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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN THE CONTEXT OF NATO'S MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE

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The origins of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue date to the Brussels Summit of January 1994, when NATO Heads of State and Government referred to the positive developments in the Middle East Peace Process as "opening the way to consider measures to promote dialogue, understanding and confidence-building between the countries in the region". The Dialogue was then officially launched at the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers, in December of the same year, during which they declared their readiness "to establish contacts, on a case-by-case basis, between the Alliance and Mediterranean non-member countries with a view to contibuting to the strengthening of regional stability". For that purpose, they directed the Council in Permanent Session "to develop the details of the proposed dialogue and to initiate appropriate preliminary contacts." As a result, in February 1995, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia were invited to participate in a Dialogue with NATO, an invitation that was later extended to Jordan, in November 1995. Algeria became the seventh non-NATO participant in March 2000.

With the exception of the information field, in principle, the dialogue's working structure is bilateral, a particularly appropriate feature in such a diversified framework, as the Mediterranean often appears to be.

Multilateral meetings, however, are not ruled out and can be organised on a case-by-case basis. An annual work programme is set out to implement practical co-operation measures on security related issues, these including such areas as information, civil emergency planning, science, as well as the military field.

Ever since its launch, the initiative has been consistently evolving in a way to favour increasing interaction. At the Madrid Summit of July 1997, a specific committee on the Mediterranean, the *Mediterranean Co-operation Group*, was created to bear the overall responsibility for the dialogue, which originally rested with the Alliance's Political Committee in a loose pattern of meetings. All the Mediterranean partners in the MCG were given the same basis for co-operation and discussion with NATO, a policy that left any one of them free to determine the level of their participation.

In February 1999, the Spanish Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, in concert with NATO Office of Information and Press, organised in Valencia a "Conference on the Mediterranean Dialogue and the New NATO". That was the first opportunity for Ambassadors from NATO and Mediterranean partner countries, to meet and to jointly

discuss the future of the Dialogue in a multilateral framework. The timing of the Valencia conference was particularly relevant as well. It was indeed scheduled so as to precede the Washington Summit of 23-24 April 1999, in which NATO's overall policy of outreach and external adaptation was expected to be a major subject for discussions.

In Washington, alliance leaders underlined the role of the Dialogue as an "integral part of NATO's co-operative approach to security", and their commitment to enhancing the political and practical dimensions of the Dialogue and to strengthening co-operation in areas where NATO can bring added value, this applying in particular to the military sphere.

The evolution of the Dialogue is influenced by a number of factors or potential obstacles, which range from the distinctiveness of the Mediterranean security environment to the difficulty, amongst participant states, to achieve political cohesion on important issues, beyond the general in-principle support.

The Mediterranean is not a homogeneous region. Whether we embrace the ecumenical portrait provided by French historian Fernand Braudel, in 1949, or we rather lean towards a Huntingtonian "clash-of-civilizations" approach, we are indeed in presence of a multicultural and

economically diversified environment. It encompasses the Judeo-Christian as well as the Islamic, the developed and the developing. The elaboration of an overarching policy in such a context is increasingly desirable and yet complicated.

The dialogue process encounters some constraints amongst non-NATO participants. In comparison with the case of NATO's co-operation with Central and Eastern European countries through the Partnership for Peace, where support for the Organisation is widespread, Mediterranean partners sometimes appear to remain more cautious towards NATO, which may be still perceived as a cold war institution, eventually in search of new enemies rather than being genuinely interested in new partnerships. This difficulty applies, in particular, when co-operation is somehow related to military matters, about which all states, regardless of the region, are more sensitive and protective. In fact, diffidence is more common at the level of public opinion than in governmental spheres, but as a consequence, when this is the case, the governments of dialogue countries cannot but be prudent about co-operating too closely with NATO, fearing that this might foment the hostile reaction of important segments of their societies.

Since the launch of the initiative, some dialogue countries have also been inhibited by the state of the Middle East peace process. Arab countries have often been unwilling to engage in a dialogue with Israel, so that it has been difficult to involve important North African and Middle Eastern countries, in the dialogue context, in questions that also involved that state.

In terms of relationships, the external questions described so far have been, and are likely to be in the future, the main challenges that the Dialogue is to face. On the one hand, a certain persisting distance between NATO and non-NATO participants, and on the other, the differences within the same group of non-NATO participants. In turn, the atmosphere among NATO members is characterised by a broad convergence on goals and security perceptions. Internal differences, however, exist and bear some consequences. This research is aimed at discussing such internal dynamics. In particular, it will be focused upon the issue of the relations between the United States, notably NATO's leading actor, and Southern European countries, whose zeal and "lobbying" within the Alliance in favour of the Mediterranean cause have ultimately led to the launch of the Dialogue.

The interest for this topic derives from the notion that NATO's policy of *external outreach*, of which the Mediterranean Dialogue is part, can only be effective if it is grounded on a solid *internal cohesion* around the objectives to achieve, and this has not always been the case in the context of the Dialogue. Specifically, the underlying hypothesis of the analysis is that the prospects of the Dialogue will largely depend on the combination of the United States' political willingness to develop it, on the one hand, and the degree of consistency by which NATO's south-European members will continue to support it, on the other.

The first part of the research will provide an image of the general framework in which the Dialogue is to operate. This will include both the economic and deriving concerns in the relevant period, i.e. from the launch of the Dialogue through the end of the 1990s, and the mechanisms that other multinational institutions have been developing with reference to Mediterranean security issues.

Based on the specificities of the Mediterranean security environment, the following part of the research will then question the perceptions that states attach to them on both sides of the Atlantic, in an attempt to

distinguish the sources of the different priorities expressed in the dialogue context.

To conclude, the analysis will be aimed at defining the actual transatlantic dynamics that the key players, i.e. the United States and south-European allies, have been able and willing to develop in the context of the Dialogue.

In terms of sources, this work has principally relied on NATO public documents, conference reports, and a certain number of articles dealing directly or indirectly with the Dialogue. With this regard, it is to be remarked that the existing literature on NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is extremely limited, especially if compared to the quantity of works that examine the Barcelona process. At present, the sole comprehensive and unclassified work available that specifically deals with NATO's Dialogue is the RAND report by S. Larrabee, J. Green, I. O. Lesser, and M. Zanini of 1997.

The study of NATO Dialogue becomes even more complicated when one attempts to single out the policies of individual states, as these are the object, in the security domain, of classified documents. Such policies are to be inferred from interviews, again when available and helpful,

and the analysis of current events. At this regard, I wish to thank the people who have made their time, material and knowledge available to my writing, which is, however, the result of personal conclusions.

By focusing on NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, this work is also intended to contribute to the broader debate on the evolution in the role of the Organisation, from provider of deterrence and defence to, in addition, active promoter of co-operation and partnership.

At the centre of cross-regional trends and interests

For most of the cold war years, the Mediterranean region has remained peripheral to the main, Central European theatre of NATO, but with the disappearance of the bipolar paradigm and its *de facto* stabilising function, dormant tensions of religious, ethnic and demographic nature have surfaced across the region, this raising the alarm about their potential and combining effects. The emergence of the Mediterranean as an area of growing concern has been determined, in particular, by the outbreak of the crises in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Southern Balkans, and Algeria. All throughout the 1990s, the literature on such "new" area of prominence has correspondingly multiplied, both in Europe and the United States.

Special forums and more institutionalised projects have been launched in various contexts, including the European Union – through the Barcelona Process and the Mediterranean Dialogue of the Western European Union (WEU), and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), all of which are emblematic of the new climate. NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, in particular, has served as a

major vehicle, among Alliance members, for conveying attention toward Mediterranean issues in a systematic fashion.

The Mediterranean Sea is surrounded by twenty-two sovereign states, whose security is essentially attached to their geographical location around this critical waterway. At writing, six of these states are members of NATO: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. It is in the Mediterranean that some of the most intensively debated and challenging security concerns of the post-cold war era take place. These include the issue of energy supply, which is by no means accidentally often referred to as “energy security”, and the phenomenon of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Historically, the Mediterranean basin has been a fundamental crossroads of commerce and traffics, a role that it largely continues to play today. About 1/6 of the volume of the entire world trade and 1/3 of the world traffic of hydrocarbons pass through the Mediterranean. Oil from the Middle East, on which most European states depend for their energy supply, moves through the Mediterranean, either via tanker from the Red Sea or by pipelines that flow into Mediterranean terminals. The entire amount of oil for Italy and Greece, for example, passes through

the Mediterranean and so does nearly half of that for Spain, France and Germany. Few doubts exist, therefore, on the importance of preserving it as a stable environment, for the sake of the economies of the states involved and the well-being of their inhabitants.

If much of Europe's overall energy supplies are imported from the South-East Mediterranean, the far highest import rates are however among the states of Southern Europe. Italy's energy supply relies on Libyan oil, and France, Greece and Turkey are importers of Libyan oil as well, although in smaller amounts.

Imports have been climbing especially as for gas from North Africa, with figures that in the cases of Spain and Portugal reach around 40 percent of the total supply. Gas supplies cross over Europe through international pipelines, whose number and reach is expected to considerably expand in the near future. At present, the two main routes consist of the Transmed pipeline, linking Italy to North Africa, and the Trans-Maghreb pipeline, which takes Algerian gas to Spain, Portugal and France via Morocco.

As opposed to oil, whose market is typically global, the gas trade is rather regional because of the fixed infrastructures it requires. The destabilising risk connected with such feature might derive from supply

disturbances or disruptions from the states of origin. The chances that such cut-offs may occur are, however, arguably low. Cross-border links, in energy as in other domains, are a resource for each one of the involved parties. In other words, “inter-dependence” can lead to either a dangerous dependence or a mutually beneficial stabilisation of the regional balances, if regional stability is perceived to be a common stake by all players. The issue of energy security is thus crucial for south-European states and, indeed, it links them to their geographical location in a crucial way, but this does not automatically imply an associated risk or “threat”, an argument that some critics have adopted, especially in the early 1990s, to justify the thesis of the Mediterranean as the “new arc of crisis”.

As for the question of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, development trends display a large availability of WMD and their means of delivery in North Africa and the Middle East. Such weapons do not replace but add to conventional arsenals, which are increasingly sophisticated. Despite the potential case for every European capital to find itself in the range of ballistic missiles deployed from one of these areas, at present the most identifiable chances for an eventual military confrontation remain, however, South-South.

In the Mediterranean environment, energy and WMD proliferation concerns are associated with other collateral instances that characterise the region. Mass migration is among the most impelling.

Migration across the Mediterranean has both South-North and East-West dimensions. Migration northward is primarily grounded in the large economic disparities between the poorer countries on the southern shore and the richer on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. In the case of migration from the East, especially from Albania and the territories of ex-Yugoslavia, the primary cause has rather been the political break-up that has followed the end of the cold war, which has also resulted in dramatic civil wars.

At the end of the 1990s, the growth rate of populations in the Maghreb has revealed less tremendous than previously expected, and migration from these countries to the North has concurrently slowed its pace. Yet, considering the present and declining birth rates in most receiving countries, movements are expected to continue. Similarly, the flux of refugees from the Balkans and the other tormented areas around Mediterranean is likely to continue in the next few years.

All South-European nations share common concerns about immigration. France has notably the largest immigrant population of Maghreb origin in Europe and maintains important political ties with its former colonies of North Africa, as well as substantial investments to defend, especially in Algeria and Morocco. Spain is separated from North Africa by only fourteen kilometres of the Strait of Gibraltar, and it shares a border with Morocco because of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Italy's geopolitical location is comparatively more complex than that of other NATO's southern allies. Its territory is concurrently subject to immigration from the South, i.e. North Africa, and the East, i.e. the former Yugoslav regions and Albania, with which it is also bonded by historical ties. Of these three front-line states, only France had a history as a receiving country before the second half of the 1980s. For Spain and Italy, migratory pressures are a relatively new phenomenon. Traditionally, these two countries were labour exporters, or countries of transit on the way to the labour markets of North and Central Europe.

In what sense migration is a security issue, and to what extent, is one of the most politicised and controversial points in the contemporary debate. It applies to security inasmuch as it brings about some destabilizing effects, especially at the initial stages. Housing,

employment, and other day-to-day issues are accordingly to be re-adjusted. Furthermore, cultural and religious differences tend to create suspicion and tensions amongst both migrating and receiving peoples. On the other hand, pointing at migration as a security challenge is in itself a way to overheat the phenomenon and to favour intolerance, in a sort of dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy. This is the also the line of argument that defines the logic behind NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, which has been designed to build confidence and co-operation precisely as a means to emphasise vicinity instead of divisions.

Most of the security issues that affect the Mediterranean are transnational, further reinforcing the notion of the region as an ideal case-study for understanding the nature of security in the post-cold war world. The spill-over effect of the social and economic problems of the South into Europe was limited in the cold war security environment, whereas it has steadily increased thereafter. Today, none of the allies in the region can afford to ignore transnational issues, because these problems cannot be appropriately dealt with by states in isolation from each other. The awareness of this state of affairs has been one of the

driving forces behind the multiplication of joint Mediterranean initiatives in the 1990s.

The nature of contemporary security issues in the Mediterranean, as in other areas, highlights, in addition, the need for a comprehensive vision of security. The new Alliance's strategic concept, approved in Washington in April 1999, states that NATO is committed to "a broad approach to security, which recognises the importance of political, economic, social and environmental factors in addition to the indispensable defence dimension". NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, through its multidimensional character, has corresponded to this 21st-century approach to security as from its foundation.

Different views of the Mediterranean

Geopolitics, in its classical conception, may have died. The spread of new military technologies and communications has undoubtedly reduced the impact of geographical factors in the definition of security policies. The term is still frequently used in the literature on international

relations, but as a neutral concept that has little to do with the distinct and specifically oriented tradition of thought that has typically been identified with the realist school. Yet, we cannot deny that geography continues to influence economics, politics and strategy, to an extent that may largely depend on other contingent factors but, at the same time, independent of their existence. In such phenomena as, for example, international migrations, or in particular sectors of energy transfers, geographic proximity is a crucial factor. In fact, if we assume that the importance of such non-military concerns has increased, we might even be bound to conclude that geography and the attached territorial interests are today more important than they were.

Considerations of this nature come almost automatically to the forefront when we are to explore United States vis-à-vis European policies. In the case of the Mediterranean, the energy reliance of south-European states from regional supplies, which has been described in the previous paragraph, is not comparable to the lower export rates from the same region to the United States. Similarly, such issues as refugee flows or other population movements across the basin do not affect U.S. interests if not in some indirect and widely arguable way, or however in such a

way that is by no means comparable, again, to the effects that these phenomena bear for South-European countries.

On the other hand, broader strategic considerations must lead to different conclusions. The United States continues to play the role of dominant power in the Mediterranean and the dispute with France over AFSOUTH command has shown that it does not intend to step down.
The question “whether or not” the United States includes the Mediterranean among its strategic priorities is indeed a poor analytical tool. Moreover, ever since the end of the Second World War, the United States has not been a Mediterranean power “on its own” but rather with - or through - NATO, so that the question would result particularly sterile in the present discussion. The relevant issue, for present purposes, is the role that the United States attaches to the Dialogue within its overall Mediterranean strategy.

In order to respond, and then to be able to compare the U.S. policy with that of its South-European interlocutors, we must first attempt to define the Mediterranean security environment, because that is where differences may possibly lay. We have already observed that the

Mediterranean is not a homogeneous region, but its same borders are the object of discussions and variable interpretations.

From a European perspective, the very existence of a “Mediterranean region” is virtually implicit and references to a Mediterranean policy are therefore conventional. Detecting a U.S. idea of the Mediterranean, in turn, seems to be a harder task. In the minds of American intellectuals and decision-makers, policies may concern either the Middle East, Europe, or North Africa, the three being rather separate entities. Then, when the term “Mediterranean” is used in American milieus, it tends to be inherently associated with the *Eastern* Mediterranean, in particular Greece and Turkey, where the Truman strategy of containment had its first application, and the Black Sea region, Ukraine in particular. Later events in former Yugoslavia have further contributed to maintain the American focus of attention on the eastern part of the basin.

In the U.S. tripartite equation enunciated above – Middle East, Europe, and North Africa, the Middle East is granted the highest figure. The Middle East peace process is in fact a distinct foreign policy compartment, which absorbs a large proportion of U.S. diplomatic and financial resources. In accordance with this priority, the Mediterranean

Sea has traditionally been regarded as the stepping stone to the Middle East, rather than an area of strategic importance in its own right. As far as North Africa is concerned, any analytical attempt to single out a U.S. policy is doomed to disappointment and, however, is to refer to the broader U.S. policy for the Middle East.

For Europeans, the Mediterranean is a comprehensive but distinguishable area, which then encompasses various sub-regions. The Middle East and North Africa, although related concerns affect each European country in a diverse way, are both part of such overall Mediterranean picture. This is one of the reasons why most of the initiatives tagged as “Mediterranean” have been implemented thanks to Europeans’ activism, and in particular South-European activism.

In the post-cold war years, the southern members of the European Union have increasingly joined forces to attract the attention of the institution on the problems of Europe’s southern shore. They have created a sort of lobby, aimed at redressing the balance between the bulk of initiatives directed at Eastern and Central Europe and those directed at the South. France, Italy, and Spain have been the ultimate locomotives in all Mediterranean processes. Other major contributors to the EU budget

have often played a minor role. Britain's Mediterranean interests, for example, are more specifically in the Middle East, this being another element that reinforces, also in the Mediterranean context, the country's "special relationship" with the United States. As for Germany, although its attention to the southern shore is currently relatively higher than in the past, Central and Eastern Europe remain its highest priorities, with Mediterranean issues gaining attention insofar as an adjunct.

In the context of NATO, the Mediterranean Dialogue was analogously launched, in late 1994, as a response to pressure from southern members, notably Italy and Spain.

Multiple views of the Mediterranean environment are not divorced from some basic difference, between the U.S. and Europeans, in the respective approaches to security. Europeans have consistently manifested a preference for diplomatic tools and the creation of a co-operative and increasingly pro-active environment in the region. On the other hand, the United States have tended to point more to the issue of the "risks" emanating from particular problems or states in the region, and therefore to assume a defensive attitude. NATO's Mediterranean

Dialogue, as we will discuss in the final part of this work, has been one of the mirrors of this discrepancy.

In relation to this argument is also the ongoing debate about the ultimate suitability of NATO, i.e. a fundamentally military alliance, to deal with the security problems of such regions, as the Mediterranean, in which these are mostly non-military and internal. The European Union is in fact the most appropriate forum for social and economic issues. We know, however, that the distinction between “hard” and “soft” security is artificial and arguable. Some non-military crises may eventually erupt into situations that require the use of military means. Examples of such contingencies include civil wars, terrorist acts, the activity of insurgent groups, and even organised crime (operations such as intercepting narcotics shipments that may require the deployment of aircraft carriers and high-readiness troops), all of which subsist in the region. Trying to choose between the EU and NATO as the “preferable institution”, although academically tempting, is in reality counterproductive. The stability and security of the Mediterranean region can be best safeguarded through a combination of EU and NATO initiatives, and it is rather about the efficiency of such a combination that further steps should be taken in the future.

Transatlantic dynamics in the context of the Dialogue

The leading position that the United States is willing to preserve in the Middle East has made it generally reluctant to accept the initiatives in which it envisages a more active European role.

The *Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean* (CSCM), officially inaugurated in 1992 by Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, has never gained the official endorsement of the United States government. U.S. fears were connected with the prospect that the Conference might eventually diminish its role in the Middle East by increasing the influence of European interlocutors. Concerns were also related to the possible creation of a naval arms control, which would question or exclude the fleets of outside powers from the Mediterranean, although this might have only become an issue in the long run and if the success of the CSCM had gone unexpectedly far.

In the case of the formulation of the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* (EMP), i.e. the wide co-operation framework established by the 1995 Barcelona Conference, the United States chose at the time to avoid even a symbolic role as an observer. Spain had proposed to the United States to participate in the conference in this role. France, on the contrary, had

not solicited any American presence whatsoever. The goal of the Conference was to establish a partnership between EU member states and eleven non-member countries, including Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey, plus the Palestinian Authority, through a fifteen-year programme.

In contrast with previous policy initiatives for the Mediterranean, the so-called “Barcelona process” was ostensibly designed to extend co-operation beyond the usual economy-centred approach and to institutionalise a regular dialogue on political and security matters. The final decision of the U.S. government was possibly the sign of a new “emancipating” approach, and thus an evolution from previous manifest reservation, as it had occurred in the case of the CSCM. More realistically, it could be argued that the United States did not envisage, in the Barcelona conference, any prospective threat to its predominance in the security matters regarding the Mediterranean. In other words, the Clinton Administration felt sufficiently “safe” because of the very low profile of the politico-military basket in the Barcelona framework, relative to the economic and cultural baskets, and the ongoing and virtually blocking tension amongst the group of Middle Eastern participants.

As for NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, we have observed that this is based on a North-South cooperative vision of Mediterranean issues that corresponds neither to the U.S. strategic priorities in the broader region nor to its vision of the area.

The central hypothesis of this work referred to the need for a more deliberate U.S. position in regard to the Dialogue, because of the pre-eminent role of the United States in the Alliance and its crucial contribution in all aspects of NATO's activity. At the time of writing, the available evidence does not seem to suggest any major clarification in this direction. However, as the process of eastward enlargement - i.e. U.S. post-cold war priority in Europe - appears to proceed smoothly, U.S. attention towards the Mediterranean and the related NATO agenda might increase in the future. This theme is thus open for further consideration in the years to come. The outcome of the November 2000 presidential elections, after eight years of Clinton's Administration, will provide some safer ground for speculation.

The end of the stagnation in the Middle East peace process, in accordance with the dominance of this issue within U.S. strategy, would have a crucial effect on the Dialogue's future, as on several Mediterranean initiatives.

The desirability of a strong U.S. role, or even of NATO as a leading player in the Mediterranean, is far from being a shared value within the Alliance.

France has historically seen the Maghreb, and the Western Mediterranean in general, as its *domaine reservé* and maintains some privileged channels in the area that it is not willing to discard. Consequently, bilateral relations remain the country's favourite instrument. Furthermore, and partly as a result, NATO is not seen as the main vehicle for conveying its interests. NATO's Dialogue is rather complementary to other initiatives that may deal with the security issues of the Mediterranean region in a more appropriate way, the Barcelona process being in the first place.

Having said that, one should avoid the conclusion that France somehow constrains the Dialogue, or a pivotal role for NATO in the management of the region's security issues. The recent inclusion of Algeria among Dialogue countries, in March 2000, has indeed been due to France's backing. France's criticism in the context of NATO, or specifically towards U.S. policies, often forms the object of political and academic overemphasis, if not rhetoric. That criticism is but a natural outgrowth

of France's higher stakes in the Mediterranean relative to other countries, and its special historical role in the region.

Hence, to summarise, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, although certainly *not* the Mediterranean region itself, is not considered as a priority in the cases of the United States and France. These two countries perform their Mediterranean policies, although the term is rather incorrect in the case of the United States, preferably through other mechanisms and institutions. For Spain and Italy, in turn, NATO's Dialogue is assigned a central role.

Spanish Mediterranean activism in the last decade has been so prominent that the country has come to contend the role of main European Mediterranean actor to France. Its star began to rise, in the Mediterranean, when it joined the European Communities, in 1986. Then, in the following years, Spain has engaged in the zealous promotion of policies specifically designed for the Mediterranean, as its participation and driving role in most of the initiatives for the region testify. Domestic stability and economic development, since the beginning of the 1990s, have certainly favoured this quest for a leading role in the Mediterranean.

As for NATO's Dialogue, we have seen that it has been launched thanks to a joint Italian-Spanish proposal. Ever since, Spain has been one of the most enduring promoters of the Dialogue, also through the action of the Spanish NATO's Secretary-General Javier Solana, who will supposedly pursue such Mediterranean activism in its new functions at the head of EU's foreign policy. The latest Dialogue conference on "The Mediterranean Dialogue and the New NATO", whose significance has been equally discussed, has been notably organised in Valencia, Spain.

Italy is undoubtedly projected towards the Mediterranean. Its geostrategic importance is determined by its location as a natural bridge between Europe and the Middle East, as well as its proximity to the increasingly unstable African continent. The United States has always been well aware of Italy's geostrategic function. This is why NATO, which was originally intended as a security system embodying the *North* Atlantic, became in fact a North Atlantic-North Mediterranean alliance, with Italy's adhesion as a charter member, in April 1949.

Italy has traditionally played the "mediator" between the Arabs and the Israelis, due to its excellent diplomatic relations with both. It has also played the middleman role between Atlanticist and Europeanist

positions, as opposed to states with a more definite propensity, such as respectively Great Britain or France.

Such features, in addition to Italy's consistent support in the development of the Dialogue, has made it a fundamental player in the evolution of the Dialogue process.

Conclusions

The Valencia Conference of 1999 and the recent inclusion of Algeria, in March 2000, suggests that NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is moving forward. The satisfactory developments in the co-operation efforts with Central and East-European countries are likely to favour a further re-launch, as part of the attention of the United States and allies may be diverted southward.

Existing obstacles are both external and internal. The major differences are inherently between NATO and non-NATO participants, because of a certain diffidence that persists among the latter toward the Alliance and its outreach initiatives. This is the case, in particular, in the field of so-called "hard" security, in which states are obviously more sensitive, in the Mediterranean as elsewhere, and co-operation moves on delicate ground.

Differences also exist between one non-NATO participant and the other, most of which related to their diverse policies vis-à-vis the Middle East peace process.

By definition, divergences inside the Alliance, on which this work was focused, are less impeding than those outlined thus far. The fact that

analysts tend to neglect these internal dynamics in favour of the problems of external sources is fully justified. Yet, the interest for internal dynamics has been driven by the idea that NATO's policy of external outreach, of which the Dialogue is an important part, cannot but be founded on a solid internal cohesion at the level of the allies. In this sense, the most relevant relations have appeared to be those between the United States, i.e. NATO's key player and a Mediterranean power, and South-European states, i.e. the active promoters of the Dialogue and of most of the initiatives that have been developed in the last decade, this applying in particular to Spain, Italy and France.

The analysis has indeed confirmed that the policies developed by the United States and these interlocutors in the Dialogue context are the outcome of different priorities. More interestingly, in an attempt to clearly define the regional setting, it has been pointed out that the same vision of the Mediterranean is rather different. For Europeans, the notion of Mediterranean region is almost conventional, or however, it is conventionally accepted that such a region exists. From an American perspective, in turn, there are several "Mediterraneans", and a "Mediterranean policy" as such is hardly identifiable.

NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is assessed as a priority by Spain and Italy, who have also been its proposers. France, the leading Mediterranean power among Europeans, although Spain is increasingly contending this role with it, develops its Mediterranean policy primarily through European institutions.

The fact that internal differences are in place and derive from a diversified range of priorities is inherent, to a variable extent, in any international initiative. The state of such internal differences in the Dialogue context does not seem to imply negative forecasts about the future of the project. The outcome of the next U.S. presidential elections, in November 2000, with the definition of the new foreign and security policy team and the country's strategic priorities, and the evolution of the Middle East peace process will be crucial variables in the prospects for the Dialogue.

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