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ENHANCING DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EU AND MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS ON SECURITY AND DEFENCE ISSUES IN THE POST-LISBON CONTEXT

Ioannis Ghikas

Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU Political and Security Committee and the Western European Union

Cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Mediterranean Partner countries in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has mainly focused on their possible participation missions and operations in the same CSDP framework. Although this has met with significant success with those countries that have already achieved a high degree of interoperability with member states' forces and civilian personnel, it has not had a significant impact on enhancing cooperation with others.

Furthermore, the Mediterranean Partners' interests in the field of security and defence are not centred on contributing to CSDP actions, but rather on engaging in a wider structured dialogue which deals with all aspects of security in a comprehensive manner, including underlying issues such as development and economic security.

However, efforts to create a structured security dialogue between the EU and the Mediterranean Partners have not made progress, due to the wider political context in the Mediterranean. For the same reasons, the six priority areas of the project-oriented approach adopted for the Union for the Mediterranean do not have a security dimension.

This situation, although understandable, has developed a sense of stagnation and frustration on the part of the Mediterranean Partners, which often perceive the EU as reluctant to engage in serious dialogue and to take their concerns into account.

Given the common security challenges of the Mediterranean region, there is an obvious need to enhance security cooperation between the Mediterranean Partners and the EU, following a new approach, that will both widen and deepen the scope of a comprehensive security dialogue, anchored on a tailor-made, bilateral basis, which will take advantage of the possibilities offered by the post-Lisbon institutional framework.

In particular, the institutional changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, with the creation of the External Action Service, the new reinforced role of the Union Delegations in Mediterranean Partner countries, the

unification of the roles of the High Representative and the Vice President of the Commission, have created a new context which should reinforce the possibilities for continuous, intensive and comprehensive dialogue on security issues, at least on a bilateral basis, with all the Mediterranean Partner countries.

The High Representative, combining her competences as Vice-President of the Commission will be in a much stronger position to engage in a comprehensive security dialogue that will also address underlying causes linked to economic development, trade, environmental protection etc. Furthermore, the External Action Service will be in a position to engage in more coherent and strategic policy formulation and implementation, combining diverse instruments such as the CSDP and the European Neighbourhood Policy, with regards to each individual Mediterranean Partner country and regarding the region as a whole. There will be greater continuity and better implementation of the Union's policies and this should lead to enhanced results and stronger ties with all Mediterranean Partners.

Furthermore, the Union Delegations in Mediterranean Partner countries now have the competence to deal with security and foreign policy issues and concerns and when they are fully staffed with the necessary political, military and police expertise to interact effectively with Mediterranean Partners, will form the backbone of appropriate higher level contacts, which will enable the Union to engage in an effective comprehensive security dialogue.

This should facilitate the development of bilateral, tailor-made cooperation programs with each separate Mediterranean Partner, suited to that partner's specific needs and requirements in the field of security and defence, and focusing on fields where partnership with the EU has a concrete added value. This would serve as a means to further share expertise in fields such as defence reform, counterterrorism, policing, border security, maritime security, combating illegal trafficking and immigration, intelligence sharing etc. It would also familiarise the Mediterranean Partners with the political, institutional and operational CSDP framework and ensure greater interoperability of their civilian security sector and their armed forces with EU member states, thus facilitating their participation in CSDP operations, while also promoting shared values such as respect for human rights, rule of law and democratic principles, gender issues etc.

In the above context, it is of course necessary for this to be a two way dialogue and Mediterranean Partners will need to engage more actively with the EU from their side as well. There is a need for Mediterranean Partner countries to clearly express their views and positions, as well as their expectations from the EU, so that progress can be made. In any case, the post Lisbon context opens new opportunities and we must make the most use of them.