

5th International Seminar on Security and Defence in the Mediterranean

Multi-Dimensional Security

Conclusions.

Security in the Mediterranean in 2006: A multidimensional reflection.
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In 2006, the Mediterranean was, once again, the scenario of armed conflict. The situation in the Palestinian territories, as well as the conflict in Lebanon has shown, once more, that a great deal of work remains to be done before one of the main objectives of the 1995 Barcelona Process can be achieved: that of turning the Mediterranean into an area of peace and security.

Furthermore, in recent years, the Mediterranean has continued to be the setting for some of the greatest economic, political and social disparities on the planet. On a domestic level, these disparities represent a seed of tension and, therefore, of insecurity. Other threats, which can on occasions assume a global scale (such as international terrorism and climate change), are also making their presence felt on the countries that ring the Mediterranean.

2006, the year in which the fifth International Seminar on Security and Defence in the Mediterranean was held, was also marked by regrettable, cyclical outbreaks of violence in different points in the Middle East. The summer of 2006 will be remembered for the military offensive in Lebanon and for the increasingly critical situation in the Palestinian territories, particularly the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, the violence in Iraq continues to cast doubts on the future of the country and on the stability of the region as a whole.

And so, the course of events in the Mediterranean, and especially its eastern basin, is demonstrating once again that the European Security Strategy accurately summarised the challenges that exist to European security and to the stability of the international system as a whole.

Nevertheless, these same events – especially with respect to the situation in Lebanon – have also shown that the European Union, working in collaboration with its Mediterranean partners, has a long road ahead of it in terms of strengthening its foreign and security policies.

In order to tackle new and old threats, the actors involved need to move forward toward a policy of constructive cooperation. Dialogue and political determination are essential ingredients for the task of ensuring progress with the various security cooperation frameworks currently under way in the Mediterranean. From the Barcelona Process to NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, from the 5+5 initiative to the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy, there are many arenas in which this issue is being debated and worked on at present.

However, these efforts do not always reach the attention of the public, and this is why seminars such as the one held regularly in Barcelona by the CIDOB Foundation and the Spanish Ministry of Defence are so important. They make visible the work that is done by different actors, thereby increasing the mutual trust between them, as well as reflecting, on a long-term basis, on what the main priorities are in terms of security in the Mediterranean.

For the 2006 seminar, three subjects were chosen which, in all probability, will continue to head the agenda with respect to cooperation in the Mediterranean: energy, migration flows and governance. These subjects were debated by working groups to which Chatham House rules were applied; that is, none of the comments made during the discussions could be directly attributed or quoted textually. Even so, this does not prevent us from listing, in this section of conclusions, some of the most promising ideas that arose during these discussions.

With respect to energy, the speakers highlighted the fact that interest in energy and security issues increases and diminishes cyclically, adding that since the year 2000, the importance of these topics has increased significantly, to the extent that discussions connected with geopolitics, geo-strategy and energy security are nowadays subjects of great importance. This is owing to several factors, including the rise of "energy nationalism" in some of the producing countries; the importance of fossil fuels at the present time (and even more so in the future) and, finally, the perennial debate for and against the use of nuclear energy. Moreover, it should be pointed out that consumption of fossil fuels has serious environmental implications. Phenomena such as climate change may generate serious security problems on a world scale, and the Mediterranean region would be particularly vulnerable to the social and economic changes that these phenomena could produce both inside and outside the region.

Energy security is an area that depends on multiple factors, such as rising prices, instability in producing regions, attacks on infrastructures and oil tankers, and natural disasters. Furthermore, the alarmism that exists over the exhaustion of reserves means that progress has to be

made on several different fronts, including the increase of energy efficiency (focusing on the aspect of demand), research into developing renewable energies and the increase in spending on “clean” energies.

As we mentioned above, the debate on the use of nuclear energy has been reopened. Different views exist on this issue, particularly those concerning public opinion reaction to the possible danger of nuclear accidents. One of the important advantages of nuclear energy is that it does not produce carbon dioxide or any of the other gases that cause global warming. In addition, stability of supply can be controlled and operating costs can be competitive. As for the disadvantages, the main ones are the high risk to the population in the event of accident or radiation leaks, the proliferation of nuclear technology and materials, and the treatment of radioactive waste.

Several Arab countries in the Mediterranean, including Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Tunisia, are planning to use nuclear energy to generate electricity and desalinate water. Meanwhile, the Iranian nuclear programme has opened an international crisis amid fears that Teheran wants nuclear technology for military ends.

In spite of being the fourth largest world producer of oil, and of possessing the second largest gas reserves (after Russia), Iran is in fact an importer of fuel, partly owing to lack of investment. In addition to this, the country’s crude oil production capacity has fallen in recent times, while domestic demand has increased.

While oil is a global asset, gas depends more on regional markets. In the European Union (EU), imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) are rising. LNG production is also increasing in Mediterranean countries such as Algeria, Libya and Egypt, as well as among other producers. It is a striking fact that Spain is the third most important destination in the world for LNG transport vessels and the main European country in terms of the number of regasification plants. In fact, Spain has five operating plants that absorb over 65 per cent of the volume of liquefied natural gas that arrives in the EU.

As for the European Union’s stance on energy supply policies, disputes and the general crisis regarding this issue (specifically with respect to Russia), there is a lack of necessary consensus to enable the EU to speak with one single voice. In this sense, the EU is also suffering from a lack of ideas in terms of coordinated common action. One vitally important question for the EU is how it can progress in its plans for the diversification of its common sources of supply and transport networks.

Proliferation issues tend to be dealt with in less depth in public debate than energy issues. Even so, in recent times, the nature of the challenge facing the international community has changed, owing to the advent of terrorism and the dangers linked with nuclear proliferation. In this sense, it is of vital importance that the International Atomic Energy Organisation should be strengthened and that more measures for transparency should be created, beyond the existing defence system. The seminar’s discussion group also dealt with the role of NATO in the face of such a challenge. Among other points, it was stressed that

NATO's role in safeguarding energy security is by no means a new one, as reference was made to this point in its Strategic Concept document defined in 1999. Economic interests and energy security are also priority issues in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, given the fact that 65 per cent of the oil and gas consumed in Western Europe arrives by crossing the Mediterranean. One of the responsibilities of the Atlantic Alliance is to analyse the main threats to the energy supply and to provide assistance to Allied countries, including maritime surveillance.

One of the main conclusions the seminar's participants reached was that energy can be a factor not only for conflict, but also for integration. In the same way that steel and coal were key elements in the European integration, perhaps energy and water can become integration elements for the troubled Mediterranean region.

As for the issue of migration flows, the discussion was essentially based on the control of these flows and, therefore, the central importance of borders. One of the most controversial topics was that of how this control could be made compatible with another fundamental priority ? human rights. This subject, currently of great importance given the humanitarian crises in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and along the terrestrial borders of several North African countries, should be given particular emphasis if security is to be defined in terms of human security.

The participants also discussed what the optimum framework for cooperation should be with respect to the subject of migration between EU countries and their Mediterranean partners. The main debate revolves around the need to make the various existing initiatives fit together, and that these initiatives should be coherent with each other. One specific point on which the states of the Euro-Mediterranean region should reflect is whether the multilateral framework that is the Barcelona Process is the most suitable framework for the situation, or whether strictly bilateral cooperation could produce better results.

This consideration of frameworks for regional cooperation leads us to define what the ideal geographical space is for developing such cooperation. During the seminar the point was made that in addition to the traditional border that the Mediterranean represents, another, much more porous one has developed in the Sahara Desert. In recent years, it has become clear that the control of borders such as the ones at Ceuta and Melilla do not solve the control of flows; instead they simply move the problem to other borders. Thus, migration flows in the Mediterranean do not take place on a solely Euro-Mediterranean or Euro-Maghrebi scale, but rather they have grown to Euro-African dimensions.

Taking a different approach, the participants also remarked upon the fact that a fixation with effectively controlling migration flows might have caused us to forget the importance of promoting development processes as long-term measures for managing migration flows in a more intelligent, less traumatic way. Thus, one of the aims of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership –to create an area of shared prosperity– is linked with the issue of migration. Nevertheless –and given the fact that the focus of attention is not limited to the Mediterranean, but rather it has widened to include Africa– development policies on this continent are equally important.

In all these debates, different answers were offered and diverse lines of action were outlined. Particularly, the seminar represented an opportunity to find out, at first hand, about some of the policies and initiatives that are already in progress. Among the subjects discussed were regularisation processes, cooperation in the area of rescue and the specific experience of FRONTEX, the agency responsible for controlling the EU's external borders.

Finally, the working group turned to the subject of governance, and the problem of how to promote policies of "good governance" that would simultaneously result in a climate of greater security and stability in the region. The tension between promoting an agenda of democratisation and an agenda for stabilising the regions bordering the EU has been a constant feature of EU policy, and that of some of its Member States with respect to the Mediterranean.

Within the framework of this seminar, one central issue came under discussion –that of the links between governance, human rights and democratisation processes. Some participants made the point that it sometimes seems as if "governance" is used as a euphemism for democracy. However, during the course of the debate, it was agreed that governance is a concept that goes beyond respect for human rights and democratisation, and that it is particularly important –especially in the medium and long-term– in the construction of an area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean.

In view of the political situation in the region, the issues under discussion included the current correlation of forces in the region, the different strategies within the EU, and between the EU and the United States, the impact of open regional conflicts and international terrorism, and the role of reform in the security sector –all of them subjects that generate a considerable amount of debate in the academic community as well as in governmental circles.

The working commission also discussed the subject of how to improve the situation of governance in the region. Various ideas were put forward, including the need to carry out projects with a broader time frame, as well as the suggestions that technical aid should be substantially increased and that in order to avoid suspicion deriving from historical memory, these processes should be executed by domestic actors to prevent them from being seen as having been imposed from outside.

Particular emphasis was placed on the idea that it was necessary to move forward toward a greater coherence between the EU's specific principles and policies. This point, which represents a wider problem in terms of European construction and its international scope, acquires greater prominence when it comes to tackling highly sensitive issues such as that of promoting processes of good governance. Without this coherence, the EU will obtain few positive results, and may even lose its legitimacy.

Thus, the plenary debates and work sessions represented an opportunity to carry out an in-depth examination of the challenges to security in the Mediterranean region; challenges that are taking on an increasingly multidimensional character, and which make it necessary to strengthen cooperation between Mediterranean countries.

This cooperation, as several participants stressed, should bear in mind the idea that the security that Euro-Mediterranean leaders should be considering is not only the security of states, but also –and especially– that of their citizens. Cooperation on the issue of security in the Mediterranean cannot be excluded from this dynamic, as new initiatives linked with a conception of "human security" will have to be incorporated.