

## Editorial

### REFORM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: BETWEEN FILLING RESEARCH GAPS AND FACILITATING NEW POLICY APPROACHES

The concept of political and economic reform has, by now, emerged as a widely used term of art throughout the multilateral political community, from governmental institutions to local and international donors. At present, the failure of local efforts to significantly institutionalize reform in their polities spurred a range of initiatives aimed at examining, more closely, and more creatively, opportunities for, as well as constraints encountering the local system's collective capacity to infuse genuine reform at all levels.

By now, it is generally recognized that reform, per se, is one preventive instrument, inter alia, which needs to be developed and deployed across the full spectrum of international assistance and engagement. Moreover, even on the 'reform' front, there has been comparatively little follow up. While reform has many advocates, at the general level, the precise details about how it is to be realized, under what circumstances, when, and by whom, remain significantly underdeveloped, if not vague. This is partly a problem for analysts, whose techniques for assessing volatile situations and prospective remedies could be further sharpened. In the same way, it is partly a problem for organizations and institutions-both local and international, whose practices, styles of decision-making and systems of learning and accountability, often inhibit effective response to the complex environments in which reform may subsist.

Accordingly, attention of Conflict in Focus, this year, is geared towards addressing the nexus between political (issue 1-2)/ economic (issue 3-4) reforms, on the one hand, and conflict prevention in the Mediterranean/Middle East, on the other. In particular, the contributing articles in section two of this newsletter will address the underlying and root causes of potential conflicts in Jordan and Egypt, which, in both countries, are resulting from issues relating to political and economic reform. Meanwhile, section three will provide legroom for European and Middle Eastern scholars and/or practitioners to state their views and standpoints on the nexus between political and economic reform vis-à-vis conflict prevention.

Such attention is potentially of great benefit to countries of the region, most of which are now sites for contemporary conflicts. If anything, it will not only prevent potential conflict from erupting, but will, also, help create an environment in which reform is significantly and genuinely augmented. ■

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### CHANGE ENTAILS FLEXIBILITY: TOWARDS A REAL EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP

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In 1991, optimism was reached its peak for the start of a new and altogether better era in the Middle East. The Cold War was, by then, over and the USSR no more. Ideological struggle came to a halt, with liberal democracy and market economies triumphant. A “New Middle East,” characterized by peaceful regional relations and the rule of law, was far-fetched hope and dream for all. However, the last decade of the past century witnessed political and economic crises, stemming from ethno-national and socio-economic reasons that surfaced to the fore for communal, state and regional leaders. Indeed, the Middle East was, and still is, subject to systemic stresses from failing governments, dysfunctional economies, growing resource scarcities (especially water), and major ideological/religious cleavages within and between countries. Therefore, the region is likely to be plagued by intra- and some inter-state conflict, driven by a powerful combination of oppression and deteriorating economies. Chaos and anarchy are, thus, inevitable, as the region is home to several potential failed states.

In specific, endemic uncertainty and instability in the Middle East is imminent. The situation will further be aggravated, however, by certain trends. First, population growth in the region is on the increase, while the average life expectancy is expected to fall dramatically. If anything, this will add massive pressures on resources, from such basics as food and water to those provided by wealth like employment, education and health care, not to mention the heightening competition for agricultural land. At the same time, the rapid and ever-increasing phenomena of urbanization will outstrip work opportunities and the provision of services, will thus, result in further deteriorating conditions. Consequently, and driven by economic necessity, coupled by illusions of the prospects for a better life, there will be waves of increased migration between countries, and from poorer (Middle Eastern) to richer (i.e. European) ones. These developments will boil into class and/or communal tensions and, hence, add fuel to internal conflicts in some countries of the region where worsening conditions are most acute, and where the state is not in a position to cope with the consequences.

In this context and against this background, European countries came to realize that wealth, per se, would by no means render the European Union immune to the negative consequences of these trends. Hence, Conflict Prevention emerged, indisputably, as a strategic objective for all countries, not only in the European Union, but in the Middle East as well.

In November, 1995, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was established with widespread optimistic expectations and hopes for achieving a viable strategic understanding within the Euro-Mediterranean area. Unfortunately, however, and contrary to these aspirations, the aforementioned regional and international events and developments continued to disappoint optimists and to challenge the ‘preventive’ essence of the EMP. Subsequently, most, if not all, objective confidence and security-building measures within the framework of the EMP proved to be futile and obsolete. Accordingly, it is high time now for the EU to deepen its involvement, and to effectively and efficiently use its leverage in order to promote a lasting and comprehensive stability consistent with its interests and expectations. As a matter of fact, it is only by assuming its responsibility seriously will the EU be in a position to maximize leverage. The EU must be ready to utilize available political, trade, financial and development-aid instruments at its disposal to ensure a sustainable outcome that is equitable enough to last.

#### From Conflict Prevention to Structural Prevention

The EU should mobilize substantial efforts and devote considerable attention to what has been termed ‘structural prevention.’ In that, it should resort to addressing all underlying and root causes of potential conflicts in Middle Eastern societies through a host of economic, social, political and military preventive measures. Such ‘structural prevention’ is potentially of great benefit to countries of the region which are venues for most contemporary conflicts. In that, it will not only prevent potential conflict from erupting, but will also help to create an environment in which the risk of conflict is significantly reduced. Accordingly, a general revision is warranted if the conflict prevention project is to avoid a similar fate as that of other EMP projects, i.e. the EMFTZ (Euro-Med Free Trade Zone). However, as far as revision is concerned, any attempt that is aimed at sustaining conflict prevention in the region must take several major developments into consideration. First, the widening perception of the region as a source of instability and potential security threats. Indeed, substantial socio-economic developments within the southern basin of the Mediterranean must form the principal core area for future cooperation and involvement of the EU. In specific, the EU should consider granting its southern neighbors a fair share in its internal markets, including, as well, the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. As the Valencia Action Plan of April 2002 has confirmed and reiterated what had already been stipulated in the Barcelona Declaration, it is in such fields as transportation, infrastructure, and energy that immediate action is highly necessary. Meanwhile, cooperation projects at the level of civil society would

clearly strengthen the cultural links between and among all countries of the EMP. Cooperative measures like study visits, seminars and training courses designed to foster and enhance constructive dialogues between the two cultures will generate mutual understanding and help in combating misconceptions and stereotyped images within the Euro-Mediterranean sphere. In other words, Euro-Mediterranean civil society cooperation can competently complement other European endeavors for home-made economic and political transformations in the southern basin of the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, any attempt that is aimed at mainstreaming conflict prevention in the region must take into consideration the so-called 'unilateral initiatives'. Many members of the EMP have, by now, accumulated a high degree of suspicion towards European unilateral initiatives that strongly antagonize relations between the southern and northern basins of the Mediterranean. Thus, the EMP should turn towards its southern partners and engage local experts in devising and setting up its ultimate targets and standards; rather than confronting them with unilaterally adopted action plans that are mainly drafted by European consultants who are usually short of the relevant holistic knowledge of the MPCs and their regional environments. Not only such a move would significantly emphasize true partnership building measures, but also, it would lead into mainstreaming the concept of conflict prevention and improving the efficiency of the EMP's development practices in the southern basin of the Mediterranean. So, it is true that the EU has, in its possession, a wide range of instruments which it could mobilize to realize a favorable, remarkable, and positive political difference. However, in order to maximize its leverage, the EU needs to achieve consensus on priorities and coordinate action.

Another major development that must be taken into account if we aim at attaining a sustainable conflict

prevention in the region is Turkey's future EU membership. It is apparent that the future inclusion of Turkey in the European Union will bring the latter closer to the Middle East, thereby, exposing it to an unstable environment that is fraught with conflicts and security threats. In fact, Turkey's accession to the EU will extend the latter's future territory towards the northern border of Iraq and the northwestern border of Iran. In the meantime, the European Union already conducts institutionalized relations with Iran in the context of a permanent dialogue on political issues and the war on terrorism. At the same time, Iraq's emergence as a future EU neighbor will necessarily oblige the EU to integrate the country into its foreign policy approach towards the region. Thus, the EMP should be re-crafted to include Iraq as a new MPC.

### From Promise to Practice: Towards a REAL Partnership

The EU has distinctive interests in a stable Middle East. Geographical proximity and substantial economic instability in the region make it imminent for the EU to change tactics and be proactive in backing a bold results-oriented process that recognizes that outside powers need to become more actively involved – but as facilitators rather than observers– if stability is to be reached.

In summary, the EU has a high stake in a lasting stability and the ability to play a much more proactive role to help promote a sustainable outcome. If the EU wants to secure its interests in the region, time is ripe for it now to pursue a new approach towards laying the foundations for a new order. In other words, in light of a dismal balance sheet of the early years of conflict prevention in the Euro-Mediterranean zone, it is perceptible that political, economic and security partnerships and the stabilization of existing regional conditions are so illusive as long as strategic imbalance persists. ■



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## CONFLICT PREVENTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: ANALYSES, DOCUMENTS, STATEMENTS

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The European Union (EU) is largely committed to conflict prevention, both as a community and an intergovernmental body. All the major EU institutions deal with conflict prevention, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council.

Not only has the EU attributed unilaterally a significant role to conflict prevention in its policies. The principle of conflict prevention and the commitment to act in order to prevent conflict are also included in the agreements and institutions the EU shares with countries and other international actors. The principle is not always active or satisfactorily active, yet it never fails to accompany EU external policies.

This is even the case with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Association Agreements between the Southern Mediterranean countries and the EU. In the EMP framework, conflict prevention is now regularly mainstreamed by the EU in the policies of co-operation it sets in motion, in particular in development co-operation. Whether conflict prevention aims are actually jointly owned by the EU and its EMP partners and the extent they are actually shared remains to be seen. Furthermore, in the EMP the partners were unable to develop joint instruments and actions to prevent conflict in the short term. On the other hand, when it comes to short-term conflict prevention, even EU action is limited as it is predicated on the limited platform of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The ongoing development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), whereby the EU is making a military force operational with a view to manage crises, is believed to open the way to some co-operation among the EMP partners.

This adverse trend to co-operation on conflict prevention, particularly when it comes to short-term co-operation, is largely due to Arab preoccupation that joint conflict prevention may be misused in the Arab-Israeli, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Broadly speaking it stems from the gap in security perspectives that exists between the EU and the Arab world.

The feature on EU conflict prevention policy that will regularly appear in this Newsletter will account for EU policies - the policies implemented and the principles adopted by the EU as such - rather than EU co-operation in the field of conflict prevention - be it in Euro-Med or other joint frameworks. The latter will not be excluded, yet the focus will be on the EU.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the new EU High Representative for Foreign Policy, who is at the same

time the Secretary General of the Council of Ministers, initiated to set up in the Secretariat a structure for early warning and conflict prevention and management? Today, there is a unit expressly devoted to conflict prevention within the structure of the Secretary General. As for the Commission, it established in April 2002 a Conflict Prevention Unit with the task of mainstreaming conflict prevention across the spectrum of the Commission's activities, promoting international co-operation and improving the Commission's readiness to intervene. Inter-institutional activities are co-ordinated thanks to the leadership of the so called troika, which is now bringing together EU institutions (whereas previously used to bring together current, past and next EU Presidencies).

Thanks to this co-ordinated institutional structure and to the deliberate aim of making conflict prevention cut across the full spectrum of EU activities, conflict prevention is everywhere. Giving account of conflict prevention activities would duplicate the EU web site or would result in a list of activities in which conflict prevention plays a more or less significant role. For this reason, this feature in the Newsletter will not attempt at establishing such list, but would comment on the most important policies and official documents of the EU institutions, trying to shed light on their conflict prevention dimension.

To start with, we have taken into consideration six policy statements, which are directly or indirectly relevant to the Mediterranean and the Middle East and tried to understand their significance and impact in terms of conflict prevention.

### 1. A Secure Europe in a Better World. The European Security Strategy

(approved by the European Council held in Brussels on 12 December 2003 and drafted under the responsibilities of the EU High Representative Javier Solana

<http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/makeFrame.asp?MAX=1&BID=111&DID=78367&LANG=1&File=/pressData/en/reports/78367.pdf&Picture=0>

This is the document issued by the High Representative/Secretary General, Javier Solana, to define the principle of the security strategy of the EU. In the strategy, conflict prevention is given a prominent role as a policy response to the mix of internal and external, civilian and military risks which concern the EU. The document states that "We [the EU members] need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and, when necessary, robust intervention ... We need to be able to act before countries around us deteriorate, when signs of proliferation are

detected, and before humanitarian emergencies arise”. The emphasis of the document on the need for a EU “strategic culture” and “robust intervention” reflects EU willingness to use its military instruments (the Rapid Reaction Force) set up recently in the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and to stress these instruments being now available for peace support as well as conflict prevention operations. From the point of view of the Euro-Med context, one has to point out that the EU strategy document, while stressing the use of these new instruments, does not forget to remind the readers that their use remains linked to the United Nations’ authorisation, i.e. the application of the international law.

In sum, the document confirms the importance of conflict prevention for the EU and provides it with a strategic perspective.

## 2. Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy, Strategy Paper

Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, Brussels 11.3.2003, COM(2003) 104 final

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy\\_Paper\\_EN.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy_Paper_EN.pdf)

[http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2003/com2003\\_0104en01.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2003/com2003_0104en01.pdf)

As a consequence of its enlargement, the EU is trying to establish new concepts and policies whose aims are twofold: on one hand, a limit to future membership; on the other, the setting up of policies with a view to ensuring EU openness and co-operation towards neighbours. The broad rationale of the new policy is emerging in the framework of the EU conflict prevention basic perspective. After a long debate based on the Communication issued by the Commission in March 2003, the latter has now prepared a strategy paper, which is expected to be approved by the European Council in June 2004. The earlier Communication from the Commission says “proximity policy must go hand-in-hand with action to tackle the root causes of political instability, economic vulnerability, institutional deficiencies, conflict and poverty and social exclusion”. These terms are those employed by the Commission to define EU Development Policy and express the broad aim of the new policy to help neighbours to attain structural stability in a full-fledged conflict prevention perspective.

It must be stressed that in this perspective, neighbourhood

policy will attempt at supporting sub-regional integration (e.g. the Agadir Pact; the Black Sea Economic Co-operation-BSEC; the Arab Maghreb Union-AMU; etc.). Also, it will be committed to deal with those issues defined by the first Commission’s Communication on conflict prevention as “cross-cutting issues”, that is all the issues relating to soft security and trans-border risks (pollution, international crime, etc.).

Maybe the most significant feature of the neighbourhood policy is that it will be a systemic application of the EU conflict prevention perspective and, as such, it will represent a strong geopolitical feature in the EU foreign and external policies.

## 3. The Western Mediterranean “Five plus Five” Group and the status of Libya with respect to the EU

[http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p\\_action.gettxt=gt&doc=SPEECH/03/600|0|RAPID&lg=FR](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=SPEECH/03/600|0|RAPID&lg=FR)

On 5-6 December 2003 a ministerial session of the Western Mediterranean “Five plus Five” Group took place in Tunis. The Group was set up in 1989. It brings together five Arab (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya) and five European (Malta, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal) countries bordering the Western Mediterranean basin. For a long while the Group remained in the back of the stage. In 2002 the member countries decided to revive it.

The importance of the 2003 meeting in Tunis is threefold. First, it reflects the emerging interest of sub-regional perspectives in the context of Euro-Med relations. The latter, in the aftermath of the Barcelona Declaration, tended to emphasise the pan-Mediterranean perspective while mistakenly neglecting the importance of developing sub-regional frameworks of co-operation. Second, it reinforces the trend to intra-Maghrebi regional co-operation under the framework of the Arab Maghreb Union. Third, it strengthens a context in which Libya can successfully be included both in a Euro-Med and Maghrebi perspective. North-South as well as South-South regional co-operation and the inclusion of Libya in co-operative settings are all significant steps from the point of view of conflict prevention.

So far, Libya has been a reluctant observer with respect to the Euro-Med Partners invitation to become a member of the Partnership. Currently, its attitude looks mollified and more interested. Its inclusion in the Euro-Med framework would definitely consolidate the end of Libya’s international isolation and, in this sense, work in a conflict prevention perspective.

## 4. Strengthening EU’s relations with the Arab World

(Considered by the June 2003 European Council)

Interim Report on a EU Strategic Partnership with the

meeting on 22 March in Brussels)

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/euromed/publication/euromed\\_report73\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/publication/euromed_report73_en.pdf)

<http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/EN/reports/78372.pdf>

These two reports come from two different mandates by the European Council. The second, more recent report tries to set out the directions and principles of a new common strategy to be pursued in common by the Euro-Med partners. The need for setting out a new EMP strategy stems from the partners' failure to start a satisfactorily and constructive political and security co-operation in the Euro-Med context. At the same time, the EMP identity within the wider context of the new EU policy of neighbourhood needs to be better defined. Hence the attempt of this report to provide a new Euro-Med strategy and clarify its goals and means.

The second report is a memo aiming at single out a EU "Arab" perspective (as opposed to the "Mediterranean" perspective in which non-Arab countries, as Turkey, Malta, Cyprus and Israel, are also included). Both documents seems to set the EMP in a kind of renewed Euro-Arab perspective. In this sense, it may be interesting to note that the EU security strategy set out by the High Representative (see above, n. 1) stresses this point by emphasising that "A broader engagement with the Arab World should also be considered". This is what the two reports seems being concerned by.

While the first document is nothing more than a picture of things as they stand today, in the second one some interesting ideas are put forward. It must be noted that these two documents do not concern EU policies but what the EU would like to see as possible joint policy-making with the Southern partners. In this joint perspective, conflict prevention is not mentioned, albeit the broad perspective EU is envisaging is largely laying on long-term conflict prevention concepts.

### 5. Interfaith Dialogue

<http://ue.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>

This kind of dialogue has been recommended by the 12 December 2003 European Council. The latter encouraged "the relevant Ministers to support a sustained, open and transparent dialogue with the different religious and philosophical communities as an instrument of peace and social cohesion in Europe and its borders".

This declaration is intended to reinforce structural conflict prevention capabilities in inter-state and inter-community relations by strengthening the long standing actions already implemented in the civil society by the representatives of different religions and spiritual



organisations and groupings. It is part of an important long-term peace-building endeavour to strengthen co-operation between different parties in implementing conflict prevention.

### 6. Report by the High-Level Advisory Group Established at the initiative of the President of the European Commission, December 2003

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/prodi/pdf/spirit\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/prodi/pdf/spirit_report_en.pdf)

This Report has been requested by the President of the EU Commission, Mr. Romano Prodi, and generated by a Commission chaired by Assia Alaoui Bensalah and Jean Daniel. It elaborates on how the dialogue between cultures should be organised and structured in the Euro-Med Partnership. In so doing it deals with a most significant factor of conflict prevention as it operates with a view to establishing a tolerant and interested attitude from peoples towards other peoples. The Report is the cornerstone for the setting up of the incoming Cultural Foundation approved by the European Council of Rome in December 2003.

The Report is very rich. It singles a number of "common founding principles" for the cultural dialogue and recommend action in three privileged and priority fields: education as a vehicle for learning about diversity and transmitting knowledge of the Other; promote mobility, exchanges and the exploitation of expertise, skills and best social practices; make the media a vital instruments of equality and mutual knowledge. ■

### POLITICAL REFORMS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A CONFLICT PREVENTION METHODOLOGY

Laura Feliu <sup>(1)</sup>

The Regional Center on Conflict Prevention of the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy in Amman, and the Istituto Affari Internazionali of Rome have asked me to contribute to this interesting initiative of their bi-monthly electronic bulletin an article on the nexus between political reforms and conflict prevention in the Mediterranean/Middle East from a European point of view. Frankly speaking, I felt that this request, which obliges me to stand for the “European thought,” far exceeds my capacities. Even if I were to express the “Southern European thought,” in my capacity as a Spanish academic, I would not dare to do so. Sometimes, one wonders why his colleagues and friends do not share his very ideas and thoughts. The answer simply lies in the fact that ideological diversity is rooted in one’s own and immediate neighbourhood and not only from one neighbourhood to the other. Therefore, what follows reflects, mostly, my personal opinion of the current state-of-affairs of the European Union’s policies, and my own considerations and perception of what could be done in the future.

The European Community/European Union has defined its guidelines on crisis prevention in a number of key policy statements and initiatives. At the outset, these statements and initiatives focused on African countries but, later, incorporated other regions as well. The EU has developed an integrated approach whereby conflict prevention is regarded as a cross-sectorial task. Greater attention is now being paid to civilian crisis prevention and to the socio-economic and political causes of conflicts. Conflict prevention, per se, must now be perceived as an “across all sectors policy,” taking into account that a considerable amount of EU’s policies form an integral part of the preventative chapter (long-term development and other co-operation assistance, for instance).

Since the late eighties, several documents have come out that emphasised the solid link among democracy, development and peace. Lack of democratic legitimacy, however, coupled with absence of effective governments have been quoted, in some of these documents, as root causes of violent conflicts and, if anything, factors behind confrontation and tension. One such significant documents, in this respect, is the Declaration, published in June, 1991, by the European Council, which regards lack of democracy and massive violations of human rights as among the fundamental factors causing conflicts in the world.<sup>(2)</sup> Almost all of the EU’s documents on conflict prevention address democracy and human rights issues in, more or less, the same manner. Similarly, the Commission has deemed it appropriate that the concept of structural stability (conceived as the adding up of

sustainable economic development, respect for human rights, viable democratic structures and healthy social conditions) be promoted in the region.

Given the acknowledged link among lack of democracy, violation of human rights and the existence of violent conflicts, the question that dictates itself here is “what has been done by the European Union in the field of promoting political reforms in the Mediterranean region?” As far as the Mediterranean region is concerned, the EU’s policy has been that of reaction; mostly, a crisis management policy. However, when it comes to democratic reforms, one can say that the EU and the European governments, in general, have by no means intended to implement a democracy promotion policy. To the contrary, they have only reacted towards very specific cases of human rights abuses. In spite of its maximalist statements - the promotion of democracy and human rights are components of a “prestige policy,” that is associated with the EU’s image of a “civilian power” - the EU has developed a non-costly and low profile policy.

In 1995, the Union launched the “Barcelona Process” with the objective of expanding peace, democracy and development towards the North-South direction under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). In the long run, the entire process can be well termed as a confidence-building initiative. In this context, the EU began a process whereby human rights provisions were included in a wide range of its external relations, from aid and trade to all other forms of cooperation. Thus, a clause which binds any aid for third countries with respect of democratic rules and human rights was added to the different documents that regulated the EC/ EU’s external relations with specific countries and regions. This same “democratic clause” was only included in its agreements with the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries after the second half of the nineties. The Technical and Financial Assistance (MEDA-Regulation in the case of the Euromediterranean region) also incorporates provisions similar to that of the democracy clause mechanism.<sup>(3)</sup>

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(2) “Declaration of the European Council on Human Rights of June 1991,” Bol. CE 6-1991, pp. 18-19.

(3) Council Regulation No. 1488/96 of 23 July 1996 on financial & technical measures to accompany the reform of economic and social structures within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA), OJ L 189 of 30.7.1996, 1, as corrected in OJ L 255 of 9.10.1996, 24.

As is the case with other regions (with very few exceptions, the application of sanctions has been paralysed by one of the member countries; they have been delayed so much that the imposed sanctions have lost their impact, or have so far responded to a double standard), the European countries do not seem to have the political will to activate this “negative conditionality” in the Mediterranean.<sup>(4)</sup> The political criteria, which are related to particular interests of the member countries, take precedence over the explicit objectives of the clause.

The European policy towards the democratisation of the Mediterranean regimes has been dominated by several factors. At the outset is the factor of worry about an ill-conceived “stability,” which is needed to maintain the status quo (a regime is stable if it can repress riots and coups d'états, collaborate with other states in matters of security, and bring about turbulent episodes to a rare close-up). Secondly, is the use of threatening arguments to justify immobility (threat by revolutionaries, communists or Islamist militants). Nowadays, the prevalent discourse supports the presumption that a genuine democratisation would entail challenges to the Peace Process in Palestine (as it is currently conceived), or would benefit Muslim parties, which are well organised in the majority of countries. A yet another factor has to do with the increased fear of countries, like France and Spain, to lose their privileged relations with the regimes in power. The harmonisation process of the member countries' foreign policies has so far been very limited.<sup>(5)</sup> As a result, the Member State's policies are characterised by lack of cohesion and mutual rivalry for more influence in the region. In this sense, the integration of the ESDP in the EU Common Strategy on the Mediterranean and in the Valencia Action Plan<sup>(6)</sup> is considered as a step forward in this respect.

The European Parliament has been the most audacious institution in advocating structural political reforms. Nevertheless, its role is limited and its actions have been traditionally short circuited by other European institutions (as we see, for example, in the case of the blockade of the fourth aid protocol worth 600 million US dollars in favour of Morocco on January 1992 by the European Parliament. This decision was opposed by the European Commission and some EC/EU member countries).

Within the context of the EMP, the standing institutional structures that have been established under the agreements concluded by the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean Countries provided important channels for political dialogue. Although this political dialogue has been activated under the EMP, there are no signals that this framework has seriously been used to address the question of political reforms in any bilateral contacts, nor has it proven its efficiency in the dialogue held by Senior Officials in charge of the Barcelona Process.

In the eyes of European leaders, the promotion of democracy entails some risks. A more gradualist approach, which is in tune with the poor political liberalisation of the region, is thus preferred; even if it is not officially recognised. The European Union and the Member Countries have implemented more pro-active and long-term measures for promoting democracy, the rule of law, civil society and specific human rights initiatives, rather than, advocating a policy of favouring actions based on political pressure and sanctions. Incentives and rewards for positive evolution entail fewer dangers for the promoting country. Rather than imposing direct conditions, different ways are being sought to bring about influence with a view to implementing semi-structured, largely informal processes (outside State circuits), such as the promotion of a civil society (defined very narrowly), or technical programs with a state-focused approach (in the judiciary field, for example).

The act of introducing a special chapter on the MEDA Programme is worth mentioning. Its ultimate aim is the promotion of democracy and human rights: the MEDA-Democracy, which has complemented the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)<sup>(7)</sup>. This programme was initiated in 1996 to bolster human rights issues across the twelve Mediterranean partner countries. This was an EP initiative that granted subsidies the green light to implement operations to support local, national and regional institutions. In addition, it enabled subsidies to promote a plural civil society by strengthening NGOs that have become increasingly involved in the furthering of democracy, the rule of law and the freedom of expression and association. The protection of the most vulnerable sectors of society (women and young people) figured high on their agenda.

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(4) The sanctions Article 228A TEC has been applied, for example, on Libya, Haiti, the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, Zaire or Nigeria, and in the majority of these cases after the respective crisis had reached its peak.

(5) An example of this is that only few political issues of the Barcelona Process have been prepared within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). BARB?, E., “The Barcelona Conference: Launching Pad of a Process”, *Mediterranean Politics* 1996 (1), p. 28.

(6) ALIBONI, Roberto, “The European Union's Mediterranean Partnership, Documenti IAI, Paper presented at the International Conference on Security and Stability in the Mediterranean: The Role of the Euro-Atlantic institutions,” organised by the University of the Aegean and the East-West Institute, Rhodes, Dodecanese, 14-15 September 2002.

(7) In 1994, the EU brought together a number of budget lines under the B770 Community Budget, known as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

In my opinion, all these indirect and long-term initiatives were not in a position to promote change in the various political structures on their own. Any positive approach needs to be accompanied by signs of political goodwill. Can it be effective to invest in reforming the judiciary if one fails to condemn specific cases of unfair trials? Can one collaborate with the independent press if one fails to protest when publications are banned, or once a retrogressive press code has been passed? Is it a coherent policy to finance feminist associations while remaining silent about the situation of family codes that established “legal discrimination” in these countries?<sup>(8)</sup> Any policy from abroad must be multileveled: a European public opinion which is aware of the situation in other countries; social and political actors who are active in its solidarity and protest; a government that is consequent with its compromises, that reacts to the abuses and supports the promoters of democracy; and international organisations that are courageous with their proposals. But, as I have mentioned earlier, the reality is that European governments do not believe that a strong policy is reasonable during the current circumstances, especially in the aftermath of recent incidents of international terrorism.

The European Union is confronted with evidence that things have not evolved as they were supposed to, and, therefore, has included the necessity of ownership in the last years.<sup>(9)</sup> The responsibility must lie, mainly, in these countries. Their motto says: “we are imposing conditions so that you will take over the process and make it your own from the outset.” The European Commission Staff Working Document of January 2001 on external aid calls for the study of “how to increase the sense of ‘ownership’ of the Partnership among our Mediterranean partners.” The Presidency Conclusions of the 5th Conference of the Ministers of External Affairs, held in Valencia on 22-23 April 2002, introduced the subject, which has, later, been developed in other documents in the Euro-Mediterranean arena.

Although necessary, it is difficult to apply co-ownership in the field of the Euro-Mediterranean relations. The situation of inequality and dependency that characterises relations between the EU and the Mediterranean partner countries renders the whole process difficult, if not impossible. The terms of the partnership were, to a great extent, imposed by the North. This would explain, in part, why key issues for the South (the removal of agricultural subsidies, the refusal to open the EU markets to many of the most sensitive products, opening-up of its markets, necessity for a systematic debt-relief policy, movement of populations, etc.) are absent or relegated into the background. It is evident that in the field of democratisation, this co-ownership means that the processes could not be imposed from abroad; rather, it could only be pushed. At present, however, the circumstances and current state-of-affairs are not so favourable.

In Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, the forces of contest against dictatorships are present, yet, they are encounter with terrible difficulties to make themselves heard or to receive listening ears. Polls indicate that the South still aspires to live in democratic countries. Even in Syria, “discussion forums” sprouted recently, calling for greater democracy. During a recent meeting in Alexandria, which gathered some 150 prominent Arab intellectuals, a statement that calls for constitutional changes was issued. But as far as I know, Arab academics sounded very prudent in their statements on issues pertaining to political reforms, either by conviction or necessity (impossibility to express freely). As Sami E. Baroudy explains in his article about the 2002 Arab Human Development Report (the AHDR presents a devastating perspective on the governance, democracy, and development situation of these countries), the Report triggered strong negative reactions amongst Arab intellectuals.<sup>(10)</sup> Baroudy attributes this hostility towards the Report’s conclusions and recommendations to two factors. Firstly, is the concern about losing the state’s ability to retain its commanding position in society, when the majority of Arab thinkers have a preference for a strong state. Secondly, comes the Arabs’ worry about how this criticism could be used by foreign forces (specially Western governments and the media) to discredit Arab governments “and undermine their achievements in the post-independence period”.

Nowadays, the discourse with regard to the promotion of democracy is becoming more and more suspicious of political instrumentalisation; a perception reinforced by the Bush administration’s policy in the Middle East, and the recent news on the torment of prisoners in Iraq by American forces. It is, thus, impossible to launch a broad political initiative in the region without dealing with the prevailing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that is currently in a very critical situation. European documents have stressed that neither the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, nor any other political reform in the region, should be a precondition for the other.

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(8) FELIU, L., “A Two-level Game: Spain and the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights in Morocco” en Annette Jünemann (ed.), *Euro-Mediterranean Relations after September 11: International, Regional and Domestic Dynamics*, Londres, Frank Cass, 2003, pp. 90-111.

(9) FELIU, L., and GRASA, Rafael, “The Concept of Ownership and the European Union’s External Relations: The Case of the Euro-mediterranean Partnership,” paper presented at the EuroMeSCO Working Group on “The Charter and the Search for a Euro-Med Common Ground” Seminar on “Common Ground and Common Language”. 14th and 15th of June 2002.

(10) BAROUDY, S. E., “The 2002 Arab Human Development Report: Implications for Democracy,” *Middle East Policy* 11 (1), Spring 2004, pp. 132-141.

It is true that each is desirable and necessary in its own right, yet, they cannot be considered as two separate processes, in spite of the European illusion that both can be dealt with separately. A clear example for this is the failure of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability. It will be impossible to build an “Enabling environment” of conflict resolution without creating a shift in the Palestine-Israeli conflict, and a recovery of the Iraqi sovereignty. This concerns European leaders; even if most European countries have positions coincident with the “Arab street,” they are perceived as part of Western Imperialism.

Terrorism has worsened the situation, due to the widespread notion of the necessity to co-operate with allies’ hard regimes on the “war on terror.” The US government (which also historically neglected the issue of democratisation in the Middle East) is now talking on a Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI). Even if the message is good, it seems impossible that it would advance, given the current lack of credibility of the messenger. Nowadays, American policies in the region dismiss any thread of illusion about the supposed intention of the democratisation of the region.

The reaction of different actors on this new version of the old magic formulas has been immediate. When superpowers move, it is inevitable that the rest of the world moves. It is a pity that the world cannot profit from these moves in a better manner. Whatever the real intentions are, the announcement of this initiative has put the subject on the international agenda; as we have already seen in the Arab League Summit in Tunis. The GMEI will be presented in three major June summits (EU-US summit 26 June, 2004 within the framework of the Transatlantic Partnership; G-8 summit at Sea Island, 8-10 June 2004; and NATO Summit in Istanbul, 28-29 June, 2004).

What seems even more interesting is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which could serve as an opportunity for change in the region, and can go in line

with a policy of incentives. The ENP is designed to build security, to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours, and to offer both parties the chance to increase their participation through greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation. The policy, which was first outlined by the Commission in its Communication on Wider Europe in March 2003, introduces the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) to foster cross-border and transnational co-operation and to put it in place under the next Financial Perspective from 2007 onwards. Both sides must define a set of priorities, which will be incorporated in joint agreed Action Plans, covering a number of key areas for specific action, including political dialogue and reform.

The question that now presents itself: “What new proposals can the European states make to the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean regimes?” Herein lies the problem. The official European Declarations talk about fully tapping into the potential of existing agreements. To go beyond them could potentially offer a stake in the European Internal Market, and the extension of the “four freedoms” (goods, services, capital and labour) as a long-term objective. This has to be discussed with countries that are more advanced on the road of economic and political association with the EU. However, this offer of “privileged relationship with neighbours,” today, does not seem to be different from what the EU is already offering, especially within the sensitive issue of labour. What is interesting is their insistence on the fact that the level of ambition of the EU’s relationships with its neighbours will take into account the extent to which some values are effectively shared. The ENP could open new perspectives and possibilities, but these actually require a complete change in the European approach to the region. So far, however, there are no signs of political will pointing in this direction. ■

[11]Ibid., p. 137-138. All this conduces Baroudy to say that even if the objectives are rightful, the foreign pressures are counter-productive.

#### About ConflictnFOCUS:

Conflict In Focus is a bi-monthly online bulletin designed to provide busy readers in the EMP policy community and interested general public with a concise and regular update on the current state-of-affairs of the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict in the Middle East. Conflict in Focus is compiled by RCCP/IAI, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our software (CCP).

Conflict in Focus alerts readers to situations where, in the near future, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict. In specific, the newsletter is divided into three sections. The first section includes accounts of and comments on EU developments and policies during the previous two months in the field of conflict prevention.

In its second section, Conflict in Focus summarizes recent developments in a conflict analysis perspective, using our CCP model of analysis, where the overall situation in each case has significantly deteriorated.

The third and final section aims at providing experts and researchers from the Partnership with a forum for common work and collaboration. Toward this end, the newsletter will host, in each issue, two short articles, one by a European scholar and the other by a Middle Eastern one on conflict prevention in the Middle East, with the final aim of provoking a debate on such sensitive subject.

We welcome your feedback at [info@rccp-jid.org](mailto:info@rccp-jid.org)