

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND CO-OPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE EU COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

ADRIÁN MAC LIMAN

Adrián Mac Liman is a political analyst and a former head of the Mediterranean-Arab World Unit, CIDOB Foundation, Barcelona.

The Mediterranean, crucible of races, crossroads of cultures and cradle of the three great monotheist religions, is also one of the most conflict-prone regions of our planet. The Mare Nostrum, scenario of the splendour and decadence of great empires, of successive conquests and dominations which have left indelible marks from Gibraltar to the Dardanelles, has become, at the end of the twentieth century, the frontier which divides the North, of opulence and paradise, from the developing countries. Apparently, its waves only serve to increase the distance between two worlds living back to back: East and West, from universes with different though complementary values, with disparate social models, who try to coexist in spite of many constant misunderstandings. This cultural conflict, which some Anglo-Saxon political scientists do not hesitate to label as a 'clash of civilisations'¹, has been increasing since the end of the 1980s due to the resurgence of integrist currents in the Arab-Islamic world and, above all, due to Arab society's generalised rejection of Western values during and after the crisis brought on by the occupation of Kuwait, which led to the Gulf War. This reaction just added to an endless number of clashes, of wasted chances for dialogue. In fact, only a few months before Saddam Hussein's troops invaded the Emirate, two of the EU's Mediterranean members, Italy and Spain, pleaded in favour of the celebration of a Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean, following the example set by the meeting at Helsinki. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, this initiative sought to extend political and socio-economic stability and co-operation to the southern confines of the Old Continent. It was not a mere improvisation; already in the 1970s, the southern European countries contemplated the possibility of drawing their neighbours from the Maghreb and the Mashriq into the process initiated in the Finnish capital. However, their attempts came up against the refusal of some central and northern European states, who were for limiting the debate to the then embryonic dialogue with Eastern Europe.

THE EU'S EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP

In fact, it was not until the mid-1990s that the 15 members of the EU met with the 12 countries of the Southern basin of the Mediterranean which signed collaboration or free trade agreements with Brussels. The EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership initiative and the Inter-ministerial Conference held in Barcelona, 28-29 November 1995, began a new era in relations between North and South. The road embarked upon in the Catalan capital will no doubt be long and winding. Even though we depart from common premises, it must be acknowledged that we find ourselves before a more complex problem than that of Helsinki, where special emphasis was placed on the need to open a dialogue between two blocs with antagonistic ideologies. In the Barcelona process, it is not easy to find a common denominator in the attitudes of the twelve southern littoral countries.² And this is simply because we do not find ourselves before a unitarian bloc, but before states whose interests differ and even diverge. Therefore, the three candidates to join the European Union—Turkey, Malta and Cyprus—insist on their position as future EU members, no longer sharing the worries of some of their neighbours and, until now, allies. One need only analyse the ambiguous relations between Malta and Libya or the ups and downs in the recent alliance between Turkey and Iran, not to mention the hackneyed Europeanism invoked by Greek Cypriot politicians.

In turn, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, which are in the forefront of preferential agreements with Brussels, adopt a very particular attitude before their neighbours to the North, emphasising the importance of their historical and cultural ties with France, the old metropolis.

Israel, who also has a very special relationship with the European Union, tries to approach this group, but it has not succeeded in its main priority: its integration within any group of privileged countries.

Egypt and Jordan constitute real exceptions. Although both states have commercial, financial, technical and scientific co-operation agreements with the European Union, their respective governments do not disguise the fact that their relations with the US are of primary importance.

Faced with the mosaic of options offered by The Twelve, one can however glimpse a converging point: economic interests. Since most of Brussels's future partners hope to take advantage of this opportunity to:

- initiate a political rapprochement with the European Union;
- achieve a series of advantages derived from the establishment of a free trade zone in 2010;
- bring about, without excessive traumas, the social changes desired by some statesmen and;
- try to manage their existing human resources with greater efficacy.

Both the Committee and the governments of the 27 states participating in the Barcelona Inter-ministerial Conference opted to sacrifice, for the sake of consensus, the most contentious items on the agenda, so allowing ambiguity to circle above certain aspects of future relations. We can ask ourselves if this original exercise of style really constitutes:

- a first attempt to apply the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) to a set of states situated on the other side of Europe's frontiers;
- a wager for Europe's increased protagonism in the Arab- Islamic world.

The fragility of this compromise became apparent during the ministerial summit held in Malta, 15-16 April 1997. The deliberations were carried out in an atmosphere of generalised unease, having the Near East's crisis, with its inevitable repercussions for stability on a regional scale, in the background.

THE CFSP: A CHALLENGE FOR GLOBALIZATION

The CFSP of the European Union represents a new option for collective diplomacy, called forth to substitute the non-binding European Political Co-operation (EPC) set of measures, which were adopted by the European Community during the 1970s. Emanating from the Maastricht Treaty, the CFSP constitutes one of the EU's most ambitious challenges when faced with a world in constant change.

It seems premature to judge its advantages or disadvantages within the context of Mediterranean conflicts and stability. The truth is that the first symptoms of its inoperativeness were detected during the ethnic conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, though they were also seen in the EU's hesitancy to adopt concrete measures to solve the Albanian crisis. In this particular case, NATO's humanitarian intervention is guaranteed by a United Nations Security Council resolution. The discrepancies that usually arise when establishing common criteria in the face of other situations of conflict which affect the stability of the region must not be forgotten either.

The CFSP philosophy could be summarised in four basic

concepts:

- the defence of the European Union's common values, fundamental interests and independence;
- strengthening of the member state's security;
- the expansion of international co-operation programmes and;
- the promotion of the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental liberties.

The application of the above mentioned principles rests in turn upon three pillars:

- Common attitudes—above all those meant to ease co-ordination of the national politics of the Union's member states in international fora and organisations or with a view to the adoption of retaliation measures (economic sanctions, embargoes, etc.)

A certain amount of confusion has been registered among the CFSP's prerogatives and the European Commission's work. This is simply due to the fact that a great part of The Fifteen's political decisions affect commerce, finance and co-operation programmes.³

- Common actions—devised for mobilising political, financial, economic and human potential for the benefit of specific projects which are in the interest of all of the member states. This second pillar is composed of a series of reasonable heterogeneous ad hoc measures, which range from disarmament policies to the supervision of electoral processes (Russia, Bosnia, etc.), as well as precise actions such as the creation of the Palestine police or the management of Mostar.

- Decisions and concert actions on defence—which contemplate the possibility of the Union applying for the elaboration and implementation of military measures from the West European Union. The EU has not yet resorted to this third pillar.⁴

CONFLICT AND STABILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

As previously pointed out, the European Union's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership did not arise simply as a reaction to the rejection of the Latin countries of the German Federal Republic's Ostpolitik, i.e. to Bonn's advances at the head of the PECO's (potential candidates for the extension of the EU), but also and above all because of the need to re-establish a balance between the Union's eastern and southern flanks. The promoters of this project feel it necessary to reinitiate dialogue with the countries from the other shore, begun over 30 years ago and repeatedly interrupted by events which affected Mediterranean stability. And so, to the Israel-Arab conflict, which dates back to the 40s, to which are added the Cyprus crisis, the two wars between Iran and Iraq, the Balkan conflict, and numerous internal encounters or low intensity wars in the Maghreb.

On the other hand, analysts and the promoters of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership insist on adding to these turbulent elements the reactions that a lack of political stability in countries such as Turkey or Pakistan could provoke, as they are key figures in the world's geopolitical scene and are included in co-operation and defence agreements with the West. It must be pointed out that, in either case, both strategists and political scientists reject resorting to any kind of military option destined to maintain the status quo.

At this stage, the question arises: can we talk about a common perception of the regional concepts of stability and security? Obviously, the answer carries many nuances. If for the EU's member states, the stability in the Mediterranean forcefully implies a group of strategic economic and energetic factors, for their neighbours to the south the concept of security usually covers economic and social disparities, the expansion of the integrist phenomenon, directly or indirectly related to the failure of "imported" socio-economic models, the environment's deterioration, the need to check illegal migratory streams and the arms proliferation. In short, the future members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership consider regional security as a concept that should be analysed from a global point of view, taking its political and economic dimensions into account.

Maybe because of this, the EU's Partnership tries to integrate the pillars of the CFSP into its three baskets, so similar to those which helped to negotiate the Helsinki Final Act. Even so, southern politicians appear reticent when they approach Europe on security and defence matters promoted by NATO through related organs which, we can take this opportunity to say, do not appear in Barcelona's Declaration, or before the proposal of creating a mixed quick reaction brigade in the Mediterranean, as recently put forward by French strategists. Most third country governments consider, in effect, that the South's war potential poses no threat at all to the Western countries. On the other hand, the solution to the problem of extremism (or of political Islam, a euphemism for the violent currents of Islamic integristism) depends on the goodwill of each and every one of the actors to confront the political, economic and social challenges that brought about this phenomenon, and their respect for both shores' cultural differences.

To aid the dialogue between Europeans and their southern neighbours, the CFSP should add a fourth pillar offering a wider scope for manoeuvre to civilian societies' socio-cultural initiatives. This lack was made apparent in the balance presented by the Commission during the ministerial meeting in Malta.

EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

By dissociating the Middle Eastern Peace Process from the whole of its Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the EU had to give way to Syria's and Lebanon's demands, countries which had expressly manifested their unwillingness to attend a meeting to which representatives of the government of Israel had also been invited. Nevertheless, the governments who had requested this exemption as a sine qua non condition to be present at the Barcelona conference, took this opportunity to ask The Fifteen to look into this matter. This contradiction, which is in line with the thinking of the region's politicians, reflects the frustration of many Arab capitals at the preponderant role played by the US in the Middle East. We must not forget that North America's action in this area used to be limited to guaranteeing the supply of oil and maintaining close co-operative links with Israel, disregarding the Old Continent's strategic interests.

Maybe for this reason, Europe's progressive involvement in the Peace Process is both useful and necessary. The measures carried out by the French diplomacy during 1996, which tended to impose a new instrument of collaboration, the Mediterranean Stability and Security Charter, coincide with the fear that Egypt- first "front line country" who signed the peace with Israel in 1979 -vainly tries to hide, with respect to a possible turn in Tel Aviv's policy, due to the present difficulties that the Peace Process with the Palestinians is going through. In fact, most of Israel's neighbours, Egypt, Syria, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), as well as some Mahgreb states, even juggled the hypothesis of a possible (although for now not likely) co-ordination of diplomatic efforts between the EU and Russia to:

- counteract US influence in the Middle East
- re-establish the balance of forces and
- reactivate the Peace Process.

However, if US influence in the region has been increasing in recent years, above all because of Europe's participation in the political and reconstruction process which is taking place in the Palestinian Territories, it is no less true that The Fifteen are not yet ready to assume the role of a regional power, bound to defend its political and strategic interests.

After the Madrid Conference (1991) and the signing of the Washington Declaration of Principles (1993), the US has limited itself to offering or channelling substantial economic aid to Middle Eastern countries (Jordan, Syria, PNA). Nevertheless, Europe has felt itself to be on the fringe in the economic summits of Casablanca (1994) and Amman (1996), organised by the US. It is obvious that the Europeans must find a modus operandi with their transatlantic ally to consolidate their presence in the region. However, for this collaboration to be possible outside the US's political or military sphere, the EU has to define a coherent regional policy, based on the following principles:

- the acknowledgement of every nation's right to self-determination, independence and security
- the right to security of every state (including Israel). This right is inseparable from the Palestinian's right to demand their independence
- support for the Arab nations' aspirations for solidarity, unity, openness towards the (rest of the) world and peace
- the creation of an economic community in the Middle East and
- the establishment of a zone of prosperity, based on the free flow of people and goods.⁵

The appointment of the Spanish diplomat Miguel Angel Moratinos, a sociologist and Arabist who has been general director for Africa and the Middle East in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the EU's special envoy to the Middle East opens the way for the materialisation of a more dynamic policy in the area. In spite of Israel's systematic rejection of any European initiative related to a political solution of the conflict, Moratinos's mission has been viewed favourably both by the Arab capitals and by Tel Aviv. This is probably one of the reasons why the Spanish diplomat played a very active role during the crisis provoked by Netanyahu's controversial decision to create a Jewish settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, a hill on the outskirts of East Jerusalem, occupied in 1967.

So, even though the mandate of the Union's envoy to the Middle East arises from the first pillar of the CFSP—common attitude—Brussel's decision no doubt constitutes a first step towards the inevitable increase of power handed to first line European personalities, which should lead to the appointment of a EU foreign and security policy co-ordinator, authorised to act as a privileged interlocutor and mediator in conflicts. To reach this goal, the circumspection of many statesmen from the Old Continent, scarcely likely to accept the idea of creating a Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the EU, must be overcome.

However, it seems inconceivable to imagine the future implementation of EU's CFSP without considering the possible designation of a Mr. CFSP.

1 Huntington, Samuel P. (1996), *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Shuster, New York.

2 Mac Liman, Adrián (1995), *Initiative Euro-Méditerranéenne de l'Union Européenne: la réponse des pays tiers méditerranéens*, Fundación CIDOB, Barcelona.

3 Santer, Jacques (1995), 'La sécurité et la défense de l'Union européenne', *Revue de l'OTAN*, No. 6, November.

4 Santer, *ibid.*

5 De Lipkowski, (1996), *La sécurité dans la région méditerranéenne, Rapport présenté au nom de la Commission politique à l'Assemblée de l'Union de l'Europe Occidentale, UEO, Paris, 4 November.*