

The NATO Mediterranean Dialogue at a crossroads

by Pierre Razoux¹

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Research Paper

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Only brief reference² was made to the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) in the statement issued by the Alliance Heads of State and Government who participated in the Bucharest Summit recently, and yet the partnership will be celebrating its fifteenth anniversary next year. For some, this apparently low-key mention is a tribute to the wide acceptance of the Dialogue and its progress over recent years. They point out that, after two summits devoted to substantial development of Mediterranean issues, it was only to be expected that on this occasion the Allies would concentrate on problems considered more urgent. Others, however, are astonished to see this symbolic partnership, embodying the hopes of southern Mediterranean countries, relegated to the background at a time when steadily worsening destabilizing factors threaten the countries of this region, whose strategic interest to the Atlantic Alliance is compellingly borne out day by day. For many observers, the partnership is losing momentum and is struggling to address the other political initiatives that are proliferating in the Mediterranean area.

Without tracing the history of the Mediterranean Dialogue's gradual evolution, we need to make a dispassionate assessment of the situation, identify the factors that are holding back its expansion, and suggest ways to approach the issue that will help clear up some of the ambiguities and pave the way to stronger, more effective cooperation between the two sides of the Mediterranean.

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² Paragraph 33 of the Bucharest Summit Declaration issued by the NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008..

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Positive achievements

Since its inception in 1994 and its transformation into a full partnership at the summit meeting of Alliance Heads of State in Istanbul in 2004³, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has by and large fulfilled its chief objectives. It has been instrumental in reinforcing security and stability in the Mediterranean. It has built political bridges from one shore to the other⁴. It has deepened mutual understanding between NATO member countries and their Mediterranean partners, as demonstrated by the many joint seminars aimed at boosting synergies between both sides of the Mediterranean and by the growing number of participants from Mediterranean Dialogue countries. This enhanced understanding of mutual concerns and regional specificities has facilitated both political and operational dialogue in this ambitious partnership. The partnership has proved attractive enough for two countries of pivotal importance to regional stability and security, Jordan and Algeria, which were not among the original members, to decide to join⁵. Since then, two countries (Israel and Egypt) have set up individual cooperation plans with NATO, testifying to their determination to strengthen links with the Atlantic Alliance. But the Mediterranean Dialogue's greatest merit has been its creation of a framework that has brought the most unlikely interlocutors around the same table to discuss matters that were long considered taboo.

In the political arena, the number of high level meetings has risen these last years. The NATO Secretary General has visited all the Mediterranean Dialogue countries. The last meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of Mediterranean Dialogue member countries, held in Brussels in December 2007, was particularly productive. Participants agreed to give greater emphasis to the partnership's political dimension and straightforwardly confronted the Middle East peace process and their potential involvement in the process initiated at the Annapolis Conference.

In practical terms, cooperation has increased tenfold in ten years. The number of joint activities has risen from sixty in 1997 to over 600 in 2007. These activities now cover 27 distinct areas ranging from ordinary military contact to exchange of information on maritime security and antiterrorism, access to educational programmes

provided by Alliance institutions, and finally to joint crisis management exercises. In operational terms, cooperation has taken the form of participation by Moroccan, Jordanian and Egyptian contingents in specific stabilization operations conducted by NATO in the Balkans and Afghanistan. It has resulted in a programme to clear Jordan's border with Israel of the mines that had accumulated there over several decades⁶. Cooperation has also resulted in the participation of an increasing number of Partner countries in Operation Active Endeavour, launched by the Alliance immediately after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, in order to monitor maritime and air traffic in the Mediterranean as part of the international campaign against terrorism⁷. During this operation, physical checks have been conducted on over a hundred suspicious ships and several terrorist attacks have been foiled. This has helped to increase exchanges of information and enhance interoperability between monitoring forces on both sides of the Mediterranean. In the words of Vice-Admiral Roberto Cesaretti: "The experience that NATO has acquired in Active Endeavour has given the Alliance unparalleled expertise in this field."⁸. This, then, sums up the positive side.

Very real obstacles

On the negative side, there are a number of factors that combine to slow down reinforcement of the Mediterranean Dialogue. First of all, the many political initiatives instituting concurrent cooperation mechanisms, such as the Barcelona process established by the European Union in 1993 (which in 1995 set up its own security exchange mechanism), the OSCE Mediterranean contact group founded in 1995, the "5+5" security and defence initiative set up in 2000, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative launched in 2004 by NATO and aimed at the broader Middle East, or the Mediterranean Union project, which should come into being on July 2008 when France takes over the presidency of the European Union. This is without taking into account the initiatives of regional organizations such as the African Union, the Arab League or the Arab Maghreb Union. The various partnerships of Mediterranean states all have different contents and formats, which does not facilitate coordination, as can be seen from the table below.

³ 28 and 29 June 2004.

⁴ Nicola de Santis, "Opening to the Mediterranean and broader Middle East", *NATO Review*, Autumn 2004.

⁵ NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue originally consisted of Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel. Jordan joined in 1995, followed by Algeria in 2000.

⁶ This cooperation programme was formalized on 3 December 2007.

⁷ Operation Active Endeavour, initially confined to the eastern Mediterranean, was expanded to the whole of the Mediterranean on 16 March 2004. See the article by Rachid El Houdaïgui, "L'opération Active Endeavour et son impact sur le Dialogue méditerranéen de l'OTAN", *NDC Occasional Paper*, No. 22, NATO Defense College, June 2007.

⁸ Vice Admiral Roberto Cesaretti, "Combating terrorism in the Mediterranean", *NATO Review*, Autumn 2005.

	MD (NATO)	Barcelona/Euromed (EU)	GCM (OSCE)	5+5 Initiative
Mauritania	x	x		x
Algeria	x	x	x	x
Morocco	x	x	x	x
Tunisia	x	x	x	x
Libya		o		x
Egypt	x	x	x	
Jordan	x	x	x	
Israel	x	x	x	
Lebanon		x		
Syria		x		
Malta		x		x
Cyprus		x		

x = member / o = observer

The wealth of initiatives is perplexing for partner states (particularly the North African states who are involved in all the partnerships), even if some of them have no compunction about exploiting the attendant bureaucratic rivalry to push ahead their own agendas.

Within the Alliance itself, diverging views of the Mediterranean space act as powerful brakes on the definition of a common policy for harmonizing national agendas⁹. Some Allies see the Mediterranean mainly as a West-East transit route for exporting troops and manufactured products in one direction and importing energy resources from the other. This utilitarian, globalist approach clashes with the approach favoured by other Allies, who view the Mediterranean in the context of North-South cooperation based on economic (labour, commercial openings) and security (illegal immigration) interdependence. These two different visions nevertheless converge on maritime security issues and the campaign against terrorism. On the other hand, they eclipse the socio-cultural dimension, which makes it difficult for the new Allies from central and Eastern Europe, who have always had very few links with the region, to deepen their understanding of the Mediterranean area.

The pursuit of concurrent bilateral agendas with certain key countries in the Mediterranean is another undeniable obstacle. Energy transactions, together with arms sales and proposals for civil nuclear cooperation, stimulate rivalry among certain Allies who are very present in the region.

It is not only the northern Mediterranean littoral that is hindering enhanced cooperation. The Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to poison relations on its southern shore, multiplying prejudices and mutual misperceptions and preventing the development of calm, positive dialogue. We must not deceive ourselves: this is still a pivotal conflict, and as long as it drags on it will influence the collective imagination and the Arab world's perception of the West. Similarly, the persistence of regional differences fuels rivalry in the southern Mediterranean, whether this concerns the Western Sahara issue¹⁰, the Morocco-Algeria border dispute, or the crises that are developing in neighbouring African countries (such as Sudan and Chad) and jeopardizing stability throughout the region. In this regard, although the Cyprus question does not directly concern any of the Mediterranean Dialogue partner countries, it unquestionably has an impact on the Dialogue because of its security implications and the fact that two Alliance members are at variance with each other as a result of conflict between local factions. This damages the credibility of the Organization and does nothing to improve NATO's image in the region. This, most definitely, is the heart of the matter. Notwithstanding the enthusiastic statements issued during official visits by NATO delegations, there are voices from the field, in academia, the press and civil society, which all bear witness to NATO's negative image in the Arab world. You only have to visit these countries and leave the official framework to realize this. This negative image explains the Partners' lukewarm interest in cooperation. As underlined by a senior official in charge of cooperation: "NATO supply" has consistently been greater than 'NATO demand' in most Mediterranean Dialogue countries"¹¹.

There is one example that illustrates the gap between official discourse and public perception. Visits from high ranking Alliance delegations are always warmly received by heads of state and government of Partner countries. The visit is usually discreetly reported in the official press, but is not often widely relayed to the public, who tend to be critical of their country's links with NATO. The NATO image is damaged even further by the fact that a large section of Arab public opinion perceives the Alliance as the "military arm of US policy in the Mediterranean". NATO'S image is also adversely affected by the US military presence in Iraq and US indulgence towards Israeli policy. *Hard security* arguments¹², therefore, fail to seduce Arab countries. As some academics empha-

⁹ Hélène Prestat, "NATO and the European Union and their offers of cooperation in the Mediterranean", *Research Paper*, No. 28, NATO Defense College, September 2006.

¹⁰ Laurence Ammour, "The frozen conflict in Western Sahara: who benefits?", *Research Paper*, No. 30, NATO Defense College, November 2006.

¹¹ Alberto Bin, "Enhancing NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue", *NATO Review*, Spring 2003.

¹² Kassim Bouhou, "L'OTAN et le monde arabe : peur, dialogue et partenariat", *Politique Etrangère*, No. 1-2008, IFRI, March 2008.

size, "Until NATO is able to overcome the negative image it has in the Middle East, the Alliance has little prospect of ever playing a constructive role in the region". This is despite NATO's indubitable efforts to assist the Muslim populations in Kosovo and Afghanistan¹³. If NATO does not manage to reverse the tendency, the "double standards" syndrome will have a free rein, accelerating the decoupling of southern Mediterranean countries and the West. The most serious risk, therefore, would be of these disappointed countries turning their backs on the West, and consequently of their respective publics paying more attention to extremist discourse.

Paradoxically, the Israeli perception of the Mediterranean Dialogue is also very critical, as several academics have stressed¹⁴, even though Israel is known to be doing everything possible to move closer to NATO. The partnership does not receive enough publicity in the West. It is significant that none of the main British and US think tanks has published a feature article on this subject over the last few years. The reference document is still the RAND Corporation report published in 2000¹⁵. RUSI is the only institute to have organized a seminar on the issue, on 11 and 12 September 2006.

Unanswered questions

To revitalize the Mediterranean Dialogue, NATO and Partner countries must reflect together on what could be the appropriate responses to a number of sensitive but nonetheless essential issues.

- **How can we increase cooperation and synergies with the other actors engaged in the Mediterranean?**

Increased cooperation with the UN is the first priority. In addition to the growing interaction between military and civilian actors in operational theatres (notably humanitarian agencies), it is important for NATO to coordinate its actions with the UN more closely, because the Allies and the Mediterranean Dialogue countries that are likely to take part in NATO's future stabilization operations in the Mediterranean from now on expect these operations to be systematically based on UN Security Council resolutions¹⁶. To achieve this, it might be advisable to reinforce contact between the experts and officers dealing with both organizations, in order to finalize the two documents envisaging practical procedures for cooperation which have been lying

in UN desk drawers since September 2005: the draft joint statement by the Secretaries General of the two organizations and the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Enhanced cooperation with the European Union is indispensable. More active cooperation between NATO and the EU would lead to increased synergies and a better return on investments, thus avoiding pointless duplication and counterproductive rivalry. A refusal by the two organizations to cooperate together does however entail risks. The Mediterranean Dialogue and Barcelona Process member countries do not understand the rivalry between NATO and the EU and are hoping for the offers of cooperation proposed to them to be coordinated. They interpret the current absence of any such coordination as evidence of European weakness and a sign of American hegemony. It is clear to them that the lack of a three-sided dialogue with NATO and the EU can only lead to loss of momentum by the partnerships and loss of prestige by both organizations¹⁷.

Maintaining rivalry between them would be all the more anachronistic, and indeed could be disastrous, given the emergence of two new actors, Russia and China, who are bent on playing an important role in the region and whose interests and values may not necessarily be those of Arab and Western countries. Cooperation between the two organizations would be particularly beneficial since North Africa and the Middle East regard the EU as an honest broker, and therefore better able to act as a vehicle for common Western values.

In order to act together successfully in the region, NATO and the EU must agree on a "common vision for the Mediterranean" enabling them to coordinate their efforts more effectively and identify possible areas of cooperation. To achieve this, both organizations must abandon stereotyped views; they must try to understand the other side without forcing preconceived models on it; they must think "regionally", not "globally", while maintaining their specificities and relevant areas of expertise. It would probably be better not to seek to define rigid task sharing, and instead focus on creating a "win-win" partnership which can serve as an example elsewhere. They must also, as an urgent priority, institute more frequent reciprocal contacts, to learn more about each other and at the same time decide on common fields of action.

In the opinion of the parties concerned, one thing is sure: cooperation between NATO and the EU, particularly in the

¹³ See Mustafa Alani, "Arab perspectives on NATO", *NATO Review*, Winter 2005.

¹⁴ Ilan Greilsammer, "Divergences entre Israël et les pays européens de l'OTAN sur la sécurité durable de l'Etat d'Israël", *NDC Occasional Paper* No.20, NATO Defense College, January 2007; Martin Van Creveld, "NATO, Israel and peace in the Middle East", *NATO Review*, Winter 2005.

¹⁵ Ian Lesser, Stephen Larrabee, Jerrold Green & Michele Zanini, *The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Initiative: Evolution and Next Steps*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica (CA), 2000.

¹⁶ David Yost, "NATO and International Organizations", *NDC Forum Paper* No. 3, NATO Defense College, September 2007, p. 9.

¹⁷ Pierre Razoux, "NATO-EU Cooperation Vital in Mediterranean", *Defense News*, 21 January 2008.

Mediterranean, will need to be pragmatic, fulfil concrete expectations and have a visible impact on public opinion. At the moment the most promising opportunities for cooperation seem to be in the security field: in the fight against terrorism and illegal immigration, for example, or in the reinforcement of maritime security and energy protection. Cooperation with the OSCE would also be useful. During their parallel engagement in the Balkans (notably in Macedonia and Kosovo), NATO and the OSCE acquired valuable expertise in combining NATO's military presence as a deterrent force with the OSCE's networks of political influence. We should not forget that today the OSCE is still the only international organization, apart from the UN, that allows Russians and Westerners to engage in dialogue on an absolutely equal footing and to work together to find solutions acceptable to both parties. Russia's determination to return to the Mediterranean stage argues strongly for such a rapprochement. Cooperation between the two organizations could be all the more fruitful since the OSCE has real expertise in the field of effective implementation of confidence and security building measures and norms aimed at increasing the democratization and transparency of armed forces.¹⁸ This is precisely what the armies of Mediterranean Dialogue countries need most.

More contacts are also needed between the Alliance and two of the most active regional organizations in the Mediterranean: the Arab League and the African Union. The Arab League is an indispensable interlocutor for promoting dialogue in the Arab world, despite its problems (such as funding and internal rivalry), which emerged at the League's recent summit in Damascus on 29 and 30 March this year. It has powerful connections which could be useful not only for political dialogue but also for practical cooperation (particularly in the organization of seminars). Although up to now the Arab League has adopted a very reserved attitude towards NATO, today it appears to be more receptive to a potential rapprochement between the two organizations, thanks in no small measure to diplomatic efforts on the part of Egypt, where the Arab League has its headquarters. Given this favourable context, it would certainly be in the Alliance's interest to make the first step, thus demonstrating its good will and putting the ball decisively in the League's court.

The African Union is a very relevant forum for discussion and exchange, all the more so because the Alliance could well be tempted to become more involved in Africa, as demonstrated by its recent contribution to the African Union-UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur (MINUAD). From July 2005 to December 2007, NATO coordinated airlift in the area of over 31,500 soldiers and civilian police from African countries and provide training for over 250 senior

staff at the Mission Headquarters. However, cooperation between the African Union and NATO can only be achieved by identifying a clear, unequivocal common interest that would add value to the two organizations¹⁹. In this case also, structural rigidity is still a cause of frustration and it is sometimes very difficult to work in a "26+53" type of format!

- **Is the Mediterranean Dialogue format the right one?**

This raises three further questions.

First, should we give priority to a bilateral or a multilateral approach? Partner countries, particularly Mediterranean Dialogue members, tend to prefer the bilateral option, as it underlines their specificities, enables them to assert their own expectations more effectively, and makes them feel that they are fully-fledged actors. From their standpoint, very often the multilateral framework is synonymous with dilution of their influence and sidelining of their agendas. The multilateral format is the only one that allows them to progress towards a constructive dialogue and to promote the mutual confidence and security building measures that the countries of the southern Mediterranean so desperately need. Today, it is undoubtedly necessary to rebalance the Dialogue to allow more latitude for multilateral cooperation, although of course we should still keep bilateral exchanges. This approach can only benefit Partner countries, which, by presenting a united front to their Alliance interlocutors, will inevitably be in a stronger position to defend their arguments.

Secondly, should we give precedence to the political dialogue or to practical cooperation? It has to be said that it is easier to deal with technical questions than to address political issues that fuel frustration and tend to create deadlocks. However, experience teaches that only political dialogue, provided that it is inspired by a spirit of outreach, can help dispel misperceptions, construct a calm relationship and make progress towards more balanced cooperation. Again, we must be bold enough to overcome taboos and tackle the thorniest issues, in both the North-South and the South-South frameworks. To this end, it would be advisable to pursue rebalancing of the Dialogue to ensure that each of its components, one political and the other practical, is given its full importance.

Thirdly, should we encourage a global approach or a sub-regional approach? Two models might provide food for thought on this: on the one hand the Mediterranean Union project, which in principle is inclusive rather than exclusive, although it is very difficult at the moment to appreciate its scope, and on the other the "5+5" defence and security initiative established a few years ago by five states on the northern littoral and five states on the southern littoral of the western Mediterranean. This initiative, predicated on the key concepts of

¹⁸ David Yost, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹ Jean Dufourcq, "Nouvelles responsabilités de l'Union africaine, nouvelles dispositions de l'Alliance atlantique", *Research Paper* No. 27, NATO Defense College, April 2007.

equality and reciprocity, today seem to be completely satisfactory to its members, who have developed concrete projects for practical cooperation in very different areas, including air and maritime surveillance. The member states of the "5+5" initiative thus were able to take part in an exercise to ensure joint monitoring of several thousand kilometres of a reputedly "hostile" aircraft by relaying the necessary technical coordinates from one country to another. Indeed, although the tendency is for security issues to become globalized, we must be realistic and give back due importance to geography and due relevance to sub-regional issues²⁰. The Partner countries themselves, who are quick to point out their differences (particularly between Maghreb and Mashrek countries), seem to be pinning their hopes on this regional approach, which could facilitate the integration of new countries²¹.

- **Is it time to extend the Mediterranean Dialogue to other countries?**

Originally, the partnership created by NATO was open to all the countries bordering on the Mediterranean. Some of them joined, while others chose not to. Today, if we examine the situation from both a geographical and a political angle, it might be advisable to extend the Dialogue to several states, particularly Libya, as suggested by researchers who have a special interest in Mediterranean strategic issues²². From a geographical standpoint, if Libya were to be integrated, then the territories of the partnership's two components, North Africa and the Middle East, could be joined. Libya would thus resume its full role as a bridge between the Maghreb and the Mashrek, and the Allies and Partners as a whole would have solid base of support that would contribute to stabilizing the African continent. Politically, there have been no obstacles to Libya's entry into the Mediterranean Dialogue now that the Country has regained recognition as a member of the international Community. The only obstacle at present to Libya's inclusion would appear to be its leader's determination to distance himself from the Alliance. But this does not rule out the possibility that the Libyan leader, who is known for his unpredictable policy swings, might finally decide to join this partnership. He would then be able him to deal more effectively with the factors threatening the stability of his country, which is confronted with the rising power of international terrorist networks and the crises beleaguering its African neighbourhood from the Sahel and Chad to Darfur. Even if the leader of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya were to persist in his refusal, there is every sign that his potential successors, who are

much more open to the West, would certainly adopt a more conciliatory attitude. In the meantime, NATO and the Mediterranean Dialogue countries should strive to maintain an "open door" policy with regard to Libya and as of now should increase diplomatic and educational measures so that, when the time comes, Libya can be integrated swiftly.

The Dialogue could also be enlarged to include Malta and Cyprus, both of which occupy an important strategic position in the Mediterranean. Their inclusion would have two advantages: it would facilitate NATO-EU cooperation in the region, since the two states are already members of the European Union, and it would bring pressure on Turkey to reassess its current opposition to Cyprus membership, which is impeding any rapprochement between NATO and the EU in the Mediterranean.

For the moment, the issue of enlargement to include Syria, Lebanon and the future Palestinian state is not envisaged. It could, however, be settled once and for all if the states and the various Lebanese and Palestinian factions as a whole made a decisive commitment to the peace process. An agreement of this kind would allow discussions to begin on enlarging the partnership to include these countries, should they so wish.

- **Should NATO and its MD partners be contributing more actively to the resolution of conflicts in the Mediterranean?**

Most MD member states are hoping for such a development. They insist that an active and impartial contribution by NATO to the settlement of the Middle East conflict could only enhance its image and increase its credibility among the countries of the southern Mediterranean littoral. The Israelis on their part are very cautious about this suggestion, for fear that the presence of NATO troops might prevent them from acting as they wish. They point out the risk of the situation slipping out of control as a result of the presence of Arab troops in the area. The positive experience of the FINUL II deployed to the southern Israeli-Lebanese border since late 2006 might however convince them that the presence of Western troops in the area would also have a number of advantages²³.

On its side, the Alliance is very prudent on this subject. The NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, regularly reiterates the three indispensable conditions for NATO engagement in the area²⁴:

²⁰ Laure Borgomano-Loup, *Le Maghreb stratégique – première partie*, "Introduction", *NDC Occasional Paper*, No. 6, NATO Defense College, June 2005.

²¹ Michelle Pace, "The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Common Mediterranean Strategy", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 9, Summer 2004, p. 305.

²² Jean Dufourcq, "Quel voisinage stratégique en Méditerranée?", in *Le Maghreb stratégique – première partie*, *op. cit.* p. 64; Luis Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, Columbia University Press, 2007.

²³ Efrat Elron, "UNIFIL II, Israel, Lebanon, the UN and the International Community: New and renewed partnerships and implications for mission effectiveness", in "Cultural Challenges in Military Operations", *NDC Occasional Paper*, No. 23, NATO Defense College, October 2007.

²⁴ Speech at press conference by Jaap de Hoop Scheffer after the meeting of NATO foreign affairs ministers in Brussels on 9 February 2005 (www.nato.int/docu/speech/2005/s050209a.htm).

- 1 - The existence of a real peace accord between the parties;
- 2 - A UN Security Council mandate for intervention;
- 3 - An official request by the parties for Alliance intervention.

Admittedly, Alliance members are divided on this issue. Some of them, who would like to see NATO playing a more active role in the peace process, underline the advantages of such a posture in diplomatic, strategic, military, and even economic terms. Others, however, are reluctant to accept this, and point out that the Middle East has often been a region of fracture between American and European policies, that an operation of this kind would demand a large number of troops (whereas the Allies are struggling to engage troops in Afghanistan), who would be dangerously exposed to terrorism, and that, in the end, NATO's image itself could suffer, with negative repercussions. Until consensus is reached on this sensitive issue, the Allies could consider alternative solutions envisaging that NATO would not be the sole actor, but would support other international organizations. An Egyptian diplomat has suggested the following interesting option: deployment of an Arab League force commanded by a high profile Arab figure, with a military component coordinated by NATO and a civilian component coordinated by the European Union²⁵.

In addition to participating in the Middle East peace process, the NATO member countries, in close cooperation with their Mediterranean Dialogue partners, could engage more in resolving other disputes that receive less media attention but nonetheless affect security and stability in the Mediterranean area. This is true of the currently frozen Western Sahara conflict, which helps to maintain a climate of suspicion and rivalry in North African countries. The Alliance's involvement, possibly in a sub-regional format, in the resolution of this dispute, which is less complex than the Middle East conflict, might allow it to test out this role, demonstrate its credibility as honest broker, and thus enhance its regional prestige. NATO could also play a part in the resolution of the Cyprus question. This could be easier to achieve after the recent election of the Cypriot Dimitris Christofias, which has made it possible to relaunch constructive negotiations between the two parties.

If it does not become more decisively involved, NATO must at least ensure that it does not contribute to the worsening of regional crises and tensions. On their side, Dialogue

member countries would have to increase their efforts to mitigate their rivalries. Enhanced cooperation also entails the relaunch of the South-South dialogue. This is crucial for the future because, according to a recent EU commission report,²⁶ global warming is a security threat multiplier in regions that are vulnerable to climate change, such as North Africa and the Middle East.

• How can we establish a more balanced partnership?

Mediterranean Dialogue member states often complain of the imbalance in their relationship with NATO. They perceive cooperation as essentially one-track and frequently focused on security issues that highlight the deficiencies in their own systems (particularly in the campaign against illegal immigration, illegal trafficking and terrorism). They argue that the Alliance does not always make enough effort to understand their mentality and their specificities. They would like cooperation proposals to take more account of their needs, which do not necessarily correspond to those of their interlocutors. Paradoxically, the response to their expectations is simple in theory, but difficult to implement. It entails paying more attention to the sociocultural approach, as demonstrated in the conclusions of several international seminars organized at the NATO Defense College²⁷ in Rome (modules introducing participants to Arab civilization could be included in some of the training courses offered by NATO)²⁸. It means extending the field of cooperation (joint management of natural disaster relief in the Mediterranean, and communication and media partnerships)²⁹. It also means helping the Partner countries and the central and eastern European Allies, who play an increasingly important role in the Alliance, to enhance mutual understanding and appreciation. Above all it entails using every possible means to promote the principle of reciprocity, which is the only thing that can convince our Partners of our good will. On this last point, two concrete measures could be taken to demonstrate the Alliance's desire for outreach. On the one hand, sending NATO civilian and military personnel to training centres in Partner countries that have volunteered to organize suitable programmes for courses (given in English or French) lasting from a few days to several weeks. On the other hand, more regular visits to Partner countries by course members in NATO structures.

A recent cooperation initiative meets the need to rebalance the Mediterranean Dialogue. This new NATO Training Course Initiative (NTCI) decided at the Summit of Alliance

²⁵ Heba Negm, "NATO and the Middle East Peace Process: Scenarios of Possibilities and Risks", *Research Paper*, No. 20, NATO Defense College, June 2005.

²⁶ Thomas Ferenczi, "Selon l'UE, le réchauffement climatique menace la sécurité internationale", *Le Monde*, 12 March 2008.

²⁷ Seminars on "Cross-cultural perceptions of security issues in the Mediterranean region" and "Looking to the Future: Common Security Interests and Challenges in the Mediterranean and the Middle East" held in Rome on 7-8 July 2003 and 29-30 November 2004. Reports on them have been published by the NATO Defense College.

²⁸ With this in mind, NATO has already translated into Arabic part of its Internet site and some of its publications.

Heads of State and Government in Riga (28-29 November 2006), coupled with the establishment of a Middle East Faculty and a regional course for MD and ICI members, organized at the NATO Defense College in Rome, offers the opportunity to create an educational tool that truly meets the expectations of partner countries, provided of course that these partners are interested and that well qualified candidates are designated. Again, this should not be a one-way effort. Partner countries could be more involved in the follow up to cooperation. Those who are not already involved should participate in individual cooperation programmes with NATO. These countries could also contribute more actively to NATO stabilization operations, thus helping to reinforce the Alliance's operational culture and at the same time improve the interoperability of their own armed forces. This cooperation is particularly useful since North African and Middle East countries as a rule have no military forces integrated into regional structures, and no rapid reaction forces able to deal with sudden crises in the Mediterranean³⁰. Lastly, their authorities should provide more education initiatives and have the courage to explain the advantages of partnership with NATO to their elites and their publics.

What future for the Mediterranean Dialogue?

In 2001, just a few weeks before the terrorist attacks of 11 September, Michael Rühle made the following prediction in an essay in *NATO Review* on what NATO might be like in 2011: "The rising strategic importance of the southern Mediterranean region will have elevated the Mediterranean Dialogue out of its role as the stepchild of NATO's outreach activities. It will have evolved along similar lines to the Partnership for Peace, with serious military cooperation, notably in the field of crisis management, and a strong focus on non-proliferation."³¹ That prediction has in fact come true, and the

Mediterranean Dialogue, far from being a secondary phenomenon, has since then become one of NATO's flagship cooperation programmes. In the meantime, of course, numerous Partnership for Peace countries have become fully fledged members of the Alliance, enabling NATO to focus its attention on other issues. At the same time, the Mediterranean and the Middle East have returned to the forefront of the international stage.

In the final analysis, the Mediterranean Dialogue's future will clearly depend on NATO's offer, but first and foremost it will depend on the Partners' degree of commitment and determination to eliminate their rivalries. It will also depend on whatever policy choices concerning the Middle East are made by the current US President and his successor, and on the attitude of the European Allies, torn by interests that sometimes conflict. From this point of view, the emergence of new European leaders who want to re-establish a harmonious transatlantic link, such as Angela Merkel in Berlin, Gordon Brown in London, and, more recently, Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris, could augur well for the future³². At a time when American influence in the region is sharply declining, it could enable the Alliance's European pillar to perpetuate in the Mediterranean the values enshrined in the transatlantic link. From now on, then, each country must shoulder its own responsibilities.

Faced with the prospect of an uncertain future, each country must ensure that the Mediterranean Dialogue develops in a way that fulfils mutual interests. To this end, Allies and Partners must ask themselves what they really need: a pragmatic, rebalanced, uninhibited partnership, which has a visible and tangible impact on local public opinion, through the establishment, for example, of a NATO information bureau in key countries. The partnership should also be a forum for a calm, open dialogue that contributes to collective security and stability and enables reciprocal confidence building measures to be put in place by its members.

²⁹ Suggested by Mohamed Kadry Said in his article "Assessing NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue", *NATO Review*, Spring 2004.

³⁰ Khaled Kaddour, "La sécurité au Maghreb à l'horizon 2030: intérêts et défis communs", in "Looking to the Future: Common Security Interests and Challenges in the Mediterranean and the Middle East", *Seminar Report Series*, No. 22, edited by Jean Dufourcq and Laure Borgomano-Loup, NATO Defense College, March 2005.

³¹ Michael Rühle, "Imagining NATO 2011", *NATO Review*, Autumn 2001.

³² Frédéric Bozo, "Alliance atlantique: la fin de l'exception française?", Fondation pour l'innovation politique, February 2008 (Translated as: "France and NATO under Sarkozy: End of the French Exception?" *Working Paper* www.fondapol.org)