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INSTITUTE NOTE

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY (ESDP) AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

(Report of the Seminar for the PSC organised by the EU Italian Presidency and the EU Institute for Security Studies, Brussels, 18 September 2003)

- I. **In the first session, 'ESDP and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – where do we stand?', some general issues were introduced and debated. These issues re-appeared as recurrent themes during the seminar.**
 - What is the purpose of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in security and defence issues? The main goal is to improve understanding between neighbours on sensitive issues. 'Transparency-building' and 'confidence-building' were mentioned as the leitmotifs of the dialogue at the current, preliminary stages. In addition, regional dialogue could contribute to positive developments in the difficult, sometimes conflictive, relationships amongst the Mediterranean partners. Bearing in mind that the dialogue will foster South-South stabilisation as well as North-South rapprochement, the dialogue would eventually enhance European security.
 - What are the perceptions of 'the other' on both sides of the Mediterranean? An academic participant presented three conclusions of a Euromesco survey on Mediterranean perceptions of ESDP, which somewhat challenge common wisdom. First, the Mediterranean partners' elites (except in Algeria and Israel) welcome both ESDP and the creation of a EU force. Second, the fact that it is welcome does not mean that the EU force is credible, for they believe that it will never act autonomously. Third, there is a palpable lack of information on practical details. In order to improve perceptions, it was suggested, the EU should foresee further information activities in the Mediterranean partners.
 - European attitudes towards the equation political change / maintenance of status quo in Mediterranean partners. One of the most debated subjects during the seminar was what the European approach to democratisation should be. Most academic participants underlined the need to support true democratisation, since this was the only way to attain stability and predictable international behaviour in the medium term.

Admittedly, political change might introduce radical regimes for some time, but even those regimes will have no other option but to negotiate with the Europeans. Therefore, the EU and its member states should engage in a wider dialogue with the civil society, including all political forces. For their part, most diplomats pointed out the difficulties and potential dangers of political transitions: political change in Mediterranean partners might lead to moderate Islamist governments but it might also lead to extremist regimes, such as the Taliban.

- European attitudes towards terrorism and other threats. Two approaches to this issue were visible: some participants favoured a more assertive approach, while others insisted on dialogue and cooperation. On the one hand, not only terrorism, but also illegal immigration, other illegal traffics and even the demographic and economic trends in the Mediterranean partners could be seen as threats to the EU. To tackle those risks and threats, the EU should employ mainly constabulary means and should work with governments in the partner countries to help them control the threats at their origin. On the other hand, a more restrictive view of the threats propounds a different way of tackling them. According to this view, the EU and its member states should rather focus on political dialogue and economic development. It was noted that the Javier Solana's draft EU security strategy had tried to find a balance between these two approaches.
- Finally, there was a consensus that the dialogue should be run and supervised by the PSC and the ESDP bodies, while the EMP bodies should be informed.

II. In the second session, '**Specific fields for cooperation in security and defence matters**', a number of concrete proposals were presented:

- 1) The definition of an annual programme with permanent activities, such as:
 - Bi-annual multilateral meetings between the PSC and the Mediterranean partners
 - Seminars organised by Ministries of Defence
 - Annual visit to Brussels and briefings for politico-military authorities from the Mediterranean partners' capitals.
- 2) Dialogue and cooperation in peace-keeping issues, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 3) Sub-regional dialogues, such as, for instance, between the EU and the Maghreb countries. The idea of organising a seminar at the EU ISS on this specific issue was put forward.
- 4) Bi-lateral activities (EU-individual Mediterranean partner) could be done on an ad hoc, case by case basis, trying to avoid misunderstandings amongst partner countries.
- 5) Information activities on ESDP issues targeted for the Mediterranean partners' societies.

Without any doubt, it would be convenient to reach some sort of coordination between activities organised by EU members and activities within the new Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in security and defence issues. For the moment, sharing information would be

very useful. Therefore, it was proposed to task the EU Council Secretariat General to prepare a list of activities, open to the public, which have been undertaken in the Euro-Mediterranean security and defence dialogue as well as activities organised and communicated by member states in the same spirit of transparency- and confidence-building.

The relationship between NATO's Mediterranean dialogue and the new EU Mediterranean dialogue on ESDP was also analysed in this session of the seminar. Although there was a minority of participants that found it unnecessary to establish a formal 'division of labour' with NATO in this regard, all participants accepted that both dialogues were complementary and should be pursued simultaneously. Ambassadors at NATO and the EU PSC should work out a (tacit or explicit) agreement to continue to conduct both dialogues. The precedent of relationships with Russia was mentioned: NATO maintain a privileged relationship with Russia, and this has not impeded the EU to start an important dialogue in strategic and defence issues at least since the adoption of the document 'Arrangements for consultation and cooperation with Russia' at the Seville European Council.

III. The third session, '**Prospects after the Iraqi crisis and the stalemate in the Middle East**', started with several pessimistic assessments: the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is stalled, the Road Map seems no longer feasible, American pre-war assumptions have proved wrong in Iraq, and a transatlantic agreement to cooperate in Iraqi reconstruction is out of sight. As a consequence, the discussion in this session was perhaps less constructive than in previous sessions.

While there was an agreement on the need to resolve the Middle East conflict, no consensus could be reached on what exactly this implied for the EU, on the practical measures that should be taken or on the respective roles of the EU and the United States. A participant asked: "what is the EU going to say or propose in the next meeting of the Quartet?" –and he got no response. Another participant called for a more active involvement of the EU, including determined action even if the US continued to abstain, but the majority's point of view was that the EU should act hand in hand with the US.

As far as the overall EU Mediterranean policy is concerned, it was stated that, since the Barcelona Declaration in 1995, the EU has carried out a declaratory policy in the region, which now must change. Given that there are real risks and threats in the region, and taking into account that the United States has adopted a strong policy, the Europeans are obliged to be 'slightly more ambitious'. In our dialogue with Mediterranean partners, we must stress our priorities: the fight against terrorism, homeland defence and migration control. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is an important initiative that must be pursued, and dialogue between the EU and its Mediterranean partners on ESDP and security and defence issues must be started, but the EU should define more clearly a foreign policy for the region.



EUISS SEMINAR FOR THE PSC

ESDP AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

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