

POLICY PAPER

Regional Dialogue and Cooperation in 2008 - Any Opportunities?

Expert Advisory Group (EAG)
European and South Mediterranean Actors:
Partners in Conflict Prevention and Resolution

This policy paper is the outcome of the fourth workshop of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) - European and South Mediterranean Actors - Partners in Conflict Prevention and Resolution, held in Rabat, Morocco on February 9 and 10, 2008. Participants discussed the question in the conference title, "Regional Dialogue and Cooperation in 2008 - Any Opportunities?"

In the overview, Gerrit F. Schlomach begins with a thorough analysis of the lessons learned from both long-standing and recent initiatives in the region. Emily B. Landau and Carlo Masala argue that "the US is uniquely positioned to take up the challenge" of regional turmoil regarding the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Iraq's internal situation and Iran's regional ambitions. Through comparing past European activities, Antje Nötzold suggests following the successful bilateral approach of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as a platform for new multilateral initiatives. In analyzing Ankara's role in the Middle East, Cagri Erhan highlights Turkish possibilities in helping to establish regional cooperation. Ahmed Driss, Cagri Erhan and Markus Pösentrup refer to the still young project "Union for the Mediterranean" in order to develop a shared North-South perception on this energizer for the Barcelona Process. Lastly, Mohamed Abdel Salam and Emily B. Landau present possible future options, which could contribute to wider regional security cooperation, when more conducive political opportunities exist.

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Overview

*Summary of discussions,
prepared by Gerrit F. Schlomach*

This overview includes firstly, an assessment of regional approaches towards security cooperation on a structural level. As there is a lack of well-developed and functional intra-regional south-south cooperation, the initial step will be to examine north/south cooperation. The inter-regional coalitions coming from the North, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the "5+5 Dialogue" indicate that there have been serious attempts at north/south cooperation. Secondly, there will be an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of recent attempts for security dialogue and cooperation. It will also focus on the Annapolis Conference as well as the Mediterranean Union and will set up the basis for the following part of this policy paper, where individual authors express their opinions and make policy recommendations.

Long Standing Structured Initiatives in the Mediterranean Region

Ever since the EMP started in 1995 in Barcelona, critics have vocally sought its improvement, to better serve the overall goals of peace, freedom and prosperity in the Mediterranean region. In examining the results of the last 10 years, it seems that economic links have developed in a faster and more sustainable way. However more effort is

needed to realize common inter-regional projects, such the Euro Mediterranean Free Trade Zone which is scheduled to begin in 2010. Despite the cautious developments towards good governance in the region, a stark characteristic of regional governments is their authoritarianism. Nevertheless, continuously bringing Israel together with Arab regimes at one table should be considered as one of the major achievements of this multilateral process aimed at building trust and confidence.

The NATO Mediterranean Dialogue based on bilateral relations started in 1994, in order to contribute to regional security and stability, to improve mutual understanding and to dispel any misconceptions about the Atlantic Alliance among Dialogue countries. Its implementation led from scepticism to real dialogue. However, a lot of work still has to be done to create a sustainable change of perceptions, particularly within broader domestic public opinion. In view of large NATO military budgets as a whole and its member states in particular, some reticence remains towards all forms of security cooperation.

Following the big bang enlargement in 2004 towards the East, the European Union created the ENP aimed at the formation of a "friendly neighbourhood" towards the East and the South. Although based on the lessons learned of the EMP, the positive aspects of the ENP – emphasizing the bilateral track and the tailor made approach through actions plans – have not been immune to criticism. Critics claim the European

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Since the early 1990s, on a sub-regional level the so called “5+5 Dialogue” ties together the five European countries of the Western Mediterranean, on the Northern shore: Spain, Portugal, France, Malta, and Italy with the five countries on the Southern shore: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania. Due to its more informal character and limited approach in the fields of natural resource management, economic links, financial assistance, migration, and culture, it serves as a trust and confidence building measure. The dialogue has suffered because of the friction between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara and Algeria’s continued internal instability. However the realignment of Libya into the international community reinvigorated the forum.

Recent Initiatives for Cooperation and Dialogue

Having reviewed the long standing processes and their limited results, it is necessary to have a closer look at recent initiatives for cooperation and dialogue in the region. Can we rely on these developments as a start for strong regional forms of cooperation?

In this regard, the US brokered meeting on the Near East Conflict, at Annapolis on November 27, 2007, gained a lot of attention throughout the region and beyond. Hopes for a successful meeting had been limited before the gathering, due to its heavily criticized agenda, the participants, as well as the influence of overall strategic developments in the region, mainly the dynamics of a rising new power balance between regional, external and non-state actors. At the table in Annapolis there were hot issues like the status for Jerusalem, the borders and shape of a future Palestinian state, and how to deal with the Palestinian refugees. Among the participants, we found not only the directly concerned Israeli and Palestinian sides, the members of the Near East Quartet; the US, Russia, EU and UN, but also other important actors such as Syria. Meanwhile, commentators have described Annapolis as another stillborn initiative or as little more than a photo opportunity, which failed to find a realistic way towards a final agreement for a two state solution.

When the Head of European governments met in Brussels for their spring summit from March 13-14, 2008, they urged the European Commission to work out the modalities of what is called now the “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”. Previous to this, French presidential candidate, Nicholas Sarkozy, during a speech in Toulon, on February 7, 2007 advocated for a “Union of the Mediterranean” built on concrete projects in the field of less contested areas such as migration or

the environment. Some commentators from the South perceived the openness of the project as an opportunity for their countries to write on this blank paper. In comparing the long standing structured initiatives in the Mediterranean region to the new, the new ones have a true advantage because the former ones had all been designed in the offices of Northern organizations reflecting a more European and or transatlantic perspective. In focusing on migration and the environment and reducing the emphasis on good governance and democracy Southern rulers were more attracted to the French offer. Southern rulers wanted to foster cooperation without changing political course meanwhile pursuing an internal strategy of stabilization.

Initially intended to advance sub regional bilateral cooperation among countries of the Western Mediterranean and Turkey, the project had been harshly rejected by the government in Ankara because of Sarkozy’s presumed intention to close the door for full Turkish EU membership. Because of its inappropriate way of communication and its lack of institutional coherence, the newly proposed project received mixed reactions from both shores of the Mediterranean. Some observers disqualified it as the Club Med project or just another stillborn project in the Mediterranean. Some heads of states from the Southern shore among them the Moroccan king and the Algerian president, pointed out the missing link to the long standing processes in the region. Also European politicians criticized the lack of involvement of the EU as a whole and the European parliament in particular. The French and the Germans worked together to develop the goals of the project before it was handed over to the European Commission. It is still unclear which way it will go and how the governments as well as civil societies from all shores of the Mediterranean will be included in this endeavor.

It also remains unclear if both initiatives can generate enough momentum to foster new ways for security cooperation and dialogue in the region. Since both topics remain on the agenda and are perceived as essential from the European as well from the South Mediterranean perspective, we have to discuss in detail, which opportunities exist in 2008. This will be done in the next section with contributions from individuals EAG members.

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Enhance South-South Cooperation Through North-South Cooperation

by Fouad M. Ammor and Carlo Masala

Nowadays initiatives to enhance cooperation with the southern countries are numerous. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can count at least three important cooperation programmes between the North and the South in the West Mediterranean

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area: The Euro Mediterranean Partnership launched in 1995, the 5+5 Dialogue (1994), and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (1994).

The EMP with its three baskets does not mention anything about this horizontal relationship between countries from the South. It is believed that the strengthening of vertical links will be enough to sort out the cooperation issues. The Barcelona Process is an example of this as well as other initiatives. It must be noted that the lack of cooperation between southern countries reduces opportunities for confidence and trust building.

When we try to assess those initiatives, we notice that, they have, in general, achieved some of their goals. But, the fact is that almost all of those initiatives incorrectly assumed the South is a homogeneous entity and the main problem is between the developed countries and the partner countries. In fact, the issue is that this is simply an illusion. The South is a plural entity with specific features and more or less deep contradictions between its components. Furthermore, without strong links between southern countries, it is useless to hope of establishing real and lasting peace and stability in the region.

One can say that strengthening south-south cooperation is the southern countries' duty. This answer, which seems to be pertinent, is not relevant. In fact, what we aim to find is not who is responsible for this situation but how to improve the stability and prosperity of the whole area. That said, we should not deny that the history and the political framework of the current situation are the product of a special relationship built on western interests and the southern political policymakers. So the responsibility is largely shared. More than that, since those “leaders” are far from democrat, the external impact is of great importance.

To summarise, the absence of real cooperation between southern countries in the framework of South-South cooperation, will handicap all the initiatives of cooperation and partnership and prevent all significant and lasting achievements.

If sub-regional cooperation is a prerequisite for North-South cooperation the question arises of how to achieve a sub-regional self-organization and what Europe ought to do to stimulate such cooperation. A brief look into history might help to identify some mechanisms about how to stimulate self-organization of regions. After the Second World War it was the US who – in order to help Europe to recovery economically – set up the Marshall Plan but tied the distribution of the allocated funds to the self-organization of the European countries. This led to the establishment of the Organization for Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which can be considered the ancestor of European Integration.

So the lessons drawn from past experiences could be that Europe needs to begin sub-regional cooperation by establishing linkages. Europe could tie the distribution of MENA funds to regional self-cooperation amongst those where it seems today most plausible – North Africa. Europe could also use its influence on the regional policymakers in order to sort out their regional conflicts. Those conflicts impede attempts to strengthen this south-south cooperation.

Stimulating regional self-cooperation does not need to be tied to the distribution of needed economic resources. It can start in functional areas of common interest. Setting up sub-regional cooperation mechanisms can start in areas where North African countries and Europeans have a common interest. The creation of a European-North African disaster relief cell, where police forces of all countries train together, or the creation of an agency to find solutions to illegal immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa are two examples. These are not only areas of common interest amongst European and North Africans but also among the countries of North Africa themselves. So, sub-regional cooperation should be stipulated in those areas without expecting a spill over into the political realm. However it is better to start with common interests and build consensus than to wait until eternity before beginning a dialogue.

3 Role of External Actors I: US

by Emily B. Landau and Carlo Masala

External actors are sometimes instrumental for managing regional conflicts and high-tension situations. This logic has never been proven as correct as with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian and broader Arab-Israeli conflict, especially as far as the US is concerned. It was the US that brokered peace between Israel and Egypt, initiated the Madrid Peace Process, pressed for a peace accord between Israel and Jordan, and has been involved in efforts over the years to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The involvement of external actors, powerful as they might be, is not a recipe for success as some of the above mentioned examples demonstrate; nevertheless, without external pressure and assistance from the US, some of the attempts to regulate the Arab-Israeli conflict would most likely never have taken place. Indeed, it has become commonplace to argue that the US plays a crucial role in Middle East peace efforts. And the current administration, although reluctant at first to become actively engaged in this process, after 9/11 became more and more involved in attempts to carve out a lasting solution between Palestinians and Israelis. The current agenda of

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the Bush Administration is to push for an agreement before the Administration leaves office, although there is so far little room for optimism in this regard.

In light of the historic centrality of the US role in the Middle East as a peace broker over the years, it is quite astonishing that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays almost no role in the current debates among the presidential candidates. None of the presidential hopefuls has discussed their ideas on how to regulate the conflict, and it is hardly ever addressed in their foreign policy speeches. Before Clinton dropped out of the race, a top foreign policy advisor on her team highlighted the foreign policy priorities of a potential President Hillary Clinton. Among his top 5, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not included. And his agenda was not disputed by representatives of the McCain campaign who also attended the meeting. As for Obama, we know very little about what he thinks on foreign policy issues broadly defined, not to mention the Middle East.

Two possible explanations for this come to mind. First, that the candidates agree that it would be unwise to criticize an acting administration currently working on a solution (Annapolis Process), but this does not sound very convincing given the huge amount of criticism (especially from Democrats) on almost every current foreign policy issue of the administration. A second explanation would bear bad news for the conflict parties in the Middle East. It emphasizes a potential "Middle East fatigue" in the US, which might be reflected in both parties. After having been engaged in the region for almost five decades, politicians and analysts alike may have simply run out of ideas on how to deal with the conflict and the region.

There are, however, two Middle East issues that are high on the foreign policy agenda of the US administration, and that preoccupy the presidential candidates as well: Iraq and Iran. It is with regard to the threat that Iran poses to many Middle East states that the US could become more actively engaged as an essential external actor: helping to convene regional security dialogue among these states. If the US put its energies behind setting up a framework for dialogue there is a fair chance of success in getting such an important process moving.

In fact, indications are that the Bush administration sought to use the Annapolis meeting last year as a venue and platform for discussing with the group of Middle East states that attended their common concerns over Iran's nuclear activities and hegemonic tendencies. This would explain the great efforts that the administration put into securing wide regional participation at this meeting. The agenda fell flat however when the rhetoric became framed as creating an alliance

against Iran. This idea fell on deaf ears in many Arab Middle Eastern states, even though they harbor deep concern about Iran. This experience highlights the complexity of Middle East politics, but with careful policy-making, this is the kind of problem that can be overcome. States in the Middle East – including Israel – desperately need to begin a real dialogue on a host of security and other issues of regional concern. With its record of at least partial successes in the region in the past, the US is uniquely positioned to take up the challenge.

4 Role of External Actors II: EU/ENP - the Bilateral Framework Works Better

by Antje Nötzold

After establishing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995 and the ENP in 2004 as new European approaches towards the southern neighborhood, the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" was discussed by the heads of European governments at their summer summit on July 13, 2008 in Paris. This new/old Euro-Med project is designed to complement rather than replace the earlier established initiatives. Hence, one can only hope that the shape of this future framework of cooperation is adjusted to the experiences of the EMP and ENP in order to improve the prospects of regional development and cooperation. In this regard, it is the ENP that very likely has more to offer than the older Barcelona process framework.

Past experience with the EMP has demonstrated that apart from the reluctance and intraregional barriers towards reform, democracy and multilateral cooperation, the lack of regional coherence and commitment on common interests on both shores of the Mediterranean has limited the success of the project. In fact, the multilateral and intraregional aspects of the Barcelona process have been exposed as frustrated ambitions. Furthermore, as matters stand, the EU is unlikely to become an important security actor in the Mediterranean in the medium-term, despite its recent engagements in the region. In light of this, it makes sense to concentrate – in the initial stage at least – on limited projects in less controversial fields, rather than the large-scale projects that have little chance of achieving concrete results in the near future. Despite criticism directed at the many shortcomings of the ENP, it appears that this initiative aims precisely at such mutually desired cooperation.

With the ENP, the EU has placed the bulk of responsibility for successful policy reform in the neighbouring countries themselves. Accordingly the EU repositioned itself from the desired (but unachievable) role of initiator, toward the more realistic role of promoter of domestic changes as

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an endogenous process. What makes the ENP distinctive from past approaches is the nature of the EU's interaction with its neighbours. The mechanism of conditionality is redefined in the ENP, and connected with the principle of differentiation. This means a shift from the EMP logic whereby aid is provided in order to change domestic policies, towards a logic that conditions aid upon the level of each partner's institutional and political capacity, and on this basis the EU proceeds to work with the individual partners. Recognition of the fact that the EU is limited in its ability to influence the domestic policies of other states may decrease the capability-expectations gap. This has long been a burden of the EU's external relations. Thus, the EU may be placed in the role of a more probable international actor fostering pragmatic cooperation in less controversial fields, with greater prospects for mutual benefits on both sides of the Mediterranean.

In the longer run, this policy can enable the EU to more successfully generate changes from within the countries, without destabilizing them. The population has to profit appreciably in a timely manner from the cooperation of their country with the EU, although this means that the Union will have to cut down on some of their economic interests and advantages as the weightier partner. While bilateral cooperation on less controversial issues can achieve results, still this should be regarded as an initial goal. The EU should not lose sight of the more fundamental European aim of promoting good governance when it comes to further cooperation. Indeed, successful bilateral cooperation on issues lying in the interest of many regional actors could be used as a starting point and platform for new multilateral initiatives.

5 Turkey's Role in Middle East: Possibilities in Helping to Establish Regional Cooperation *by Cagri Erhan*

After decades of a low profile, Turkey has been playing an important diplomatic role in the Middle East. Over the past few years, Ankara has established close ties with Iran and Syria; adopted a more active approach toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; tried to play a mediator role in the Syrian-Israeli negotiation process; sent peacekeeping forces to Lebanon; created new ideas to make a peaceful environment in the region such as peace water and improved relations with the Arab world. Although this new activism is generally recognized as an important departure from traditional western oriented Turkish foreign policy, this new approach does not mean that Turkey is about to turn its back on the West.

Turkey's new activism is a result of structural changes in its security environment after 2003, namely the invasion of Iraq, and Turkey's need to have better relations with regional countries. Therefore, Turkey wants to be a bridge between the Middle East and the Western world. In order to reach its aim Turkey uses several tools such as regional cooperation initiatives, peacemaking efforts, developing economic relations, and providing humanitarian support to crisis regions.

Six main reasons can be counted for Turkey's new approach and efforts towards the Middle East. First of all, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is the ruling party in Turkey since November 2002 has a particular interest in the Muslim World. This is not only because of their Islamic orientation and background, but also for their supporters' special interest in the economic and trade relations with the region, i.e. attracting the petro-dollars into Turkey accumulated in the Gulf area.

Secondly, after the Iraqi invasion, Turkey tried to repair and strengthen its relations with the US government, which were severely damaged when the Turkish Parliament rejected accepting American troops in Turkey, in March 2003. Therefore, Turkey enthusiastically took part in the broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative and tried to play a “model” for Islamic countries, a role which was designed by Bush government, depending on the so called “moderate Islamic identity”.

Thirdly, Turkey tries to use its capacity and potential in the Middle East, like a regional leader or moderator between conflicting parties, in order to persuade the EU countries of its strategic importance. Therefore Turkish “Ostpolitik” possesses a strategic goal not ending in the Middle Eastern capitals, but in Brussels.

Fourthly, Turkey feels a deep concern about the dissolution of Iraq and creation of an independent Kurdish state in the area. By increasing its role in the region, Turkey tries to guarantee Iraqi territorial integrity with the assistance of all neighboring countries.

Fifthly, having suffered from two wars in the Gulf, Turkey does not want to feel negative economic and political impacts of any other crisis in the Middle East, such as an armed confrontation between Iran and the US. Therefore, by transforming its regional posture into a mediator, Turkish government intends to play an important role for Iranian-American “détente”.

Finally, Turkey's activism is a continuance of its centuries old competition with Iran in the region. Turkey aims to decrease Iranian influence in the region, at least balance it, by using its soft power instruments. As far as peacemaking efforts, Turkey has been a strong supporter of the Middle East

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peace process. Since Turkey has good relations with both Arab countries and Israel, it wishes to play a facilitator role. That is why it remains equally distant to both parties with regard to the conflict. In this context, Turkey declared several times its intention to contribute to the peace process as a mediator, which was welcomed in different contexts by both sides. As a result of Turkish efforts Israeli President, Shimon Peres, and Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) met in Ankara in November 2007, ahead of the Israeli-Palestinian summit in Annapolis. This visit was the conclusion of a framework agreement for the construction of an industrial park in the West Bank under a process known as the Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation, which was inaugurated by Turkish President Abdullah Gul in April 2005 and that seeks to bring together Israeli and Palestinian businessmen.

Currently, another peacemaking effort of Turkey has been going on for several months. At the end of April 2008, Syrian officials declared that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had brought a letter from Israeli Prime Minister Olmert in order to revitalize peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, and parties were brought together in Istanbul in May 2008. Similar to the Palestinian case, Turkey has the confidence of both sides and close relations with the US. Therefore, it may be the only actor, which can play a facilitator role between these two countries to start new official talks. If we look deep into Turkey's role between Israel and Syria, it is clear that, for the time being Turkey only carries the parties' messages to each other and provides a venue for the meetings. Turkey does not dictate any solution modalities to the two countries. In fact, Turkey does not have any political or economic power over Israel or Syria, which can be used as an instrument to enforce the parties to find solutions.

6 The Union for the Mediterranean

*by Ahmed Driss, Cagri Erhan
and Markus Pösentrup*

While initiatives targeting the Mediterranean have not been lacking, none has to this day truly managed to achieve its objectives. European initiatives such as the European policy for the Mediterranean, the EMP, and the ENP each sought to make the Mediterranean a space of peace, stability and prosperity. Europe demanded that its Mediterranean partners adhere to its system of values, offering them in exchange a share of the prosperity bred by its liberal economy. These diverse arrangements failed to convince, however, the Southern Mediterranean countries, resistant to rapid social and political changes, as

well as those of the North, little inclined to direct investments, technological transfers, or the global treatment of cultural and migratory issues related to the field of security. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict aggravated an already complex situation and resulted in a political block within the Partnership. Starting from this, it was unavoidable that southern EU partners greeted France's announcement of the Mediterranean Union project with a negative balance of the Barcelona Process, coupled with a certain reticence vis-à-vis the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Keeping in mind that ideas of a “Mediterranean Union” or “Mediterranean Alliance” or “Mediterranean Cooperation Area” or “Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue” were being discussed for over 15 years, much hesitation remains in welcoming something fundamentally new in the initiative.

However, the evolution of the original French “Mediterranean Union” project through a joint French-German proposal into an overhaul of the Barcelona Process, allowed the European Union member states to renew their commitment for the Mediterranean region and enhance their political involvement. France's ambition to allocate more space for the Mediterranean in Europe's agenda was endorsed by two European Union summits of Heads of State and Government in March and June and further developed by a European Commission proposal in May. Amidst navel-gazing of EU members digesting the 2004 and 2007 Eastern enlargements and painfully reforming their internal structure and procedures, fresh attention is achieved to the gigantic area in the south that should never be neglected.

After shedding off some visionary vagueness the new proposal seems clearer and politically promising: It raises the political profile of the relations by bringing together all European Union Member States and all the other European, Middle Eastern and North African Mediterranean Partners in a new high-level policy forum, the biennial summit meetings of government leaders. It seeks to increase the co-ownership by installing two co-presidents, one from the EU, i.e. the Northern, and one from a Mediterranean, i.e. the Southern co-president, and a joint secretariat with national experts. It attempts at attracting private as well as regional and national funding for multilateral projects aimed at promoting regional cohesion and economic integration in a small number of concrete projects. These projects should be selected and developed by the joint secretariat. The hope for more commitment from the Mediterranean Partners to the partnership and to achieving substantial results is shining through.

According to Mr. Sarkozy, even higher hopes are justified and the Union for the Mediterranean Union could contribute to a solution for the Middle

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Eastern problems and could also develop policies concerning immigration. The Union for the Mediterranean members would use the new summit meetings to share ideas on problems such as terrorism, fight against organized crime, energy, and environment.

The project's evolution and its adoption during the March European Summit as a continuation of the Barcelona Process, finally lend reason to those from the South who predicted this development and who feel reassured by the participation of all EU member states, confirmed by the Franco-German compromise announced in Hannover on March 3, 2008.

Certain elements of this “new and improved” Barcelona Process, within the context of the Union for the Mediterranean, appear to command a particular interest and, at the same time, respond to demands expressed by southern partners. The preoccupation is in establishing a balanced basis that will allow all actors to engage in the elaboration of common projects on an equal footing. If the principle of co-direction is definitely maintained, it shall require a reformulation of the Partnership's institutional plan, with the creation of an exclusive competence within the domain of the EMP, underlined and personified by the new secretariat and the Co-Presidents.

Although it appears that the southern Mediterranean countries are interested in this new orientation, they reveal differences in approach linked to the lessons learnt from the failures of the Barcelona Process: namely, lack of means, lack of structures, deficiencies in the area of governance, and shortcomings in trans-Mediterranean market integration. The Project, which was devised in part to find an alternative to Turkish membership in the EU, is now billed as a way to tackle strategic challenges in the region – from energy security and illegal immigration to terrorism and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The political start must be given at the Paris Summit of July 13, 2008.

7 Thinking of "Non-Traditional Frameworks" for Regional Security Cooperation

by Mohamed Abdel Salam and Emily B. Landau

The current state of instability in the Middle East makes it difficult to envision that states might as yet begin to pursue broad security cooperation among them. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, each year there is a sense that the region has reached a crossroads that will either engender relative stability or end in complete collapse. So far neither scenario has materialized. Indeed, over time the current pattern of mixed reactions –

neither calm nor dangerously escalatory – has become a chronic feature of the region.

The current open conflicts in the region seem to reflect this pattern. Iraq may not witness stability in the short term, but neither is it on the verge of sliding into all-out civil war. The challenge posed by Iran's nuclear program has not been resolved, but has also not escalated yet to the point that it evokes serious prospects of war. In Lebanon a solution to political tensions and spurts of internal violence has not been achieved, but civil war is not yet imminent. Also while Annapolis presented the vision of a two-state solution by the end of 2008, everything is still pending.

Under these conditions, the idea of regional security cooperation is still excluded by most in the region, due to a perceived lack of ripeness in the strategic environment. Most parties in the region still think in line with the logic that conflicts must be managed either through confrontation or engagement. But the very unstable conditions on the ground have actually sowed some “strategic seeds” on the basis of which a level of security cooperation may be conceivable among regional parties. For while it might seem that the region has formed implicit mechanisms to cope with situations that perpetually teeter on the brink, in fact there is a need for more purposeful cooperation to ward off the danger of actually falling.

Examples relate to groups of states in the region that coordinate among themselves to deal with the problems posed by Iran in the region, and to maintain the current equations. Sometimes these states have gone so far as to talk about a regional cold war. We can also mention interactions carried out between security institutions in the region for managing crises, or for dealing with common challenges facing the national interests of states.

These types of interaction signal a new way of thinking about regional security cooperation. If we have still not reached the point of contemplating formal cooperative security arrangements in the Middle East - that would be inclusive of all parties of the region – we can still consider less comprehensive options for the short term.

These might include:

- 1 - Solving some acute crises without linking them to the creation of a comprehensive regional security system, whenever possible.
- 2 - Relying on arrangements in sub-regional, rather than region-wide systems.
- 3 - Devoting more thought to informal frameworks of security understandings, rather than formal security agreements.

The importance of contemplating and acting on these more limited options is to instill cooperative modes of thinking in the security environment of the Middle East. Less comprehensive and less

formal arrangements can also provide the basis on which to carve out more comprehensive options in the future. An additional reason to consider these options is the need to devote attention to important non-traditional security problems sweeping the region at the moment, posing transnational challenges and threats. These include drug trafficking, organized crime, terror activities, illegal immigration, the spread of diseases and environmental security.

Cooperation in confronting these threats – including among states with political differences – is clearly a strong common interest. And "street politics" will not manifest strong opposition in this regard. Cooperation in such fields could provide a model for a non-traditional approach that can contribute in the future in facilitating wider regional security cooperation, when political conditions are more conducive.

About the Expert Advisory Group (EAG)

This project aims to explore a constructive and sustained relationship between European and South Mediterranean actors in Conflict Prevention and Resolution, in the context of past and present collaborative efforts in the Middle East and North Africa. The main objective is to create a knowledge-based network in order to advise relevant actors from both shores of the Mediterranean on current political and security developments on an ad-hoc basis.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention and the members of the group agree with the general thrust of this policy paper but not necessarily with every individual statement. The responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in this policy paper rests exclusively with the contributors and their interpretations do not reflect the views or the policy of the publishers.

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