

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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The inter-regional character of the Mediterranean area

The Mediterranean is an area where many different political, societal and cultural entities happen to stay in touch with one another. In some respects it may be regarded as a region in itself, in particular because of environment and a number of dwindling premodern, subcultural similarities. In general, though, it can hardly be regarded as a regional entity, i.e. endowed with a significant inner coherence. There is no doubt, that what characterises the Mediterranean area is its quintessential inter-regional structure.

If we look at the initiatives to institutionalise inter-Mediterranean relations in the last few decades, we see that they are in fact of both regional and inter-regional character. In the functional realm, a clear example of Mediterranean regional organisation is the "Blue Plan", set out within the framework of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) with a view to manage common environmental resources relating to the sea. An example referring to the political realm can be drawn from the Cold War, namely the Mediterranean component of the Non-Aligned Movement. At that time, within that Movement there was a Mediterranean feeling shared by Southern European as well as Third World countries belonging to the area. Such common feeling was motivated by the perception of a cultural and political oppression enforced by imperialist quarters (the West, USA, NATO). This gave way to a search for a Mediterranean region de-linked from Western dominance.

A similar claim is referred to globalisation, as of today. The important difference, however, is that today's European Mediterranean countries have been "Europeanised", either as long-standing members of the EU or because they are deeply involved in the European security framework, as for the Balkan countries. In this sense, talking about an all-Mediterranean regional trend against globalisation would be a mistake. As a matter of fact, there is no "Mediterranean" grouping against globalisation, whether in regional, inter-regional or international organisations (though there are streams of anti-globalisation opinion in Southern and Northern Europe).

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In fact, the end of the East-West confrontation can be regarded as a watershed between the idea of the Mediterranean as a region and as a web of inter-regional relations. For sure, in Southern Europe the idea of some Mediterranean solidarity may have survived here and there, but it is politically irrelevant. On the other hand, as of today there is only one working Mediterranean political organisation, the Mediterranean Forum for Dialogue and Co-operation. This Forum being a grouping of Mediterranean countries with a loose ancillary task with respect to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), all the other Mediterranean working organisations have an inter-regional character. A number of intergovernmental and private networks or organisations (including those dealing with environment) refer to the Mediterranean region, but none of them has a political significance or task. In the political field, today's Mediterranean institutional set-up is substantially inter-regional.

There is no doubt that the inter-regional approach makes more sense and helps governments to organise in a more rational way some kind of badly needed co-operation among the different regions gravitating towards the Mediterranean basin. In fact, the inter-regional approach reflects the reality of regional differentiation across the Mediterranean and thus it makes possible to deal with the product of such differentiation, namely the political and security fragmentation of what is assumed to be the Mediterranean "region".

The fragmentation of the Mediterranean is due to at least four most important factors:

- first, its already noticed character of place where areas having their political and cultural "centres" elsewhere (more often than not, well beyond the rims lying on the basin) get in contact: the Mediterranean basin is a "border" and not a "centre" in itself;
- second, the fact that, partly as a consequence of what has been just said, the Mediterranean countries do not constitute what the theory of international relations defines as a "security complex" (1); in fact, they have different security agendas; this difference between agendas is very striking in the Mediterranean area, South-South security being affected by factors which have nothing to do with factors affecting North-South security; no doubt, this differentiation among Mediterranean security agendas has been accentuated by the end of the Cold War;
- third, the fact that, because of its global relevance (both economically and politically), the Mediterranean area is highly "penetrated" in both its marine and territorial dimensions, i.e. as a strategic waterway as well as a strategic location requiring substantial deployments of military forces and armaments.
- fourth, the fact that there are great economic gaps between countries in the North and the South of the basin, furthermore in the framework of very differentiated political and institutional regimes.

It must be pointed out that a greater rationality in dealing with such fragmented reality is not only predicated on the adoption of an inter-regional approach, but also on that of concomitant initiatives geared to solidify the

structures of the individual regions relating to the Mediterranean (the most important such initiative being the Middle East Peace Process, MEPP, in particular its multilateral track). It could be added that reinforcing regional structures, so as to make the varying regions around the Mediterranean Sea more homogeneous, is very important for inter-regional co-operation to succeed in further stages.

With the end of the Cold War, these two principal political orientations - the inter-regional approach and the strengthening of Southern regions adjoining the Mediterranean - have been espoused by the various actors involved with the area. In fact, they have initiated two relevant sets of institutional policies, one concerning the relations between the Western and European alliances and the Mediterranean countries, like the EMP and the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, and another one the relations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area, like the MEPP, the MENA Economic Summits and, more recently, the Eizenstad process (which regards primarily the Maghreb countries).

Table 1 (attachment 1) lists the most important international organisations concerned with the Mediterranean area in the narrower and broader definitions just pointed out in the above. Much has been written on these organisations (see the essential bibliography provided in attachment 2), so that the paper doesn't deal with the illustration and analysis of the individual organisations involved. Rather, it focus on commenting the broad institutional structure of the area, seeking to identify its main trends. Some conclusions on the role of the Mediterranean institutional frameworks are drawn in the last section.

Trends relating to Mediterranean institutions

A high death-rate - Two out of the ten initiatives listed in table 1 are fully working and alive, namely the EMP and the Mediterranean Forum for Dialogue and Co-operation.

Three more initiatives, the WEU Mediterranean Dialogue, NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension, do work but their profile and/or operational capability appear rather low. NATO's operative profile has somehow improved in the last two years. Still, its Dialogue continues to be perceived as void, monotonous and somewhat irrelevant by Southern Partners. On the other hand, with the inclusion in the EU of the WEU, the latter has entered a transition in which, among other things, the future of the WEU Mediterranean activities has to be redefined in the framework of the emerging EU Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP).

The recent Eizenstat initiative promises an American support to the Maghreb countries (including Libya and Mauritania) contingent to the acceptance by the latter of a globalisation agenda similar to that unsuccessfully fostered in the region by the MENA Economic Summits. This initiative has got very mixed reactions from the countries concerned and, for the time being, doesn't seem to have any impact worth mentioning.

The four initiatives left are suspended or just sleeping, when they are not defunct. According to the rule of diplomacy, nobody has closed nor will close them. Still, there is no doubt that they have run into crisis one after another and that, as of today, are not working: the Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Western Mediterranean "Five plus Five Group", the MEPP and the MENA Economic Summits (which were rather strictly linked to the MEPP).

As already pointed out, between the two actually-working institutions there is an ancillary relationship: the Mediterranean Forum being a kind of club bringing together European and non-European members of the EMP sharing a Mediterranean location. The Forum is hardly operating any project of its own. It is a group trading political and security points of view relating to the EMP agenda. It was promoted by Egypt at a time this country was afraid of being cut off by an apparently emerging privileged relationship between the EU and the Maghreb countries. Subsequently, the EU initiated the EMP and the Forum became obsolete. Still, the members decided to retain this kind of regional Mediterranean circle as a kind of political signal to the wider inter-regional EMP circle. In this sense the Forum is the only remnant of the idea of a special Mediterranean solidarity involving both European and non-European countries. In its ancillary relationship with the EMP, the Forum may play a helpful role and contribute to reinforce the EMP itself. With all its shortcomings, the EMP remains today the most relevant and important institution dealing with inter-Mediterranean relations.

From what has been said, one first conclusion is that there is a fairly high death-rate among Mediterranean institutions, accompanied by a certain weakness of those concerned by security in a narrower and military sense, a point which will be resumed later on.

The high death-rate seems correlated, however, to a rather high birth-rate. This may mean that there are political, social and economic conditions demanding for an urgent and badly needed co-operation, but also obstacles and conditions of fragmentation that render co-operation fragile and difficult to be kept alive.

A strong holistic character - The two institutions that actually work have both a holistic or multidimensional approach (this approach being only theoretical for the Forum given its non operational character). In fact, they deal with political and security relations as well as economic development, cultural and social relations. They reach out to sectoral fields of co-operation as important as the struggle to internationally organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism.

The same approach used to characterise the "Five plus Five" Group (which definitely belongs to the branch of the species evolution that has brought the EMP about). To some extent, the same was true with the Euro-Arab Dialogue. A holistic approach was also characterising the multilateral track of the MEPP.

The other initiatives have some more specific task. The OSCE Mediterranean activities, the WEU Mediterranean Dialogue and the Dialogue carried out by NATO are concerned by security only, in the narrower sense of military

security or in the broader sense of the possible use of military instruments in a co-operative security perspective.

If the MENA Economic Summits are taken into consideration, they could be regarded as the only initiative, among those considered by this paper, specialising in economic co-operation, thus adopting a non-holistic approach. However, it would be wrong to consider the MENA Economic Summits in isolation. They were, no doubt, linked in an organic way to the MEPP multilateral track. As a matter of fact, an organisation that is at the same time only Mediterranean (in a broad sense) and only economic in its character is hardly there. What is there, but clearly outside the institutional framework considered by this paper, is a set of branches or agendas in the UN and in the International Economic Organisations, like the Department dealing with the MENA in the World Bank or the already quoted "Blue Plan" in the UNEP.

Generally speaking the holistic approach is featuring contemporary regionalism everywhere. For example, it is a prominent aspect in the experiences of regional integration presently taking place in Latin America, like the Mercosur. In inter-Mediterranean relations, however, the holistic approach looks even more inherent than elsewhere to political and economic conditions prevailing in the area, in other words to the "political economy" of the area.

With particular reference to the North-South dimension, two such conditions can be stressed, some of them already pointed out in the above general comments: (a) the political and economic fragmentation of the area and the consequent inter-regional nature of relations in the Mediterranean area, in particular the fact that political regimes, cultural orientations and levels of development are very diverse; (b) armed conflicts in the area are generally terminated (i.e. they are not necessarily solved but can hardly re-enter a stage of open violence) and have shifted from inter-state to intra-state relations. Consequently, in the Mediterranean area security depends less on international than domestic factors, that is less on international disputes and external military threats than social, cultural, economic, ethnic factors. For sure, there are military threats, like the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Still, they are perceived as risks that can translate into inter-state threats only if inter-regional co-operation fails to stabilise local situations, precisely by taking care of social, economic, cultural, ethnic factors triggering proliferation and other such risks.

For this reasons, a holistic, multidimensional approach fits well with Mediterranean institutions of international co-operation or, to say the least, it makes the adoption of "umbrella" institutions or networks more especially convenient.

Relevance of a civilian notion of security - A corollary of what has been just said is the relevance to inter-Mediterranean, in particular Euro-Mediterranean relations of a security notion more linked to social and civilian than military factors; in any case, of a notion of comprehensive rather than narrow security. One consequence of this relevance is that Mediterranean institutions, beside short-term instruments of crisis management and

diplomacy, must be endowed with middle-long term instruments to manage systemic and structural factors. In this sense, at least in principle, the EMP looks like the most fitting institutions to deal with inter-regional co-operation in the Mediterranean area and, if not misguided, it should result more resilient than security-oriented organisations proper.

A strong external presence - The upper section of table 1 shows in a rather clear way that Mediterranean or even Euro-Mediterranean initiatives proper are a minority. Most of the initiatives concerning the area (seven out of ten) bring about a more or less important presence of actors which do not belong to the Mediterranean area in a narrow sense nor to geographically adjoining areas. In the case of European and transatlantic Dialogues (NATO, OSCE, WEU) with the Mediterranean area, the latter is aggregated as a more or less collateral appendix. In the case of the MEPP and the MENA Economic Summits, the presence of external actors is more evident and the Mediterranean (in a broad sense) plays a central role.

The importance of external actors' presence is usual in areas prone to political and economic conflicts and with a global relevance. In these areas, large international "coalitions" use to emerge with the aim of preventing, managing and solving such conflicts. Historically, this is nothing new to the Mediterranean. Today, this tendency remains strong for at least two reasons: (a) as solid as it may be with respect to many cultural and environmental factors, the Mediterranean is not a "centre" politically but a kind of cross-road where even very distant countries may get in touch. For example, the Dialogues of the European and transatlantic institutions (NATO, OSCE, WEU) with the Southern Mediterranean countries bring in actors as distant as the USA and Canada (not to talk about the "Mediterraneanisation" of Northern Europe due to the EMP); (b) furthermore, the "global" role the Mediterranean area used to play in the Cold War era as the Southern Flank of NATO is not over in the geopolitical vision of the United States, though its significance has changed. In fact, according to Brzezinski (2), with Western Europe and the group of states at the far-eastern rim of the Asiatic continent (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, etc.), the Middle Eastern/Mediterranean expanse is the third area the USA have to be able to control to prevent in the Euro-Asiatic continent any change adverse to their power and that of the West.

This situation brings about the conclusion that the initiatives regarding the Mediterranean area can hardly avoid a high level of "internationalisation" or "penetration" from outside. External influences in the Mediterranean are obvious and legitimate.

This conclusion provides an important corollary, i.e. that the Euro-Mediterranean initiatives should be open with respect to external influences and deal with them as opportunities rather than liabilities. In particular, unlike Russia and the Balkans, the Middle Eastern-Mediterranean area triggers strong differences between the EU or Western Europe and the United States. This competition may result detrimental to co-operation and institutionalisation in the area.

Between an open and a closed Mediterranean space - Whether the Mediterranean is regarded as an open or closed space is thus important in the transatlantic perspective. This question is relevant from a cultural and economic point of view rather than security's. As far as security is concerned, there are disagreements between the two sides of the North Atlantic Ocean and even institutional competition, but at the end of the day there is a strong strategic convergence and this convergence is substantially working. Contradictions have a greater impact when it comes to economic interests and, to a lesser extent, cultural ones. In this sense, there is a contest in the Mediterranean between forces that push for the globalisation of local economies and those looking at globalisation with suspicion and strong reluctance, when they are not strongly opposed to it.

There is no doubt that co-operation in the regional dimension of the MEPP has been perceived and promoted by the USA and the EU according to different ways and concepts. In the Regional Economic Development Working Group of the MEPP (REDWG), the EU ("gavel-holder" of the Group) tried to direct MEPP regional co-operation towards a privileged and strong link with the Union itself, that is a Mediterranean inter-regional or Euro-Mediterranean co-operation. To that purpose, the EU tried to introduce in the Group instruments and visions consistent with its aim of privileged inter-regional co-operation. The USA countered this trend, not without success. Since the inception of the REDWG, it tried to encourage a regional co-operation in the MENA areas more linked to globalisation than to EU regionalism and to the World Bank than to Brussels. The EU acted in the REDWG having in mind the implementation of its strategy of Euro-Mediterranean "networking". Washington tried to set up networks going beyond the areas in question. This resulted very clearly in the process of the MENA Economic Summits, in particular with reference to the US proposal of instituting a development bank (Menabank) for the MENA area, that was opposed not only by the Arabs but also by the EU. The US Eizenstat initiative is now developing in the same line of thought.

On the other hand, it would be wrong and simplistic to look at this differences as the opposition between a EU strategy of exclusion versus an American strategy of global opening. The development strategy adopted by the EMP is undoubtedly based on the philosophy of the "Washington consensus". It aims at achieving a situation of "open" regionalism, albeit with some graduality.

As a matter of fact, one can hardly say that there is a transatlantic difference concerning the task of integrating the international economy globally. Rather, it can be said that the EU/EMP regionalist way is trying to protect a sphere of political autonomy, though it sticks fundamentally to the American promotion of globalisation. In sum, the opposition has a political significance. This is confirmed by the fact that one of the most important objective of the EMP for both Arab and European partners is the strengthening of their respective political identity. For the Arabs, the EMP is politically relevant to the extent it creates an alternative to the overwhelming US hegemony in their region. For the European, the EMP may become an important nursery contributing to the

growing up of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and (maybe) CESDP.

The transatlantic entanglement has a great impact on Mediterranean institutions. It gives way to differences, less economic than political, which may undermine the success of these institutions and the attainment of their strategic tasks of development and stabilisation. Co-operation in the transatlantic circle may be an important precondition for the Mediterranean inter-regional institutions to achieve effective co-operation.

Conclusions: the role of international institutions in the Mediterranean

One has to distinguish between what role Mediterranean institutions have played after the end of the Cold War and what role they should be expected to play in next future accounting for the experience accumulated in that period of time. Results so far have been ambivalent and, to a considerable extent, unsatisfactory. Mediterranean institutions need to be better focused and more effective.

Mediterranean institutions were revived at the end of the 1980s with the ambition of taking advantage of the end of the East-West confrontation to transform the area from one of violent conflicts with global implications to one prone to stability and co-operation. With respect to this goal, there emerged three tiers of challenges:

- *the incongruity of the notion of Mediterranean*; the latter has been regarded as a region in itself, whereas it is a composite area with different security agendas and different political and cultural settings; while the notion of "Mediterranean policy" can well describe the policies of a country or an alliance towards the area, it cannot indicate a common policy of different countries as the rationale for common Mediterranean institutions; by clearly distinguishing a Northern and Southern side of the area, the Euro-Mediterranean format has been the first significant rationalisation of the inter-regional policy-approach to be held towards the Mediterranean;
- *the role of distant and external actors*; that the Mediterranean area is "penetrated" can well be a cause of displeasure for the advocates of the Mediterranean as a region, culturally and politically homogeneous, to be de-linked from international capitalism or globalisation; as a matter of fact, in view of the inherent inter-regional structure of the area (which by the way reflects today's shift from the exaltation of a "Mediterranean" identity to that of a plurality of more traditional ethnic-religious identities), one can wonder whether in the event the concept of "penetration" makes sense, for the composite nature of the area entails by definition external presences; in other words, one can hardly escape the strong global component that is embedded in the Mediterranean politics; consequently, the Mediterranean actors, the EU, Turkey, Israel and the Arabs, all allied with the United States, must find the way to make this common alliance a factor of unity and synergy in their policies towards the area rather than looking at Washington as an intruder when coming to the Mediterranean; for sure, it is as justified as necessary that they uphold a margin of political autonomy in the area with respect to Washington; there could be, however, a

functional distinction of issues and respective roles in the area, for example between hard and soft security, cultural and economic co-operation and so forth (3);

- *the military dimension in the notion of Mediterranean security*; the approach to the issue of security in the Mediterranean area has been strongly influenced by history and has much resented of Cold War experiences; it has also been affected by the inherent mix of global and regional or local factors which characterises security in this “frontier” or “penetrated” area; in the last five years the holistic approach of the EU, as applied to the EMP, with its emphasis on non-military factors and stability (rather narrow security) has clearly emerged as the security approach that fits with Mediterranean fragmentation and specific requirements.

These precious experiences are already at work. They have had a considerable impact on the role of Mediterranean institutions and contributed to reshape the latter by ensuring interlocking rather than interlocking institutions. If these experiences and changes are taken into account, it is possible to set out the main lines of what the role of Mediterranean institutions could be in next future, that is next agenda for increasing co-operation in the area and improving its systemic structure:

- the main focus should be the building of confidence as a precondition for structured political co-operation; confidence in the context of the Mediterranean doesn't correspond to the most familiar CSCE/OSCE notion; confidence in the Mediterranean refers to the necessity of establishing more primordial conditions of cohabitation and co-operation, which are just not there, as precursors to operational and structural measures and policies of arms limitation or disarmament, when they will become possible;

in this perspective, three principal aims should be pursued: (a) the resolution of the Arab- Israeli conflict and the establishment in the Middle East (as distinct from the Mediterranean) of the kind of security co-operation that the ACRS had begun to pursue before it was suspended; the creation of a kind of CSCME (Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Middle East) as a precondition for the establishment of an inter-regional security organisation bringing together the Middle East and Europe (the CSCME and the OSCE?); (b) the implementation of Partnership-Building Measures (PBMs); (c) a successful agenda of economic growth and liberalisation;

- it must be clearly recognised and stipulated that the Mediterranean institutions are not committed to pursue collective security on inter-regional basis, this task remaining strictly in the hands of the UN and the Security Council; it must also be recognised that political conditions prevailing in the area do not allow, as of today, for a consensus on the assignment of collective security tasks to security organisations from regions other than the ones in need of interventions (in other words, a task could be assigned to NATO in relation to the necessity of intervening in Europe, but not in an Arab country); the role of Mediterranean institutions for the time being must be confined to create the premises for the implementation of a full-

fledged co-operative security zone, starting with the application of simple measures of co-operative security, like military seminars, training, etc. directed at modifying the basic conflict culture that prevails today in the basin; this change is a first unavoidable step to begin organising a co-operative security zone proper;

- the establishment of a common human dimension, entailing the common adoption of Copenhagen-like principles should be strongly encouraged, though present conditions are not conducive to an early implementation of this task. Perhaps, the tasks just mentioned in the above have to be first consolidated in order to make it possible to set up a common platform for human rights and democracy.

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