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**The 2003 Hellenic Presidency
of the European Union**
Mediterranean Perspectives
on the ESDP

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Mediterranean Perspectives on the ESDP

Introduction

The terrorist attacks against the US on September 11th, 2001, have ushered in a new era in international politics. The priorities of international relations, the nature of regional politics, the shape of political alliances, along with the driving purpose of US foreign policy, the nature of international cleavages, and the evolving role of military forces, including the risks of weapons of mass destruction, have all been affected by the epoch-making events.¹ The latter have also altered the Western strategic threshold, but have not really challenged, at least fundamentally, the dominant US position in world politics, although the impact on the current US strategy debate is profound. Likewise, the overall international security paradigm remained reasonably clear-cut, in that the US dominates, in large measure, the post-Cold War international system, especially those aspects of the system dealing with security issues.

Against an ever more turbulent and at the same time unpredictable international security environment, clear manifestations of which have been the wars in Afghanistan and, more recently, in Iraq, security and defence

1 D. N. Chryssochoou, M. J. Tsinisizelis, S. Stavridis and K. Ifantis, *Theory and reform in the European Union*, second revised edition, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.

analysts were quick to point out that the Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable to the emerging global security setting. After all, it has traditionally been a zone of strategic and socio-economic instability, migration flows, violent religious and cultural conflicts, varying forms of political institutions, differing security perceptions and, above all, divergent worldviews. Today, three major issues dominate Euro-Mediterranean affairs: the widening socio-economic gap between the 'booming' but still underdeveloped South and the 'growing old' but wealthy North; the redefinition of Euro-Arab relations; and the 'power deficit' between the European Union (EU) and its southern Mediterranean partners. The latter has been escalating steadily since the signing of the Schengen Treaty, which many perceive as the forerunner of a 'fortress' Europe.

Issues of Mediterranean stability are old themes in the study of international relations, let alone of European diplomacy. Yet, they still rest on considerable variation. The extent to which the Mediterranean can be seen as a distinct region complicates further the discussion about the appropriate scope and level of a common European policy towards this part of the world. Partly as a result of the Community's Mediterranean enlargements in the 1980s, and partly due to the changing conditions post-1989, Mediterranean affairs have come to occupy a significant amount of Europe's external relations. But important questions are raised as to whether the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), launched in Barcelona in November 1995, will be crowned with success; whether the EU can further political and economic liberalisation in the partner-states; which norms, rules and decision-making processes are likely to emerge in the security-building aspects of the EMP; whether a more equitable regime of economic exchange will be established in the region; and what the prospects of regional institutionalisation are, given the levels of complexity, heterogeneity and fragmentation that for centuries now shape the physiognomy of the region. Added to the above are questions of good governance, civil society, multiculturalism and inter-faith dialogue.

But Euro-Mediterranean relations are also affected by a new regional strategic variable: the EU's nascent European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). In its present stage, this crisis-management tool directs attention to

a set of developments that enhance the EU's role in international security affairs. Arguably though, ESDP is but one aspect of a broader and far more ambitious objective linked, *inter alia*, with the future of the EU political system, and particularly the elaboration of a common European defence policy, leading eventually to a common defence (composed of a mutual assistance clause and assorted solidarity provisions). Such developments reflect the desire of EU members to advance the pace and range of the regional arrangements in the sensitive fields of security and defence.

Ultimately, the aim is to 'communitarise' the EU's second pillar – the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) - so as to bestow the larger polity with the necessary decision-making structure for effective responses to actual crises. The consolidation of the CFSP is a platform from which the EU can make its voice heard in international affairs, adding to its - already acknowledged - economic might. The perceived 'added value' from this process of 'deepening' European integration, points at the formation of an independent political entity able to face the new global and regional challenges and to promote the fundamental norms of good governance. Such aims are to be supported by a nascent ESDP in dealing with crisis management operations, humanitarian and emergency rescue missions, as well as with peacekeeping and peacemaking tasks, including peace-enforcement; what in recent strategic parlance amounts to the so-called 'Petersberg tasks'. It is necessary to make clear that the ESDP, apart from being an incipient step towards the making of an EU military force 'proper',² it is also a point of strategic convergence among different national aspirations, as well as a medium between the strategic preferences of the transatlantic partners themselves.

The EU may well be firmly enough established as a collective polity, albeit with a considerable degree of 'inventiveness' and institutional sophistica-

2 In the military aspects of ESDP, the EU has committed itself to setting up a force of 60.000 men, deployable within two months and sustained on the ground for 12 months. But this embryonic military structure is not meant to be a standing force. Hence, the term 'Euro-Army', which has been in inflationary use for some time now, does not describe accurately, at least for the time being, the nature of the EU's crisis-management apparatus.

tion, but has no historical precedent. This exacerbates the prospect of contextualising our expectations in relation to its global ‘actorness’ with enhanced military capabilities. Even though the EU’s transformation into a collective defence system remains a rather distant possibility, it is clear that, today, extraordinary opportunities arise for a substantive redefinition of its future international role, given that it already represents a global symbol of political stability and economic prosperity. To give an example, the EU has been actively involved in the process of democratising Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the promotion of change in North Africa. But the vision of an EU that contributes to global security management entails more than the consolidation of a regional role, especially one based on economic power. It requires the emergence of a commonality of interests among its members and, hence, a single voice in world affairs, which in turn implies that EU members will have to sacrifice some of the gains stemming from the formulation of their foreign policies on the altar of a defence-based CFSP.

Doubtless, the deeper integration of EU foreign, security and defence policies is bound to affect Mediterranean governance, and with it the normative and institutional orientation of the EMP. For one thing, an autonomous European defence capability should not lead to a ‘fortress’ Europe, but rather, precisely because the ESDP is better equipped to dealing with crisis-management operations, it can complement the EMP by endowing Mediterranean security with a more pluralist and transparent vision. Here, it is important for both settings to arrive at common definitions of their respective security anxieties, especially those related to asymmetrical threats, as well as to pertaining asymmetries in issues of justice, tolerance, information-flow and trust-building. Thus, all strategic perceptions in the Mediterranean should be reconsidered and clarified so that the EMP bears practical political achievements.

Euro-Mediterranean Dynamics

The Mediterranean is a composite of different civilisations, each reflecting a distinctive sense of being and belonging. But the extent to which old im-

ages are replaced by new in the region's cultural tapestry remains open. Mythical constructs aside, in the light of current constellations, the Mediterranean reveals a pluricausal dynamism towards a new social, cultural and political mapping. Elements of convergence and divergence are reformulated through a dialectic of old stereotypes, novel ways of thinking, modified security perceptions, and an ascending pluralism in its emerging governance structures. Against this background, the EU agenda has been reshaped to accommodate regional transformations in its periphery.

Since the launching of the EMP, the EU's Mediterranean policy has gained both in strategic importance and, as compared with previous policy regimes, internal cohesion. By putting an institutional face to a more balanced and comprehensive approach, the EMP became key to Mediterranean order-building through a principled policy orientation. Arguably, developments in the region have always been part of the EU's agenda. Europe's external relations with southern Mediterranean countries have become politicised as a result of the geographical proximity, the level of interdependence, and the role previous EU Mediterranean policies have come to play. Signs of an enhanced European interest were first recorded as early as 1975, at the beginning of the Euro-Arab Dialogue, then in the early and mid-1980s with the accession of Greece and the Iberian nations to the then Community, and again after the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf crisis of 1990/91. Since the mid-1990s, however, the EU's Mediterranean policy has become multilateral in nature. The EMP, by forging new cooperative policies in the region has become a focal point of attention. Hence a new phase of openness, dialogue and work in common from policy-design to implementation.

Post-1989, Mediterranean security became increasingly indivisible, often regardless of diverse sub-regional features. More recently, some analysts have tried to project, both before and after September 11th, 2001, a historical Mediterranean fragmentation, by perceiving the dominant conflict in the region as one between 'occidental' and 'oriental' values. This narrowly framed hypothesis, favours security's cultural dimension, prophesising an inevitable 'clash' among different civilisations. Yet, others focus on 'new' security threats and risks, including international terrorism, emergent forms

of transnational criminalities, nuclear smuggling, drug-trafficking, uncontrolled refugee movements, illegal migration, socio-economic asymmetries, environmental risks, and the like. Since the post-bipolar world has lent greater fluidity and instability to the Mediterranean, what is most needed is a structured political dialogue on the root-causes of conflict, the prolepsis of immediate crises through a long-term strategy within multilateral institutions, a renewed focus on institutional response adaptation, and the development of a 'common strategic language' to redefine security issues.

Here, the comparative advantage of the EU in developing an ESDP Mediterranean dimension is that the EMP was not meant to serve as a conflict-manager, peacekeeper, or an instrument of conflict resolution. For all its ambition to bring about an 'area of peace and stability', the Barcelona Declaration emerged as a loose framework for conflict prevention. The ESDP's capacity structure is better equipped to act as an institution able to carry out crisis-management missions, offering complementary security framework for the elaboration of guidelines towards a 'common Mediterranean security space'. In that sense, an ESDP-led security dialogue in the region will bear positive cumulative effects in the EMP, opening up new possibilities for critical security issues to be discussed such as interoperability and 'constructive duplication', doctrinal convergence on conflict prevention, intelligence-sharing and information exchange practices, export control regimes, civilian emergency planning and, moreover, a redefinition of defence mechanisms with a view to embracing civilian capabilities and achieving operational cohesion. Such an extended political dialogue could thus enhance security's 'human' dimension, including civilian engagement in crisis-management missions, compatibility of prescribed actions with human rights norms, civil society input, and so on.

But epitomising the EMP is the emphasis put on respect for democracy and human rights, political dialogue, economic liberalisation, as well as financial and technical assistance for the southern Mediterranean partners. The Barcelona Declaration, adopted eight years ago, includes numerous norms on rule-governed interstate relations and global disarmament, as well as provisions for combating terrorism, drug-trafficking, and illegal immigration. It also provides for increased arms control-renunciation of nuclear,

chemical and biological weapons. Accordingly, one could argue that the EMP, for all its shortfalls, has infused a greater political (security) bias to Euro-Mediterranean relations, whilst encompassing an ambitious economic plan for an (industrial) Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by the year 2010, and a 'human dimension' similar to that introduced by the Helsinki Process in 1975.³

The EMP may prove instrumental in fostering a new co-operative culture, even a new ethos, among the partner-states. For instance, interest-convergence around economic tasks could contribute to a relaxation of tensions in areas where controversy is more likely to arise, such as military security and human rights. It is on that premise that a more easily discernible Euro-Mediterranean regime may come into being.⁴ The composite nature of the EMP offers a range of opportunities for the actors' functionalist expectations to reach decisions that are beneficial to systemic stability. In its eight years of existence, however, the EMP has not fulfilled its high ambitions, but has experienced significant constraints. First, it has not helped in the resolution of any major security problem in the region – all three 'baskets' of co-operation have suffered from the proliferation of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, low-level investment, illegal immigration, violation of human rights, and the regional 'ticking bomb' called demography. Second, all the optimism that the Oslo Process produced in the early 1990s turned into a devastating violent cycle of suicidal terrorist attacks and excessive use of military force. It is lamentable that since the second *Intifada* in 2000, the EMP has failed continuously to free itself from the failures of the Middle East Peace Process.

It is fair to say that the EU exhibits difficulties in dealing with Middle East security, in contrast to dealing with other transformative regions. Equally true is that it faces significant challenges as a result of the presence of the

3 D. K. Xenakis, 'The Barcelona Process in the Light of the Helsinki Paradigm: Patterns of Complexity and Order-Building', *Themata: Policy and Defence*, No. 18, Defence Analysis Institute, Athens, 2003.

4 D. K. Xenakis, 'From Policy to Regime: Trends in Euro-Mediterranean Governance', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Autumn/Winter 1999, pp. 254-70.

US and the latter's continuing reluctance to share its 'co-operative hegemony' in the region. Post-September 11th, the US-sponsored counter-terrorism campaign and the recent war over Iraq highlighted the profound divisions not only between transatlantic partners, but also within the EMP. Also, the latter's status has been seriously affected by the inadequacy of the EU's intervention in the 2002 Middle East crisis, not only in terms of security co-operation but also in relation to the Partnership's multilateral nature. It is no secret that the EU has to make considerable efforts to keep Israel in the Peace Process, whilst continuing to co-operate with the Arab countries. The EU has to contribute something concretely positive to regional peace in accordance with the reasonable demands of its Arab partners, whilst dealing with Israel's hostile attitude toward any EU-led intervention.

Of importance in the years to come will be the chosen institutional format to transcend the peculiarities of a rapidly evolving Euro-Mediterranean space. But institutionalising the EMP alone will not be sufficient to manage an ever more complex and expanding security agenda. Can the EMP meet its prescribed ends without transforming itself from a loose association of states into a system of patterned behaviour with a particular notion of rules of the game? Put differently, can the co-operative ethos embedded in the Barcelona Declaration go beyond the level of contractual interstate obligations and closer to a meaningful partnership?⁵ A plausible answer is that new rules and norms on how to handle change will have to be created, given that behaviour, not just proclamations, will determine the outcome of Mediterranean order-building. EU strategic choices will thus be of great importance, along with the promotion of norms of good governance, given the tensions arising from different conceptions of democracy and political liberalisation. Equally crucial are the socio-cultural barriers in promoting an open inter-civilisational dialogue, keeping in mind the recent re-embrace of religious radicalism in parts of the Arab world. Whatever the legitimising ethos of the prevailing worldviews, a structured political dialogue based on the principles of transparency and symbiotic association is central to the

5 See further on this in D. K. Xenakis and D. N. Chrysochoou, *The emerging Euro Mediterranean system*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2001.

cross-fertilisation of distinct politically organised and culturally defined units, as well as to alleviate historically rooted prejudices, whilst endowing the EMP with a new sense of process and purpose.

Greece and the Mediterranean

Greece, a country located at the eastern hub of a strategic theatre lying at the crossroads of three continents, is well anchored to the European zone of peace and stability. Being at the centre of a volatile regional triangle comprising Southeastern Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus, the Mediterranean plays a pivotal role in the country's history, politics and society. Greece is also an integral part of the Balkan state system, whilst the Aegean passage constitutes an important shipping route for the transportation of energy products to Europe. In general, Greece's position enhances its strategic significance for the EU, as the Mediterranean constitutes a crucial fault-line between the rich Christian North and the poor Islamic South. The challenges facing contemporary Greece are to safeguard its territorial integrity, whilst projecting its civilian values in its oft-troubled peripheries, especially in the Balkans. With Greek politics being formulated in relation to an ever globalising, if not already globalised, world, the time is ripe for the country to redefine its identity in the new multicultural settings.

Greece became a full member of the then European Community, now EU, courtesy of the Community's first Mediterranean enlargement in the early 1980s. Since then, the evolution of European governance has had a profound impact on the country's policy and strategic orientation, especially with regard to its traditional public policy domains. It is not surprising that an overwhelming majority of Greek public opinion has supported increasingly, especially since the mid-1980s, the country's European vocation and its multifarious integration into the mechanisms and institutions of the EU political system.⁶ Although Europe remains essential to the evolution of the Greek polity, the latter cannot regard Europe without considering its unstable peripheral areas. Greece maintains good relations with most Arab

6 For an evaluation of Greek-EU relations see M. J. Tsinisizelis and D. N. Chrysoschoou, 'Images of Greece and European Integration: A Case of Uneasy Interdependence?', *Synthesis*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1996, pp. 22-33.

stable peripheral areas. Greece maintains good relations with most Arab countries and Israel, although it exhibits relatively little contact with its southern Mediterranean neighbors, as compared to its Balkan counterparts. Due mainly to traditional but also emergent security concerns, as well as to the centrality of religion in Greek identity, the country often orients itself more towards the Balkans than the Mediterranean.⁷ But the emerging Euro-Mediterranean space is now attracting greater attention from Greek foreign policy-makers, as it represents an embodiment of a long-standing view that Greece cannot be oriented towards one direction, but has to strike a balance between its competing identities.

Today, Greece exhibits a firm European orientation, whilst maintaining a number of particular Mediterranean concerns that relate to both internal and external security issues. Its 'principled' Mediterranean policy is guided by respect of internationally recognised borders, stability, peace, and security. Despite the many complex problems faced by the littoral countries, Greek foreign policy aims to develop multilevel and multilateral links with the southern EMP partners based on a rich spectrum of historical and cultural ties and affinities, as well as on a long-standing common economic and commercial experience. Greece has intensified its efforts to foster links with these countries, by acting as a factor of stability throughout their – sometimes arduous – transitional phase of economic and political liberalisation. Building on an ESDP Mediterranean dimension, the new regional space becomes a rediscovered land of opportunity and belonging for Greek policy-makers.

Greece has often found itself in a delicate position between the dictates of complex, if not uneasy, interdependence and the quest for independent self-rule on sensitive national issues, especially those touching upon the question of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. It has often been accused of maintaining a fixed preoccupation with the Aegean and the Cyprus issue. Things have progressed, however, as the Simitis government (in

7 On this issue see M. Pace, *Rethinking the Mediterranean: Reality and Representation in the Creation of a Region*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Portsmouth, June, 2001, especially chapter 4.

power since 1996) moved away from a strategy of ‘conditional sanctions’ to one of ‘conditional rewards’ in relation to Turkey’s EU candidacy. *Entente* between the two countries was exhibited further after the destructive earthquakes that both countries experienced in 2000. But the causes for such an improvement should also be explored in close relation to the growing demands of (mainly institutional) modernization, globalization and, crucially, of deepening European integration. Undoubtedly, EU membership implies the undertaking of certain institutional and normative obligations about the conduct of foreign policy. After the December 2002 Copenhagen European Council decisions and the accession of Cyprus to the EU,⁸ following the signing of the Accession Treaty in Athens on 16 May 2003, developments are expected to contribute positively in the Eastern Mediterranean security dilemmas.⁹

A major question in the Mediterranean is whether conflict-prone areas will manage to integrate into the emerging regional system. Greece has been an adherent of non-military solutions, with its objective in the Mediterranean being made clear on several occasions: to promote peaceful initiatives with the view to establishing a coherent framework of principles that can be made applicable throughout the region. This principled policy is guided by the rules of international legality such as respect for international borders and human rights. With the launching of the EMP, Greece strengthened its ties with its southern partners, whilst assisting in the amelioration of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The initiative of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organise two meetings between Palestinian and Israeli politicians, journalists and academics in Athens in July and December 1997 is a good case in point.

8 See further on this in Philippos K. Savvides, ‘Cyprus at the Gate of the European Union: Scenarios, Challenges and Prospects’, *ELIAMEP Policy Papers*, No. 1, ELIAMEP, 2002.

9 See further in T. Couloumbis and K. Ifantis, ‘Altering the Security Dilemma in the Aegean: Greek Strategic Options and Structural Constraints - A Realist Approach’, *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Winter 2002, p. 1-25.

The Hellenic Presidency and the ESDP

With this in mind, let us recall that the successive crises in the Balkans during the 1990s increased the need for developing a reliable ESDP machinery to support European foreign and security policy. ESDP was formally launched at the June 1999 Cologne European Council. Since then, it developed itself through a series of political decisions taken at Helsinki (December 1999), Feira (June 2000), Nice (December 2000), Geteborg (June 2001), Laeken (December 2001), Seville (June 2002), Brussels (October 2002), Copenhagen (December 2002), Athens (April 2003) and, more recently, the expanded General Affairs Council (with the participation of the member states' Defence Ministers) in Brussels in May 2003, where the European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF) was declared fully operational. Each of these decisions gave substance to the EU's desire to enhance its capacity for autonomous action.

After the Saint-Malo Agreement and the Cologne European Council, it was decided that the EU should achieve an autonomous capability for the deployment of humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in accordance with the UN Charter. The decisions taken at Helsinki reformed the policy frame and made the ESDP a reality, at least as far as the implementation process of the Headline Goal is concerned. The Helsinki text underlined that the proposed action plan had to take into consideration that 'the most demanding part of the missions will take place in and around the Mediterranean', without, however, separating the latter from the Balkans. The political and military institutions for EU crisis management were established at the December 2000 Nice European Council. Later on, at Laeken, the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) was adopted, providing general guidelines for the shortfalls regarding the specifications of the ERRF. The so-called 'Brussels text', adopted by the European Council, was key in developing an ESDP 'operational capability', by ensuring EU autonomy beyond NATO's means. Recognizing NATO's fundamental role in European security, and given that it remains the sole agent for collective European defence, the development of EU crisis-management tools was discussed at

the Washington Summit in April 1999,¹⁰ where it became imperative for both partners to reach an agreement.¹¹

Finally, following the efforts of the Hellenic Presidency during the Informal Conference of EU Defence Ministers at Rethymnon on 4-5 October 2002, the ESDP has been set on a more stable basis. The basic priority set out by the Presidency was the completion of all outstanding issues that would allow for the utilisation of the EU's operational capability in crisis management operations within 2003, through the advancement of civil-military networks. Greece has held the Presidency of the ESDP since July 1st, 2002 (due to Denmark's opt-out from defence issues). In its twelve-month Presidency, too many issues have arisen in the international agenda such as the intensification of the global war against terrorism, the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the increasing emphasis on illegal immigration, and the US-led war in Iraq. Reasonable claims point to the danger of setting aside EU expectations to strengthen south-south co-operation within the EMP *vis-à-vis* the new security priorities.

Most analysts, in the light of the negative experience with Eurofor and Euromarfor, have underlined the need of complementary measures to support the ESDP. Given the low level of information about the ESDP in the Arab world, it the EU decided to pay greater attention to the misperceptions and fears of its Mediterranean partners regarding the strengthening of its military capabilities. Thus the ESDP acquired its own Mediterranean dimension, courtesy of the initiative taken by the Spanish Presidency during the first half of 2002.¹² The Hellenic Presidency that followed, played a decisive role to that end. Its proposals on transparency, trust-building and the

10 During this Summit, the guidelines of the ESDP-NATO co-operation in the field of strategic management were defined so that EU operations be conducted either through NATO means and capabilities or independently.

11 He means for an effective and workable ESDP-NATO relationship are not in the focus of this article. Yet, such issues include, among others, the harmonisation of national defence policies and strategies, as well as of different group memberships; the presently limited ESDP financial resources; and the problem of defining the weight of different groups of countries in the decision-making process.

12 Spain plays a leading role in the EU's Mediterranean policy. Naturally, the promotion of the Barcelona Process and the Mediterranean Dimension of the ESDP were high priorities for the Spanish Presidency.

institutionalisation of security dialogue will allow EMP partners to gain better access in the making of a co-operative regional space and to reduce the existing levels of regional asymmetry. Thus the Presidency's seminars on the Mediterranean Dimension of the ESDP, held in Rhodes on 1-2 November 2002 in association with the Defence Analysis Institute of the Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, and in Corfu on 9-10 May 2003, were meant to act as platforms for an open exchange of views to clarify EU strategic intentions and to alleviate any possible misperceptions with the view to promoting mutual understanding.

In particular, at the Corfu Seminar, entitled 'Building Security for the Mediterranean Peoples', representatives of twenty-four countries were brought together with the view to discussing developments in ESDP and the use of soft security tools in the Mediterranean. The Presidency's seminar demonstrated the progress made in security- and partnership-building, by putting forward concrete proposals such as:¹³

- Measures aimed at better understanding the specific interests and needs of the Mediterranean partners through a colloquium organised jointly with them to present their views on maritime security and the future of the EMP.
- Measures aimed at informing Mediterranean partners about EU policies, with particular reference to the ESDP. Proposals included six monthly meetings among military personnel to discuss current developments in European defence - i.e., the fight against terrorism, rapid response, capabilities - and force planning.
- Measures aimed at promoting sub-regional initiatives in the area of training through seminars between EU and Mediterranean partners on maritime issues.

13 Council of the European Union, Brussels, 'Seminar on Building Security for the Mediterranean Peoples, 12 May 2003, COSDP 355.

- Measures aimed at associating Mediterranean partners with EU activities such as participation of those interested in the planning and conduct of EU-led exercises.

Implementation and further development of the above proposals rests with the Italian Presidency, which, to that end, organised in association with the Centro Minitare di Studi Strategici a follow-up Seminar on ‘Security, Stability and Co-operation in the Mediterranean Region’, held in Rome on 25 September 2003. In the discussions, emphasis was placed on the need for improving co-ordination between the EMP and NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, in that these initiatives are complementary, rather than antagonistic, to each other. There was also discussion on the text regarding the European Security Strategy, which is in the process of being finalised by the EU. Moreover, the implications stemming from EU enlargement were brought to the fore, together with the need for promoting confidence-building measures that allow for the participation of Mediterranean partners and even for intelligence sharing on illegal immigration, proliferation of weapons of mass distractions, etc.

With regard to the Hellenic Presidency of the EMP, during a particularly difficult period due to the escalating crisis in the Middle East and the war in Iraq, it set up realistic and at the same time substantive objectives for progress to be made in EMP matters. This is reflected in the successful outcome of the Interim Ministerial Council that was held in Crete on 26-27 May 2003. There, the level of attendance was quite satisfactory at ministerial level, with the Presidency proposals finding their way to the Conclusions. More specifically,¹⁴

- A Parliamentary Assembly was set up to act as an advisory body, with the participation of national and European parliamentarians. Such a decision bestows the EMP process with higher levels of legitimacy and transparency.
- The Declaration of Crete was adopted unanimously by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. This document was prepared by the

14 Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003.

Presidency and contained the basic guidelines for the envisaged inter-civilizational dialogue.

- The objectives, principles and activities of the Euro-Mediterranean Institute were agreed with the view to promoting further the inter-civilizational dialogue.
- The role of the Civil Forum and its contribution to the EMP was upgraded, together with specific references on how to strengthen the role of women.

The Presidency also promoted debate on important issues that will be of interest to EMP partners in relation to the future of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation. That was partly the result of a wider debate on the implications stemming from the recent enlargement of the EU:

- For the first time, the future of the EMP was examined between the EMP partners and the new member-states, in the light of the policy for the 'new neighbourhood'.
- Emphasis was given on the need to continue the efforts to strengthen political dialogue regarding CFSP and ESDP. To that end, Javier Solana was invited for the first time to inform and exchange views with High Officials from the EMP.
- The results of the Third Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Energy, held in Athens on 20-21 May 2003, were considered as positive steps for setting the preconditions of regional co-operation in the energy sector, as included in a relevant Declaration, but also for promoting co-operation between Israel and Palestine.
- The launching of a discussion on the Commission's proposal about human rights.

Rethinking Threat Perceptions

Euro-Mediterranean politics are full of misunderstandings about distorted perceptions and images of Islam, as they are about the threat of terrorism

used by transnational extremist groups, especially post-September 11th. Other misperceptions stem from the appropriation of Islam for political ends and the tensions arising from questions of universal values and norms of human rights. Such misunderstandings emanate as much from mutual ignorance, as they do from intended confusion. One should also guard against the simplification often suggested in the media that ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ is a violent and merciless force orchestrated by radical regimes in the Middle East. The creation of a meaningful (security) partnership in the Mediterranean is no easy task, given the tendency to exploit or fuel traditional prejudices that would perpetuate the EMP’s stance between order and disorder, making the development of co-operative politics an ‘essentially contested project’. Thus there is urgent need to (re)define terms that reduce inter-civilisation dialogue to a series of parallel monologues. The aim is for a reciprocal exchange that does away with any subjectivist view that wants the ‘West’ to act as a universal civilising force based on an almost metaphysical obligation to humanity. It is, then, of great value that any meaningful debate about Islam should dispel the clouds of deliberate myth-making and revengeful rhetoric that are detrimental to a security dialogue.

Any security dialogue in the Mediterranean implies a realistic assessment of security risks and threats, at both northern and southern fronts. It is true that the Arab partners do not present Europe with any major military threat, as the growing militarisation in the South is mainly intended for use on a south-south scale or for ‘internal interventions’.¹⁵ Nor do southern Mediterranean states perceive any direct threat from the North, for they associate ‘security’ mainly with domestic concerns and internal policing. Still though, even talking about the (neo-colonial) international management of domestic crises the West has exhibited post-1989 exacerbates general anti-Western feelings. A neutral assessment of the risks undermining regional stability would not perceive Europe as a threat to the South, as well as Europe’s perception over the Islamic danger as an exaggeration. However,

15 T. Dokos, ‘Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Mediterranean’, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Autumn 2000.

it is the threat itself, as much as the dominant perceptions of such threat that guide national policy-makers.

It is commonplace that state behaviour is largely influenced, even determined, by perceptions. Perceptual influence and mental constructs in political interaction becomes visible when actors decide to extend their cooperation into new areas of collective action. Although terrorist activity is endemic in the Mediterranean, most would agree that the new US-sponsored doctrine focusing on asymmetrical threats and preventive wars has impacted on EMP affairs; namely, the re-enforcement of policing in national security affairs, an increase in restrictions regarding the free movement of people, and the alienation between Mediterranean publics. It has also affected the course of Euro-Mediterranean politics, by increasing 'internal pressures' in some southern Mediterranean societies, and by redirecting attention to issues of military security at the cost of investing in economic growth and stabilisation projects. In particular, there is a dominant perception in the Arab world that the US-sponsored antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan, Iraq and possibly in other parts of the Middle East is the beginning of Huntington's 'clashing' era. This perception stems from a chain of events that have fuelled the Arab world with a deep sense of insecurity. The first Gulf War, the international isolation imposed on Iraq and Libya, the overwhelming US preoccupation with Israeli security, and the 'neo-hegemonic' stance of the US before and after the recent war in Iraq have convinced the Arabs that the West will not hesitate to strike out against them should its interests, geopolitical or other, require so. The development of ESDP military capabilities has also led many Arabs to the erroneous conclusion that the EU shares NATO's strategic plan for the Mediterranean, focusing primarily on how to combat the new asymmetrical threats. All the above endanger the empowerment of radical religious segments that perceive Europe as a potential enemy. Hence the need for including southern EMP partners into ESDP processes.

Besides the growing feeling that in the Arab world there is a negative predisposition towards the ESDP, questions about the properties of a Mediterranean security system further complicate discussion about the objectives and the level of the EU's strategic involvement in the region. The EU's of-

ficial documents such as the Common Strategy for the Mediterranean are general descriptions lacking prioritisation over the EU's strategic intentions.¹⁶ But in the process of consolidating a common European defence identity with operational capabilities, the conceptions, intentions, planning, political goals, individual national interests of EU states and their attempt to maintain a relative diplomatic freedom in the region remain vague. 'In the absence of a clear range of goals, deriving from a joint strategic plan for the Mediterranean', the EuroMeSCo's report argues that 'a certain level of vagueness is inevitable'.¹⁷ The development of EU military capabilities is a reaction to previous European interventions in the successive Yugoslav crises. But the fact that the main geographical target of the ESDP is to maintain peace and stability within the European continent, does not exclude the possibility of the EU to undertake humanitarian and crisis-management operations in the Mediterranean.

The point being made, therefore, is that the ESDP represents a new regional strategic variable, not a threat. Thus the EU's Mediterranean partners should not perceive it in hostile terms. Immigration is not on the ESDP agenda, and the EU's military force is certainly not intended to act as a police force for the Mediterranean peoples. Accordingly, the southern partners should not view the deeper motives of the ESDP as the creation of a Schengen-type force to guard the Mediterranean, or as some sort of EU military imposition or even as an orchestrated western control over them. A solid EU position towards the Middle East could act as a confidence-building measure in Euro-Mediterranean relations, and the ESDP can be taken by the Mediterranean partners as a new opportunity to strengthen strategic co-operation.

16 The *Common Strategy for the Mediterranean* was adopted by the Feira European Council and constitutes a means for accommodating Mediterranean issues to European foreign policy aspirations, as well as a mechanism for implementing CFSP objectives according to the provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty.

17 First Year Report of the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) Working Group III, 'European Defence: Perceptions vs. Realities', *EuroMeSCo Papers*, No 16, 2002, p. 14.

Conclusion

Current global transformations are sharing and reshaping the terms of political and economic governance, reactivating basic questions of multilateral co-operation. Deep-seated changes in the conditions of institutionalised rule pose new challenges to the search for viable political orders based on stable patterns of authority not only within but also between states and societies. Such challenges offer the broader context within which the integration of domestic and international politics takes place. At the same time, the struggle for social and political equality, the ever widening chasm between rich and poor, and the displacement of bipolarity by deep divisions of cultural values point in the belief that defining elements of separateness proceeds hand in hand with the need to identify degrees of common understanding among actors that increasingly operate under conditions of complex interdependence.

Against this swiftly changing international scene, whose intellectual outcome has been the ascendance of ‘identity politics’ and non-territorial, even post-national, forms of governance, the Mediterranean refers to a heterarchical regional space, which continues to spark the interest of international scholarship. Such composite mosaic of self-images, belief-systems and identities results, as noted earlier, in a composite system of partial regimes, each reflecting a particular sense of being and belonging. The relationship between complexity and reality in the region can be understood as having developed from a uniquely Mediterranean context. The above views are testimony to the enduring influence of cultural distinctiveness in the politics of regional order-building, with the Mediterranean remaining a divided (social) construct. But this renewed interest in Euro-Mediterranean politics post-1995 may not necessarily result in a substantive agreement on many good governance issues, including transparent policy-making, economic security-building, respect for human rights, co-operative conflict management and intra-regional reconciliation. Partnership-building and a shared, but credible, commitment to mutually rewarding outcomes can feed into this process, constituting a crucial adjunct to the emergence of a sense of security at the grassroots. Central to the above is the institutionalisation of

the EMP through the setting up of co-operative practices, norms and rules. All the more so, given the need for an open political dialogue to do away with the subjectivist approach that wants the West to act as a universal civilising force based on fixed notions of democracy and a predominantly liberal understanding of political order.

The Mediterranean has been a crossroads of civilisations as well as a hotbed of tension. Today, against the background of unprecedented global changes, both its shores are groping for change. At macro-level, although the EMP cannot but go ahead through trial and error, it should keep a fundamental direction: designing efficient systems of institutionalised rule requires maximum 'capacity for governance'. The EMP is presently lacking such a capacity, not only due to various institutional weaknesses, but also due to the absence of credible commitments by the partners to make effective use of existing arrangements.¹⁸ Notwithstanding the Middle East crisis, steps in the right direction include the infusion of greater transparency in its structures and a clear focus on strategic co-operation. Most of the EU's southern partners do not oppose the strengthening of regional defence co-operation and their involvement in joint military exercises, as well as strategic and training activities. Their participation in future ESDP exercises is a valuable confidence-building measure that needs to be encouraged by the EU. The reinforcement of scientific as well as military co-operation in emergency rescue missions and the handling of natural disasters are good cases in point.

New mechanisms for bilateral security and defence co-operation should not be excluded from the agenda, initially at the level information exchange or even intelligence sharing at sub-regional level, where security is a clear issue. Such forms of co-operation could then be extended at EMP level for the promotion of regional contacts over ESDP matters. Even though southern EMP partners seem to appreciate security and defence co-operation at a selective bilateral level, the holding of frequent meetings at Defence Ministerial level is desirable by all partners. This was made clear at both

18 D. N. Chrysochoou and D. K. Xenakis, 'Prospects for Euro-Mediterranean Governance', *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2003, pp. 47-70.

seminars organised by the Hellenic Presidency of the ESDP that helped to revive the interest over the initiation and regularisation of a Mediterranean security dialogue. The Greek proposals for the regularisation of such dialogue could lead to the institutionalisation of the Mediterranean dimension of the ESDP.

Limited as it may be at present, the potential for organising Mediterranean-security awaits utilisation. Because crises in the region are endemic, they know no borders: they have a tendency to ignore passport procedures and spill over very rapidly, opening a wide range of possibilities for crucial strategic issues to be brought to the fore. The search for a new legitimacy in EMP security structures depends heavily on the partners' capacity to resist the forces of polarisation and segmentation, as well as on the credibility of their commitment to a mutually reinforcing dialogue. The flexibility of the EMP and the means through which its constitutive norms can facilitate agreement on security and defence issues will no doubt affect its potential to adjust itself to a highly interdependent region. What is urgently needed is a set of system-transforming mechanisms to alleviate regional complexity, absorb order-building vibrations and preserve the same sense of being and belonging that for centuries now binds the peoples of the region in an almost mystical, all-Mediterranean fashion.

But to break down Mediterranean complexity, one has to realise the importance of diversity as an essentialistic principle: the system is itself constituted in the clash of different sub-systems. A heterarchical order minimises homogeneity as the principal referent for sub-systemic co-operation. This form of enhanced particularity through a reflexive appropriation of difference becomes the basic normative unit of the system itself. This resonates with a broader aspiration of partnership that transcends any mono-dimensional configuration of power, stressing the complex nature of a common vocation. This is where a heterarchical regime like the EMP is better equipped to manage the existing levels of regional complexity. The plausibility of this claim to the importance of reflexivity, as opposed to coordinated hierarchy, rests on a systemic perspective, whereby the various segments form 'instances of a totality'. Although some hierarchy of norms may prove necessary, this should also reflect the necessity for respect for

the 'other'. The aim is for 'others' to be brought into the EMP framework, and for regional diversity to transform itself from a self-referential property of distinct units into an identifiable pluralist order composed of intertwined states and societies.

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