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Editorial

Never before has the issue of Mediterranean security been so relevant. Never before has the transatlantic community found it so difficult to formulate a concerted policy on this area. Instead of coordinating security cooperation in the Mediterranean basin, NATO and the European Union are conducting parallel efforts, to the detriment of all the actors concerned.

In this paper Hélène Prestat, a young graduate in International Relations from the Sorbonne who worked as an intern in Spring 2006 at the NATO Defense College Research Branch, examines the causes of the problem and offers proposals for common courses of action.

After explaining each organization's specific strategic vision of the Mediterranean area, she describes the main aspects of current cooperation mechanisms. For NATO, the Mediterranean is first of all a transit zone where it is essential to monitor the shipment of energy supplies, illegal arms and human trafficking, and prevent the establishment of terrorist networks. This has led to cooperation, chiefly in security measures, based on concrete military programmes. The European Union has a broader vision of security – economic, societal, cultural, political, military – and has made solidarity and neighbourhood the two key concepts of diversified cooperation. Yet neither organization has provided a really credible response to the security needs of the Southern Mediterranean littoral states, and it is generally acknowledged that this is due to political disagreements within the two organizations rather than to the Mediterranean partners' lack of regional integration.

While suggesting ways to overcome these divergences, Hélène Prestat proposes that diversity of approach be regarded as an asset, not a constraint. The fight against terrorism, in particular, is an interesting example of "virtuous cooperation". NATO's contribution in this area essentially is to provide maritime surveillance (Operation Active Endeavour) and military training. The European Union is developing programmes to tackle the political and economic causes of terrorism and has offered to provide cooperation in specific sectors (justice, police, intelligence), while the Southern Mediterranean states have signed bilateral cooperation agreements with the United States, and with NATO and EU member states. The two organizations could therefore capitalize on their reciprocal achievements to develop joint cooperation in this area with the Southern Mediterranean states. All three actors stand to gain from this: NATO would improve its image, the EU would demonstrate its ability to provide security, and the Southern Mediterranean countries, by leaving aside national rivalries and engaging in regional cooperation, would be in a stronger position to make proposals.

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NATO and the European Union and their offers of cooperation in the Mediterranean

Hélène PRESTAT¹

Two competing strategic visions in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean region is of strategic importance to NATO and the European Union on account of its location on the southern flank of Europe, an area that since the end of the Cold War has been identified as a source of multiple risks for Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-Atlantic security.

NATO's vision of the Mediterranean region is modelled on the American strategic concept of the wider Middle East defined in the *Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative* and presented by the Bush administration at the G8 Summit on Sea Island (February 2004). It envisages an East-West axis, based on a perception of the region as a transit zone for the supply of energy from the Arab Peninsula – and, by extension, from the Caucasus, the Black Sea and Central Asia – to western outlets. The Mediterranean basin in the strict geographical sense, though strategically less important, has been developing into a fairly important area of energy resources comprising Algeria,² Mauritania (since February 2006)³, Libya, and the western Sahara⁴. There is growing competition in the area for oil supplies, involving Algeria in particular. A memorandum of understanding between the Sonatrach company and the Russian firm, Gazprom, was discussed during Vladimir Putin's visit to Algiers in March 2006, and that same month a strategic partnership was signed with South Korea⁵.

The basin is also an area for the necessary pre-positioning of forces to ensure power projection to Middle Eastern theatres and the western flank of Central Asia - and beyond, to regional powers such as China, India, Russia and Iran. For the United States, it is essential to protect the State of Israel and at the same time maintain a permanent military presence in line with the strategic concept of pre-emptive war. In NATO's case, the concept of partnership – which is developing into a concept of "flexible" partnerships, to be discussed at the upcoming Riga summit - is diminishing the need for pre-positioned standing forces. Options for action are now moving towards action with "global partners" further and further away from the transatlantic area,⁶ thus reinforcing the strategic importance of Mediterranean partners as regards increased legitimacy for future joint operations.

The global war on terror and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, initiated in 2002 by the Bush administration, is the justification for renewed US and NATO attention to the region, not only as a transit and illegal trafficking area but also, in the absence of rigorous state control of the territory, as a potential safe haven for terrorist networks, as is the case in the western Sahara.⁷

The American perception of the region, based on an East-West axis, seems to be extending to include countries with different political and security problems and different requirements: the *Broader Middle East* corresponds to an area stretching from the Atlantic

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²Chérif Ouzano, "Comment est gérée la manne pétrolière ?", *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, 19 October 2005.

Mireille Duteil, "Algérie, la fièvre capitaliste", *Le Point*, 6 October 2005.

³Daily offshore production at Chinguitti is around 75,000 barrels a day, *PanaPress*, 24 February 2006.

⁴USA, pétrole et Sahara occidental", *Le blog des finances*, 30 October 2005.

⁵Vers une alliance énergétique Moscou-Alger", *Le Figaro*, 6 April 2006.

"L'Algérie et la Corée du Sud signent une déclaration de partenariat stratégique", *Xinhua*, 12 March 2006.

An agreement was also signed recently aiming at strengthening cooperation between Mauritania and China. "Pékin et Nouakchott signent un accord de coopération", *AFP*, 21 May 2006.

⁶Press Conference by Secretary General (Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers) in Sophia, 27 April 2006.

⁷American experts are particularly suspicious of the presence of the *Salifist Group for Preaching and Combat*. Morocco recently voiced concern about the risks of infiltration by other Islamic groups, *Reuters*, 15 May 2006.

shoreline (Mauritania) to the Western borders of Central Asia (Pakistan). NATO elected to make a distinction between the Mediterranean and the Middle East regions with its launch of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004, in response to the fears of the countries of the basin that their Mediterranean identity would be "diluted" into the larger whole. Moreover, the centre of gravity has now shifted from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict towards countries located further to the East that are perceived as unstable and sources of threat - Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran.

The European countries bordering on the Mediterranean see themselves as grouped along on a North-South axis, because of their proximity, historical ties and socio-cultural links with the countries of the southern shore. This configuration also follows the flow lines of migration and trading – both legal and illegal– that frequently are sources of tension. The related security problems are increasingly emphasized by European countries. The North-South links have given rise to a "differentiated" European vision of the Mediterranean region as a whole, divided into sub-regions: the Western Mediterranean – which is the subject of two specific cooperation frameworks;⁸ the Eastern Mediterranean – comprising the Balkan states, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and Egypt; and the Middle East and the countries of the Arab Peninsula. This specific vision informs the EU's special approach, defined in 1995, to its Mediterranean partners of the Barcelona Process. However, the new European Neighbourhood Policy, introduced in the Commission Communication of 11 March 2003,⁹ blurs rather than complements this vision by offering individual cooperation plans on a case by case basis to Southern Mediterranean countries.

Development of NATO's offer to cooperate with the "Broader" Mediterranean

The collapse of the Soviet bloc called into question the Atlantic Alliance's very reason for existence and compelled it to reassess its mission and the extent of its areas of responsibility. NATO has adapted by replacing its Cold War defensive approach with an offensive approach based on power projection outside the transatlantic area to cover a broader range of intervention – peacekeeping, civil defence and humanitarian assistance – necessitating appraisal of its changing role. As a result of its involvement in the global war on terrorism, the Alliance's interest in Mediterranean countries has been increased by instability factors – population growth, energy, economic problems – and the emergence of new threats – terrorism and proliferation. Since it operates more and more frequently in areas far removed from its traditional area of action, NATO has a greater need for partners located in these new theatres of intervention.¹⁰ This has raised the problem of interoperability, which should be resolved through dialogue with its partners. These strategic developments have led to a change in its offers of cooperation with the "broader" Mediterranean.

NATO'S Mediterranean Dialogue

The initial aim of the framework of exchanges on security issues launched in 1994 was to promote NATO among Southern Mediterranean countries, who on the whole were suspicious of it, while implementing concurrent initiatives in the region.¹¹ At the Prague Summit (21 and 22 November 2002), it was stated that the first edition of the Mediterranean Dialogue should develop into a true cooperation framework, consistent with the Alliance's necessary adaptation to the new strategic context and to the emergence of new security imperatives, such as the growing interdependence between the Mediterranean region and transatlantic security. But this hoped for evolution only managed, with some difficulty, to address the issue of more formal structuring of exchanges with the countries of the region.

⁸The 5+5 dialogue and the 5+5 "security and defence" initiative bring together 10 states: France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya.

⁹Entitled "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours".

¹⁰Thus the issue of implementing new "flexible" partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea will be addressed at the next NATO Summit this Autumn in Riga.

¹¹The OSCE's Mediterranean Dialogue and the EU's Barcelona Process date back to 1994 and 1995.

The desire to develop NATO's efforts in the area took on a more concrete form at the Istanbul Summit (28 June 2004), which raised the dialogue to the level of a genuine partnership. It drew inspiration, albeit marginally, from the Partnership for Peace (PfP)¹² and adopted the principles of non-discrimination and self-differentiation – allowing partners the freedom to choose activities according to their needs and priorities. In addition to these customary forms of cooperation, the partnership should encourage interoperability between armed forces with a view to their participating in NATO operations, as well as reform of defence policy, modernization of armed forces, rationalization of expenditure and revitalization of civil-military relations. It emphasizes civil defence and the fight against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.

The cooperation activities proposed under the Mediterranean Dialogue have increased and diversified since its inception, but Southern partners are asking for more and want to increase their participation in NATO activities. At a meeting in Rabat on 6 and 7 April 2006 between the North Atlantic Council and MD countries (26+7), participants took stock of the situation and reflected on the MD's future prospects. The meeting illustrates the relative progress that has been made in proposals in this domain. A decision was also made to study procedures for future participation in Operation Active Endeavour¹³ by Algeria, Israel and Morocco, and the fight against terrorism was identified as the most suitable area for more extensive practical cooperation with Mediterranean partners. The prospect of increased participation in NATO exercises and operations¹⁴ depends first and foremost on the political will of the Allies to meet the expectations of Southern countries. However, it is also subject to the interoperability of forces, which raises a number of problems.¹⁵

On the MD's tenth anniversary (8 and 9 December 2004) an improved offer to Mediterranean partners was made with the start of regular meetings between army chiefs of staff and defence and foreign ministers, and between the North Atlantic Council and the representatives of partner countries, aimed at giving the Dialogue institutional anchorage and greater visibility.¹⁶ These meetings, in the 26+7 format, fulfil one of the Southern partners' requirements by facilitating joint discussions on regional security. But the political dimension of the partnership is still not satisfactory; the Mediterranean countries of the MD lament the absence of a "founding" framework document defining the partnership's political basis and perspectives. They would like multilateral meetings to be the subject of a joint declaration. On the other hand, decisions that meet these expectations have been greatly appreciated, such as the creation of liaison offices at the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers, SHAPE, in Mons. But as long as there is no prospect of participation in planning and decisions, the MD's partnership dimension, and hence its political dimension, will remain marginal.

Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)

In an identical perspective to the *Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative* launched by the Bush Administration in February 2004, NATO has manifested its desire to integrate the Middle Eastern countries into the MD. In response to the concerns of Mediterranean partners, a new offer of bilateral cooperation distinct from the MD was proposed to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states at the Istanbul Summit (28 June 2004). It will be open to all the countries in the region wishing to participate. This proposal

¹²Although the MD also has the objective of stabilizing Europe's flanks, it does not employ its structure or instruments, and it does not aim at integration.

¹³ Operation to protect shipping lanes and prevent illegal trafficking in the Western Mediterranean (launched in 2001).

¹⁴Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have been engaged in NATO-led peacekeeping operations in the Balkans: Jordan and Morocco have taken part in SFOR, and all three have taken part in KFOR.

¹⁵A case in point is the implementation of the Agreement on the Status of Forces, designed to encourage participation by MD countries in the NATO/PfP exercises open to them.

¹⁶The first meeting of Defence Ministers in the 26+7 format took place in Taormina (Sicily) on 10 February 2006, and a meeting of the North Atlantic Council with MD countries (representatives of 26 NATO countries and representatives of +7 MD countries) took place for the first time in a Mediterranean partner country, at Rabat, on 6-7 April 2006.

comes at a time when NATO, through its partnerships, is becoming an organization with a more global reach. It recognizes the Gulf region's strategic importance – linked to its oil reserves and the fact that it is a pre-positioning area between the Eastern Mediterranean basin and the Afghan and Iraqi theatres - as well as its increasing instability.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative proposes identical activities to those of the MD and also emphasizes border security - to monitor illegal transit and trafficking - and territorial control. The purpose of the meetings inaugurated recently was to define its institutional structure and the means to implement it¹⁷; the ICI countries that are not NATO members will be involved in the work of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Group, which is tasked to define procedures for listing activities to be proposed, and to supervise their implementation. The ICI seems to have been quite warmly received by the GCC states, who have shown interest in cooperating in border monitoring and security to fight terrorism. The fact that the initiative is also seen by governments as a means to diversify sources of influence and protection in the region is an indication that the Alliance is not chiefly perceived as the "military arm of the United States" but also as a means to reduce dependence on the US for security in an unstable region.

Through this other cooperation forum, NATO can put forward its ability as a regional actor to make a political contribution to regional issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process under the general terms of the agreement between the two parties and a UN mandate. Although the Secretary General has mentioned this possibility, he has stated that NATO's current task is to lend political support to the efforts of the Quartet.¹⁸ Some analysts also foresee the eventual integration of Iraq, the Yemen and Iran in the ICI as a guarantee of regional stability. In the shorter term, a report by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly envisages that it could be a diplomatic platform to coordinate the Allies' actions with regard to Iran, without going beyond its sole function as a consultative forum¹⁹. NATO's future role in the region deserves to be defined more precisely, because a number of suggestions for its subsequent political role in the region are under discussion, while the Alliance representatives have repeatedly stressed that the Alliance does not intend to operate outside its current area of responsibility, since NATO does not have a Middle East policy, though it does have a set of proposals for practical cooperation with the countries in the region.

- The military cooperation activities proposed by NATO are tailored to the requirements of its Mediterranean partners, such as modernization of armed forces for MD partners and territorial control for ICI partners. The Alliance is also perceived as a complementary umbrella to the US, offering forms of cooperation that are less constraining and less destabilizing. In this regard, it will have to deal with the strong and growing expectations of its Southern partners.
- Although governments now have a more positive perception of the Alliance, their populations still have a negative view of it. Public diplomacy efforts so far have not managed to change NATO's negative image as a tool of American policy.
- NATO must therefore continue to differentiate its policy from the short term policy of the United States in the region, which is now showing its limitations.²⁰ It is important for the Alliance to emphasize the distinction between the Mediterranean and the Middle East by further adaptation of initiatives to their sub-regional specificities, and to implement a long term strategy of co-ownership with its Southern Mediterranean partners.
- In the framework of the MD, NATO must deliver the partnership that Mediterranean countries are demanding. It has everything to gain in seeing them emerge as genuine partners with whom joint operations can be conducted, thus reaping benefits in terms of costs, but above all in terms of legitimacy.

¹⁷A conference attended by NATO senior officials, representatives of civil society and Gulf State leaders was held in Qatar on 1 December 2005.

¹⁸Speech by the NATO Secretary General on 24 February 2004 during his visit to Israel.

¹⁹"NATO and Persian Gulf Security" Annual Meeting 2005, NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

²⁰ Particularly the issue of democratization of Arab regimes and the current dilemma of superficial changes that preserve the political status quo, and the establishment of a dialogue with democratically elected "moderate" Islamic parties.

Change in the EU offer to Mediterranean partners

The Barcelona Process

The Barcelona Process (BP), defined by the Barcelona Declaration on 28 November 1995, establishes a new frame of reference for Euro-Mediterranean relations, underpinned by the fundamental principles reflecting Europe's vision at that time of the problems in the area. It provides for a multilateral partnership, based on equality and dialogue between its participants, and aims to close the various gaps – economic, social and democratic – between the Northern and Southern shores by encouraging a convergence of views, in accordance with the principle of joint decision making. In retrospect, the BP's ten years have been a disappointment both to Mediterranean and to European countries, as they have not fulfilled the hopes raised by the partnership. The results of the Political and Security Chapter have been all the more unsatisfactory, when compared with progress made in the Economic and Financial Chapter, because the issues dealt with and regional political tensions have led to frequent stalling of implementation of the project.

The Valencia Conference (22-23 April 2002) did however confirm the partners' will to reinforce the BP's political dimension and embarked on new initiatives to revitalize the Political and Security Chapter: the launch of the "New Neighbours Initiative" by the European Commission as the premise for the current EU Neighbourhood Policy; the introduction of measures aimed at good governance and democratization in the region; the development of a programme of cooperation in the Justice and Internal Affairs Chapter. The will to consolidate this progress, to go beyond it, and to make up for the scarcity of actions proposed to Mediterranean partners led to high expectations with regard to the decisions to be taken at the anniversary summit in Barcelona in November 2005. The failure of this summit generated malaise by highlighting the differences between Northern and Southern partners' perceptions of Mediterranean security. The monopoly of the political agenda by the issue of the democratization of Southern regimes and the problem of North-South migrations, based on a security vision of the problems in the region, was strongly criticized by the Southern countries.²¹ The introduction of a conditionality mechanism linking European aid to advances in democratic reforms in Mediterranean regimes was also criticized as being contrary to the partnership principle. European policy, which seemed to be pursuing the objective of imposing democracy on Arab regimes, despite the European Union's disapproval of this objective, was therefore perceived as contradictory. European immigration policies, which are increasingly restrictive, are also a cause of concern among Southern partners, and they decredibilize European intentions with regard to the Mediterranean region.

Mediterranean partners also complain about the "illusion of partnership", arguing that the BP only reflects the European vision of security in the Mediterranean and its perception that the South is a source of threat. Their disappointment is all the more bitter because the BP had raised such high hopes. Yet despite everything they believe it to be the best framework for stabilizing and developing the region. Notwithstanding this lack of enthusiasm, the European Union is injecting new vigour into its Euro-Mediterranean approach by implementing a new cooperation framework that will revitalize the BP's Political and Security chapter.

²¹ Some heads of state, such as the Egyptian and Tunisian presidents, the Moroccan and Jordanian kings and the Israeli prime minister, showed their disapproval of the agenda for the meeting by boycotting the summit.

The European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) on Mediterranean countries, launched by the European Commission Communication of 11 March 2003²², provides a framework for the region that initially targets the neighbouring Eastern countries as potential members.

Conceived and directed essentially by the European Commission, the ENP establishes bilateral cooperation with each of the partner countries, based on the principle of differentiation and case by case implementation of plans. The objective is to rationalize cooperation with the Southern partners by introducing conditionality clauses linking aid to economic and democratic reforms. While the ENP has been presented to Mediterranean partner countries as complementary to the BP, offering a different approach without challenging it, the partner countries have responded to this new initiative with a host of questions. Initially, the diversification of European offers created some confusion, but what worries them most is the principle of the conditionality of aid and their "floating" status as partners who would benefit from the greatest possible integration into the European Union but are kept hovering on the brink of membership. The new initiative also questions the founding principles of the Euromed Partnership: although a comprehensive approach is maintained to problems in the area, the ENP is opposed to the principles of multilateralism and equality between partners – the status of "privileged partner" is envisaged – with a view to overcoming what has been identified as the main obstacle to moving forward with the BP.²³ Lastly, the European Commission runs the risk of giving priority to economic mechanisms, according to its area of competence, to the detriment of the specificity of the Politics and Security Chapter. Thus, the managerial method of benchmarking that has been adopted seems at first sight to be better suited to monitoring economic reforms than reforms aimed at good governance.²⁴

The European Union has opted for a more pragmatic, short term approach to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The ENP has also aroused some scepticism among the Southern partners, who question both European strategy towards them and the future of the BP. However, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Tunisia have already adopted an action plan, while Lebanon, Egypt and Algeria should soon be signing up. But some partners, like Tunisia, might be tempted to redirect their relations with the European Union towards other frameworks for dialogue specifically for the Mediterranean, such as the Political and Security Initiative in the 5+5 format.

- The lukewarm response to the BP's "Political and Security" Chapter does not mean that Mediterranean countries are rejecting it. On the contrary, they complain that the partnership is being distorted and conflicts with the original plan that they signed and still consider important.
- The European Union's proposed solution is a short term, pragmatic approach. It does not solve the European security drift and North-South tension. By the very nature of its principles, the BP remains the most suitable forum for healing North-South divisions in the long term and dispelling this tension. Although the ENP aims to revitalize it, it could also weaken it by competing with it.
- As a political organization, the European Union has multiple instruments and competences that enable it to diversify its cooperation with Mediterranean countries in the "Political and Security" field – the BP, the ENP, the Mediterranean dimension of the ESDP.²⁵ However, this range of fields of action, which is a definite advantage,

²²Entitled "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours".

²³In the framework of the BP, the requirement for consensus among partners is a powerful constraint that slows down the decision making process and to some extent explains the scant progress of the "Politics and Security" chapter.

²⁴This method has been tested among Eastern candidate countries, but it must not be forgotten that the prospect of membership has also acted as a powerful constraint.

²⁵The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) incorporates a Mediterranean dimension, defined at the European Council meeting in Feira (19-20 June 2000) in its "Common Strategy on the Mediterranean region".

is not being sufficiently exploited. Two options emerge for the BP: (re)establish a partnership in accordance with the plan originally endorsed by the Mediterranean countries in 1995 and increase proposals for activities in the "Political and Security" field.

- Mediterranean partners must realize that the lack of a common project for regional security means that they inevitably react to any proposals made. Their viewpoints therefore receive less attention than they would if they were acting together as a driving force behind initiatives – as seems to be happening with the 5+5 "Security and Defence" initiative.

Diversity of approaches to Mediterranean security: an asset to be exploited

There is no common definition of Mediterranean security, given the different security-related perceptions in the region. It is revealing that reference is made not to a single Mediterranean security system but to Mediterranean security systems, which vary according to the cooperation frameworks and the actors, both Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean, in the region. These distinct approaches do however share common objectives, and the absence of a unified vision of security in the Mediterranean is not necessarily negative. The range of expertise available can be a genuine opportunity for relevant action linking different capabilities and approaches in order to handle security issues in the region more effectively.

The European Union takes a comprehensive approach to Mediterranean security by acting in all security-related areas through the BP and the ENP. Although NATO, through the MD and the ICI, has been developing a political dimension in its relations with the countries of the "broader" Mediterranean since 2004, the NATO Secretary General has repeatedly stated that NATO's main sphere of action is in practical security cooperation.²⁶ This fundamental difference is explained by the nature of the two regional organizations and the means at their disposal. The European principles of equality among partners and joint decision making are very attractive to the Southern countries, particularly as regards politics and security, and therefore it is worrying that they are being questioned. NATO's offer is regarded as more appealing in a strictly military sphere because of the catalogue of activities proposed as well as the expertise that is being provided to the armed forces of Southern countries. But this one asset has its limits, since military cooperation is being offered to a region where requirements are still primarily non-military.

And so there is a positive complementarity between the assets of the two organizations that it would be very useful to explore as an essential prerequisite for effective cooperation to attain the common objectives of pacifying and stabilizing the Mediterranean region. An example of this is the current virtuous cooperation already taking place in the fight against terrorism: the European Union is tackling its multiple sources, and NATO is planning the coordination and training of Southern partners' forces. But this de facto cooperation is simply not enough, and enhanced or institutionalized NATO-EU cooperation cannot be envisaged unless it is politically necessary. The cooperation being developed in the Mediterranean area must retain the specificities of each approach, so that the different types of expertise and competency can be combined in specific areas of activity where they can bring true added value. The fight against terrorism seems, therefore, to be a pertinent area for enhanced NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean, given the requirement for both "hard power" and "soft power".

At the moment this political choice does not appear to be envisaged for the Mediterranean region, despite the positive debate in NATO on enhanced cooperation with the European Union. The European partners want to keep a clear distinction between their offers and those of NATO. The fact that NATO is often perceived as a United States agency could delegitimize their efforts in the eyes of Arab countries, whose generally positive view of the European Union is one of the EU's most valuable assets. The policies pursued by the EU and NATO continue to compete with one another, even though institutional modalities have been

²⁶Speech by the Secretary General on the occasion of the first visit by a NATO SG to Algiers on 25 November 2004.

adopted to facilitate cooperation, such as the pooling of their resources under the "Berlin-Plus" agreements signed on 17 March 2003. But fear of seeing their cooperation frameworks taken over by the other organization seem to be making them somewhat reluctant to implement genuine cooperation in the Mediterranean.

With regard to NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean, the Southern partners also need to find their place and define their position. The lack of consensus on the definition of regional security poses a problem, as they believe that it is subordinate to interests that do not always reflect their own. The Mediterranean countries do however share the same perceptions of their security needs and concerns: the fight in their own countries against fundamentalist groups who could resort to violence to overthrow the existing political order and set up an Islamic regime; the resolution of regional conflicts; but above all, the need to close the economic and social gaps that are fuelling discontent among the population. Unless this problem is addressed, regional stabilization cannot be envisaged.

Accordingly, within a joint NATO-EU cooperation framework, it is essential for Mediterranean countries to reach an agreement on their own definition of Mediterranean security. By acting as a driving force behind initiatives, they will have a genuine partnership status, which ultimately is the most appropriate way to revitalize the cooperation mechanisms in place in the region and attain their goals. By acting as a driving force for proposals, they will have more influence on the decision making process, and consequently more attention will be paid to their requirements and their approach to addressing the problems that they have identified. They will also be able to act as a driving force to encourage the EU and NATO to cooperate in specific projects where joint action would be more effective than fragmented, competitive actions.