could act as some kind of clearing house for those security matters that have the potential of paralysing or disrupting the Barcelona Partnerships.

Both, the French and the Maltese proposals for a Mediterranean Pact reflect the need to give a clear framework to the vague, but ambitious objectives of the Barcelona Partnership. In this context, the primary objective is to engage in building norms in the area of good-neighbourly relations among states and groups of states. This can be partially achieved by the highlighting of existing treaties and agreements already concluded. Furthermore, the initiatives attempt to seize the security agenda of the region and to give it a Mediterranean-specific character. But, under the Pact, every Mediterranean state would be free to

choose its own security arrangements, including alliances and mutual military assistance agreements.

The loose character of the proposals on a Mediterranean Pact would allow a security forum to emerge in the Mediterranean without necessarily defusing military rivalries before co-operative security can take a foothold in the region. The initially modest objectives of the Mediterranean Pact are to promote a culture of co-operation in the security domain among Mediterranean states. Such a culture can be actively shaped by a conference diplomacy for foreign ministry officials as well as a seminar diplomacy for military decision-makers. A continued dialogue with face-to-face encounters, even if initially only addressing light issues, can eventually yield the effects of a preventive diplomacy.

The Mediterranean Pact would differ from her older sister in Europe on two basic points: first, the Stability Pact in Europe would turn into a clearing house for candidacies for EU membership. Non-participation in the Pact or non-compliance with its stipulations would forgo any claim to EU membership among the Central and Eastern European countries invited to participate. This is not the case in the Mediterranean, where only 3 countries out of 12 partners are considered eligible to join the EU.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the emphasis on questions related to minorities and frontiers will not be retained in the Mediterranean Pact. The Barcelona Declaration, for instance, carefully avoids minority issues and contends only to the commitment of respecting the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination. The question of the rights of peoples to self-determination has been a contentious issue up to the Barcelona conference. Understandably pushed by the Palestinians, it encountered opposition from Israel, but also from Turkey, who tried to avoid the Kurdish issue somehow finding a way into the Barcelona arrangements.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in contrast to the European pact, the Mediterranean pact will be more generic, attempting to consolidate existing agreements and enable in a step by step approach the Mediterranean region to engage in a security dialogue and in confidence-building.

#### Towards a Mediterranean Security Agenda

The Barcelona Declaration and the revised Action Plan of the Political and Security Chapter of the Barcelona Process advance a number of soft security measures. It would be up to the Mediterranean Pact to implement and build upon these measures. The Pact is supposed to contribute both to confidence-building and to the prevention of conflicts and escalation of violence. The proposals also stress the role of round tables and co-operation in areas of anti-terrorism and peacekeeping.

- Confidence building

The main purpose of confidence building is to enhance the mutual understanding among the Barcelona Partners. Specific measures could include information exchange, co-ordination and mutual assistance in matters such as response to natural and man-made disasters and air-sea search and rescue operations. Security building in the Barcelona process emphasises transparency measures, information exchange, co-operation arrangements and adherence to existing arms control agreements.

- Preventive diplomacy

This is the main purpose of the Mediterranean pact. Within the Barcelona setting, the promotion of a structured political dialogue and the agreement of a Euro-Med security agenda can in itself produce the effects of preventive diplomacy. More operational aspects could include the establishment of communication networks among focal points and fact finding/rapporteur missions. An essential part of preventive diplomacy constitutes the convening of round tables. Such tables could be chaired by the EU. Themes of the round tables could include items like illegal migration and treatment of migrant workers in Europe, terrorism, drug trafficking, water resources, minority rights, ecological imbalances, etc. Round tables could also deal with sub-regional disputes. Subsidiary agreements to the Mediterranean Pact could define the composition, issues of negotiations and the working procedures of these round tables. Such a round table could be conceivable, for instance with Algeria, Morocco and the Polisario for finding a way out of the current stalemate in the Western Sahara.

- Fighting terrorism

The Mediterranean pact could become the framework within which Mediterranean states co-ordinate their fight against terrorism. Important suggestions in this field have already been elaborated by the Contact Group of the OSCE with the Mediterranean partners at their meeting in Vienna on 1-2 July 1996. The suggestions include the creation of a database on terrorism, preparation of a code of behaviour on combating terrorism, mutual legal assistance, sharing intelligence and information on counter-terrorism and counter-terrorism training assistance.

- Peacekeeping guidelines and training

The objective would be to establish guidelines for peacekeeping operations in the Mediterranean similar to those adopted under the Petersburg Tasks of the Western European Union (WEU) or the 1993 Rome commitments of the OSCE. Currently there are at least eight peace support missions deployed in the Mediterranean region. A common approach to peacekeeping may enable regional organisations such as the League of Arab states to assume a more affirmative role in regional and sub-regional peacekeeping missions. These efforts should be accompanied by joint training programmes for peacekeeping operations, as suggested by the revised Action Plan.

The presence of Middle Eastern states in the Barcelona process will make it impossible to confine security co-operation under the Mediterranean Pact to soft security measures only. The Arab, and primarily the Egyptian delegation insisted on making Israeli nuclear capabilities a top priority item of regional security co-operation. This has led the Barcelona partners to pursue a mutually and effectively verifiable Middle East Zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Barcelona Declaration also encouraged the partners to adhere to the much neglected UN Register on Conventional Arms Transfers and highlighted the need to work out a concept of defence sufficiency and non-offensive defence.

The abundance of items on the security agenda of the Barcelona process clearly shows the need to orchestrate the policy initiatives between the Security Chapter of Barcelona and the Mediterranean Pact on the one hand, and between the Barcelona process and existing extra- and sub-regional security arrangements on the other.

## THE MEDITERRANEAN PACT IN A COMPETITIVE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The Mediterranean pact could not be established in a normative or institutional vacuum. On the contrary, the institutional playing field in the broader Mediterranean area is already rather crowded. The key question is whether there is space for a region-specific security arrangement such as the Mediterranean Pact, and how this Pact would relate to existing security frameworks in Europe and the Middle East. In other terms, how can the emerging Barcelona security agenda avoid undercutting or duplicating the work of existing security arrangements that cover part of the Mediterranean region, either from the European or the Middle Eastern side?

NATO, the WEU and OSCE cover part of the Northern and Eastern Mediterranean and they would be reluctant to support the formation of a new trans-Mediterranean co-operative security regime. This is particularly true, as some of these organisations begin to re-orientate their attention to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The geopolitical perceptions of NATO officials or of American policy makers links increasingly the Mediterranean to a greater Euro-Atlantic scheme. Such a geo-strategic perception appears incompatible with EU efforts to create a separate Euro-Med security partnership. The Northern security organisations have marked their presence in the Mediterranean region through their dialogue programmes with select Mediterranean states. Furthermore, a reformed and more European NATO may soon be engaged in a process of gradual openness toward the South and formally launch a Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme for the Mediterranean. Key foreign policy institutes of NATO countries, such as the Instituto Affari Internazionali (Italy) or Rand (USA) have already submitted their proposals about PfP in the Mediterranean.

Relations would have to be clarified between the Mediterranean Pact and a Partnership for Peace for the Mediterranean, possibly even with the WEU Mediterranean Dialogue. The WEU, based on the Petersburg Tasks, has already held meetings with Mediterranean partner states in order to exchange views on experience gained in peacekeeping operations.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the peacekeeping training, as envisaged in the revised Action Plan would directly compete with Nato's PfP programmes. Currently, in the context of the multinational IFOR operation in Bosnia, close co-operation on peacekeeping emerges between NATO and several Mediterranean states, such as Tunisia and Morocco.

In view of the fact that all WEU members are part of the EU, the question will inevitably arise as to what extent the Mediterranean Dialogue of the WEU should be harmonised or merged with the Barcelona security agenda. The WEU has engaged in a dialogue with Maghreb states since 1992, Egypt joined in 1994 and Israel in 1995. The dialogue centres around a number of items of co-operation that are very likely to be included in the mandate of the Mediterranean Pact.<sup>8</sup> A certain rivalry between the WEU and Barcelona has already emerged, as the former seems paralysed by some of its members who give priority to the Barcelona Security Chapter on the costs of WEU's Mediterranean Dialogue.

Should the WEU insist on the continuation of a distinct dialogue with Mediterranean partners, the defining difference to the emerging Euro-Med dialogue would be in the differentiation between soft and hard security. The Euro-Med process could engage in soft security arrangements, whereas the WEU would concentrate on politico-military questions such arms control, sufficiency, defence restructuring, arms transfer constraints, etc. This emphasis, however, would heavily overlap with Nato's Dialogue with Mediterranean states and the envisaged Partnership for Peace in the Mediterranean.

In addition to extra-regional actors and institutions, such as the US, NATO or the WEU, there are sub-regional co-operative groupings dealing with soft and hard security questions, that may appear incompatible to a trans-Mediterranean security arrangement. These initiatives derive from the multilateral dimension of the Middle East peace process and cover the entire geographical south of the Mediterranean, ranging from Morocco to Jordan, for the time being without Syria and Lebanon. The round tables of a Mediterranean Pact would take up most of the themes that are part of the working groups of the Madrid Multilateral Track.<sup>9</sup> Even though, or precisely because, the Multilateral Track has been stalled since mid-1995, it appears questionable to what extent Israel and the Arab states would be prepared to participate in Euro-Med round tables dealing with similar or identical topics.

## CONCLUSION

The cross-cultural situation in the Mediterranean necessitates in a first step to develop shared understandings and meanings of the commitments entered in the Barcelona Partnership. Without shared understandings the building of a security partnership appears an impossible task. The achievement of common understandings and the sharing of values can only be reached through regularised political co-operation and interactions at various levels of government and societies.

One of the basic understandings that needs to be harmonised in the Mediterranean is the unacceptability of threat or actual use of force in both inter-state as well as domestic politics. Euro-Med instruments such as political dialogue, situation rooms or crisis management procedures are important. But equally important is the general acceptance to solve internal and external problems with compromise or consensus.

The only chance of the Mediterranean Pact to assume an effective role is to focus on soft security co-operation and to pursue an incremental policy of crisis prevention that is closely linked to the economic Euro-Med partnership. A Mediterranean Pact could find its legitimacy in the normative vacuum that today exists in the area of conflict prevention and war avoidance. As an abstract and norm-building approach, the Mediterranean Pact could coexist with a Nato's Partnership for Peace in the Mediterranean and the peace processes in the Middle East and the Balkans. The conceptual differentiation between soft and hard security co-operation could allow for a mutually reinforcing link with the WEU.

The action-oriented round tables, in turn, would eventually have to co-ordinate their agendas with the Madrid Multilateral Track and the OSCE. This would require a system of reciprocal exchange of information between the Barcelona Security and Political Committee, the Steering Committee of the Madrid Multilateral Peace Process and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna.

The chances that the emerging agenda of the Mediterranean Pact will be implemented depends in final account on the Middle East and extra-regional developments. The failure of the Middle East peace process could break the Barcelona spirit as well. The Arab states managed to become increasingly organised within the Barcelona process. The Arab League decided at its meeting in September 1996 to continue with the Barcelona process, but it clearly established a linkage to the developments in the Near East.

Finally, the fate of the Mediterranean Pact will heavily depend on the EU members' capability to take a common stance with regard to the Mediterranean.

In this respect, the future of the Barcelona security agenda relies to a large extent on the progress of the IGC in the area of CFSP. The recent appointment of a EU envoy to the Middle East indicates that the EU is prepared to take a firmer and more unified stance toward the region. Given the extra-regional institutional interplay currently at stake, including the IGC, the Europeanisation of NATO, the unknown future of the WEU and the strengthening of the OSCE in recent years, together with an increased US-European rivalry over the Middle East peace process, the agenda of the Mediterranean Pact will have to accept with much flexibility a non-hierarchical relationship in the future institutional environment of the Mediterranean.

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution draws partially from an article published in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Bleda, Tanşuğ (1996), 'The Mediterranean and the Black Sea', *Perceptions*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Ankara.

<sup>3</sup> Referred to as Euro-Mediterranean Pact in the Barcelona Declaration, the French and Maltese suggested first a Stability Pact for the Mediterranean, then variably a Mediterranean Pact or a Mediterranean Charter. This article uses the term Mediterranean Pact, except in cases where official language explicitly refers to another term.

<sup>4</sup> 'La politique Méditerranéenne de la France et de l'Union Européenne à la veille de la Conférence de Barcelone-Intervention du ministre des Affaires étrangères', M. Herve de Charette à l'Assemblée nationale, *Textes et Documents*, November 1996, pp. 86-91.

<sup>5</sup> Malta, Cyprus and Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> Barbe, Esther, 'The Barcelona Conference: Launching Pad of a Process', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 1, No.1, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Brief on WEU Mediterranean Activities: OSCE Seminar, Tel Aviv, Sem.Med./TA/11, 3 June 1996.

<sup>8</sup> They include: 1. dialogue to contribute to stability in the region; 2. transparency in the field of military activities; 3. confidence-building measures on the OSCE patterns; and 4. conflict prevention based on the development of common security perceptions.

<sup>9</sup> The themes of the Multilateral Track include: Refugees, Water, Economic Development, Environment and Arms Control.