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The OSCE and the Mediterranean: Assessment of a Decade of Efforts to Reinvigorate a Dialogue

Introduction

More than a decade has passed since the last attempt to evaluate the OSCE's Mediterranean dialogue in the pages of the OSCE Yearbook. The authors of the 1999 contribution sounded a cautiously optimistic note in their assessment of the state of the dialogue, referring in particular to the interest of the six Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation (MPCs) in expanding their relationship with the OSCE, and providing a list of proposals for further co-operation.¹ Much has happened since then in the relationship between the countries of the southern Mediterranean and those in the OSCE region. Some of the events have had a tremendous destructive potential, especially the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the USA, and subsequent developments aimed at finding appropriate anti-terrorism measures. Others, such as the enlargement of the EU to include Malta and Cyprus, and the development of the European Union's Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean had the objective of improving co-operation and bringing the regions closer together. On some developments, such as the renewal of the discussion of the European security architecture in the OSCE context, as instigated by the Russian Federation, judgement is still out. Clearly, however, much space for further action remains for any framework or organization concerned with human security, stability, development, and co-operation in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

This contribution aims to assess the progress achieved in the OSCE's Mediterranean dialogue since the late 1990s. It will not provide extensive background on the Mediterranean dimension of the CSCE/OSCE's² work up to this point, mainly because the 1999 OSCE Yearbook contribution has already done this. It will also abstain from providing an exhaustive description of institutional developments and steps taken in the context of the OSCE Mediterranean dialogue since the 1990s. Rather, it will focus on observable trends in the co-operation of the Organization with its Partners in the Mediterranean and speculate on the future of this partnership.

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- 1 Cf. Elizabeth Abela/Monika Wohlfeld, *The Mediterranean Security Dimension*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 1999*, Baden-Baden 2000, pp. 435-446.
- 2 For simplicity's sake, all further references to the CSCE/OSCE shall be to the "OSCE".

The Nature of the OSCE Mediterranean Dialogue

Although the OSCE's Mediterranean dialogue can be traced back as far as the "Questions Relating to Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean" contained in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the topic has always been one of great controversy. The OSCE has always functioned on the basis of consensus, and clearly, consensus on Mediterranean issues has at times been difficult to reach. The intertwining of European and Mediterranean security has been underscored in numerous subsequent OSCE documents, most recently in the Astana Commemorative Declaration, adopted at the 2010 OSCE Summit, as well as in seminars and meetings that have addressed the Mediterranean dimension of security. Nevertheless, the substance of the relationship has emerged only step-by-step, and the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners can still be said to have something like observer status, with limited access to the workings of the Organization.

The 1990s were marked by changes in relations between the OSCE and a number of states that did not participate in the Organization. One of these was the introduction of the OSCE Asian dialogue. Japan became a Partner for Co-operation in 1992, as did Korea in 1994, Thailand in 2000, Afghanistan in 2003, Mongolia in 2004, and Australia in 2009. The discussion of the OSCE's Asian dialogue goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth noting at this stage that, while the Asian dialogue has emerged more recently than its Mediterranean counterpart, it is in some aspects more dynamic. Some of the Asian Partners take a very active role in the context of the OSCE, including providing voluntary funding and staff for core OSCE activities, such as field operations in the Balkans or election observation. Others, such as Afghanistan, require substantial support from the international community, with the result that the OSCE participating States are engaged in an ongoing debate as to how far the Organization could and should go in providing assistance to countries outside its area. At the 2010 OSCE Summit, the participating States underscored "the need to contribute effectively, based on the capacity and national interest of each participating State, to collective international efforts to promote a stable, independent, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan".³

While the OSCE's Mediterranean and Asian dialogues are different in nature, and not necessarily interlinked, many recent decisions on how the dialogues should proceed have referred to both sets of Partners. In addition, OSCE participating States have also decided to work with international organizations outside the OSCE area, which adds another dimension to the two dialogues. The Mediterranean dialogue is thus no longer the only or key aspect of the OSCE's outreach to other regions.

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Summit, Astana 2010, *Astana Commemorative Declaration: Towards a Security Community*, SUM.DOC/1/10, 3 December 2010.

The second change has been a process of giving structure to relations with Partner States that began in the early 1990s. Since that time, the core of the dialogue has been the informal meetings of the Contact Group with the MPCs, and the OSCE Mediterranean Seminars. The Contact Group events are informal, which means that not all participating States are interested or able to be represented, given the multitude of events and meetings that take place in the OSCE context and the small size of many national delegations. Others do attend regularly and actively, and a number of states, including the MPCs, participate at the level of ambassador. The Contact Group provides mainly for the exchange of information and discussion of issues of mutual interest between the MPCs and the OSCE participating States.⁴ The annual OSCE Mediterranean Seminars have had a multitude of functions, such as bringing diplomats together with academics and other experts to explore a variety of issues. Many proposals of discussion topics and events first emerged in the context of the Mediterranean Seminars. The seminars also made it possible to involve other international organizations that conduct Mediterranean dialogues and, most importantly, when held in one of the MPCs, for the OSCE to raise awareness of its Mediterranean dialogue in those countries.

A third change – one that altered the nature of the Mediterranean dialogue – was enacted by the decisions taken over the past few years by OSCE participating States that allow Partner States to gain access to the OSCE's decision-making forums, activities, and events. They are now able to participate as observers in OSCE Ministerial Council Meetings and in annual OSCE events (the Annual Security Review Conferences, the Economic and Environmental Forum, the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, and the Annual Implementation Assessment Meetings). The practice of offering the Mediterranean (and Asian) Partner States an opportunity to meet the OSCE Troika (that is the current, incoming, and outgoing Chairpersons-in-Office) on the eve of annual Ministerial Meetings and Summits also emerged. Although the participating States decided as far back as in 1994 to invite non-participating Mediterranean States to attend Permanent Council (PC) and Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) meetings devoted to Mediterranean issues, it was only in 2007 that the then Spanish Chairmanship changed the seating arrangements to accommodate the partner states at the main table and made the invitation to the weekly PC meetings a standing one. This practice was also encouraged by the Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Partners for Co-operation adopted at the 2007 Madrid Ministerial Council. This is a sig-

4 The agenda includes briefings by representatives of the Chairman-in-Office (CiO), i.e. the foreign minister of the country chairing the Organization in a given year. These briefings tend to focus particularly on OSCE missions and field activities. This is followed by a presentation by an OSCE official on one of the main aspects of OSCE activity, such as the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, or a Personal Representative of the CiO, and other briefings on specific issues of interest.

nificant development, as the Partner States have consistently lobbied for access to the deliberations of the participating States, and it has had a substantial effect on the level of interaction between participating States and Partner States.

With regard to access to operational activities, the OSCE Permanent Council adopted a decision providing for representatives of the MPCs to participate, on a case-by-case basis, in OSCE/ODIHR election monitoring and supervision operations, and to make short-term visits to OSCE missions in order to continue to take stock of the OSCE's experiences and to witness the comprehensive approach to work undertaken in the field.⁵ Partner States are also invited to second mission members to OSCE field operations. The MPCs have been encouraged to take advantage of these decisions by actively participating in and witnessing first-hand the experience of the OSCE in the field. The response has been muted, and more could still be undertaken in this direction.

The fourth change worth highlighting is what could be called a “devolution” of the dialogue to various parts of the rather decentralized Organization. The MPCs have made increasing use of the various opportunities for support and consultation offered by the OSCE's many institutions and offices. These have included units of the OSCE Secretariat such as the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as OSCE institutions, particularly the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA). In this way, once a topic of common interest was identified (and funding was made available), the relevant institution or office could provide expertise or organize a seminar or workshop.⁶ Side events for Partner States have been organized in the margins of a variety of OSCE meetings. This “devolution” effect reflects efforts that have been made to identify issues on the OSCE agenda in which Partner States would have an interest and then to provide them with information and OSCE expertise. Also noteworthy is the fact that a number of handbooks and manuals on specific aspects of OSCE commitments have been translated into Arabic (and adapted for the region in ques-

5 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 233*, PC.Dec/233, 11 June 1998.

6 Recent events of this kind have included an OSCE workshop on travel document security in the Mediterranean, which was held in Madrid in 2007 and organized by the OSCE Action against Terrorism Unit; an OSCE seminar on media self-regulation for Mediterranean States, held in Vienna in 2009 and organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; an OSCE workshop on supply chain security in the Mediterranean, held in Malta in 2009 and organized by the OSCE Action against Terrorism Unit; and a seminar to launch the Mediterranean Edition of the Handbook on Establishing Effective Labour Migration Policies, held in Rabat in 2007 and organized by the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities.

tion) after Mediterranean Partners showed interest in them and voluntary funds were identified for this purpose.⁷

The fifth change is the substantial development of the parliamentary dimension of the dialogue. While, in the past, the OSCE PA did not shy away from discussing the situation in the region, including in the Middle East, the appointment of PA Special Representatives on the Mediterranean, which raises the profile of the body's contacts with Mediterranean and Middle Eastern states, and the new practice of holding special sessions on the Mediterranean have changed the nature of the dialogue. The current Special Representative is the US Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Alcee Hastings (Democratic Representative from Florida). Since 2002, the PA has held an annual Mediterranean Forum during its Fall Meetings and Mediterranean side meetings during the Annual Sessions of the PA. During such meetings, the PA invites parliamentary delegations from Mediterranean Partner States to discuss topics that have included minority protection and non-discrimination, terrorism and fundamentalism, democracy and human rights, and the situation in the Middle East. The state of the OSCE Mediterranean dialogue is also discussed. The PA invites parliamentarians from the MPCs to join its election observation efforts. Parliamentarians from Partner States have taken part in election monitoring in the OSCE area, while the PA sent a small delegation to monitor the Algerian presidential election upon the (unprecedented) invitation of its government.

The sixth change is an effort to involve civil societies in aspects of the Mediterranean dialogue. Some efforts have been undertaken to reach out to NGOs in the Mediterranean, most recently in the form of a side event at the 2008 annual Mediterranean Seminar of the OSCE, held in Jordan, and organized by ODIHR.⁸ This was the second time that such an event has been held in Jordan. The first NGO event took place in Israel in 2007. ODIHR noted that civil society actors in the region had great interest in finding venues where they could exchange views among themselves and with their counterparts from the OSCE region. However, this practice has not become a regular feature, and the experience of the workshops has not been entirely positive. For instance, in the case of the event held in Israel, NGOs from only one other Mediterranean Partner State participated.⁹

There have also been developments regarding the funding of the dialogue. The participating States agreed to set up a voluntary Partnership Fund

7 See, for example, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/International Organization for Migration/International Labour Office, *Handbook on Establishing Effective Labour Migration Policies, Mediterranean Edition*, Vienna/Geneva 2007, at: <http://www.osce.org/eea/60960>.

8 Cf. OSCE, Office of the Secretary General, Section for External Co-operation, *OSCE 2008 Mediterranean Conference, The OSCE approach to regional security – a model for the Mediterranean*, Amman, Jordan, 27 and 28 October 2008.

9 See Internet Centre Anti Racism Europe (I CARE), *I CARE – Special Report – Mediterranean Seminar*, 17-19 December 2007, Tel Aviv, Israel, at: <http://www.icare.to/telaviv-english/telaviv2007-index.html>.

in November 2007 after some difficult deliberations.¹⁰ The proportion of the OSCE's annual budget (which, at about 150 million euros, is itself small compared to those of other organizations) devoted to the Mediterranean dialogue is minuscule. In the OSCE Secretariat, the budget funds one full-time member of staff in the External Co-operation Section, who supports both the Mediterranean and the Asian dialogues, and some limited funds for the organization of the annual Mediterranean conference. All other activities are funded by voluntary contributions. The Mediterranean Partners do not pay into the annual budget, but can make voluntary or in-kind contributions (particularly by co-organizing events or activities). Their voluntary contributions, if any, have also been negligible. The impact of the relatively new Fund is difficult to assess. It has been used to support a considerable number of practical activities, mostly workshops on narrower specific topics. One thing that dims the generally positive outlook is the fact that it is the "usual culprits" that provide the bulk of this funding, for example, the countries that chair the dialogue. Furthermore, the Mediterranean Partners have been slow to consider taking an active role in this context.

Geographical Reach of the Dialogue

The recognition, reflected in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, that European and Mediterranean security are intertwined has in no way led the participating States (or the Mediterranean Partners) to consider expanding the CSCE or OSCE to fully include states from the southern rim of the Mediterranean. Nor has it led to an effort to include all of the states from the region in the dialogue. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, and Tunisia have been part of the dialogue since its inception. The only addition has been that of Jordan, in 1998. The proposal to add Jordan was made by Shimon Peres, the then foreign minister of Israel, in 1994. At the time, he also spoke of adding the Palestinians. In 1998, Jordan itself requested to become a Mediterranean Partner, and the OSCE participating States agreed by consensus. The Partner States, although not part of the decision-making process, were also consulted on this matter (as they always are – informally – in such cases). Several years later, the Palestinian Authority also wrote requesting partner status. During informal consultations, no consensus could be reached among the participating States, and some Partner States had doubts. The process therefore came to a halt before the request had been formally tabled. The Palestinian Authority has recently resubmitted its request to the Chairmanship of the Organization. Although the matter is officially pending, it is clear that consensus will be difficult if not impossible to reach at this time, as the discussions at the 2010

10 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 812, Establishment of a Partnership Fund*, PC.DEC/812, 30 November 2007, at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/29502>.

Mediterranean Seminar, which was held in Malta, showed.¹¹ While some Partner and participating States strongly favour the bid, others argue that Palestine is not a proper state, or that the OSCE is not the right forum to address matters related to the Middle East conflict.

The great influence that the political stalemate in the Middle East exerts on the Mediterranean dialogue becomes evident if one considers which Partner States are most active in the OSCE context. Broadly speaking, the most active are Israel, along with Egypt and Jordan, two states that have diplomatic relations with Israel. These Partner States have been most vocal, have submitted proposals, have hosted OSCE events, and have taken advantage of opportunities that co-operation with the OSCE offers. The other states have provided input of varying quality, with Morocco and Algeria quite vocal within the group. Neither Algeria nor Tunisia has ever hosted an OSCE annual conference devoted to the Mediterranean. When events were held in Israel, some of the MPCs did not participate or participated through working-level representatives only. Furthermore, apart from some very specific and rare situations, the MPCs do not speak as a group, and do not make proposals jointly. The quality of the dialogue clearly reflects the nature of relations among the countries involved.

In this situation, painstaking efforts have been taken by both the OSCE participating States and the Partner States, first of all to find topics for discussion that would interest all of the Partners (more below). Furthermore, some thinking has gone into assuring that the dialogue is not a one-way street, and that the Mediterranean Partners would be seen not only as beneficiaries but also as contributors in the OSCE context. One must see the attempts to ensure that annual Mediterranean Seminars take place in one of the Partner States (rather than in one of the participating States) in this light. It means that the host country has an active role in the preparation and partial funding of the event, as well as helping to decide on participation. Attempts were also made to introduce co-chairing during seminars, but this does not seem to have become standard practice. Similarly, care has been taken to organize events for experts on topics suggested by Partner States, and the agendas of the Contact Group structured accordingly.

But overall, the effort to present the dialogue as a two-way street has not been very credible. The Contact Group has always been chaired by a participating State. As mentioned, the Mediterranean Partners have seldom managed to speak with one voice, even on matters of significance to them. This is not surprising, but it weakens their position. And those working in the OSCE to make the dialogue relevant have found it hard at times to coax and cajole both sides to come up with new proposals that are practicable and to consider

11 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office of the Secretary General, Section for External Co-operation, *2010 OSCE Mediterranean Conference: "The Dialogue on the Future of European Security – A Mediterranean Perspective"*, Malta, 14-15 October 2010, Consolidated Summary, SEC.GAL/195/10, 25 November 2010.

implementing ideas that are already on the agenda, some them for a considerable time.

Dimensions and Themes of Dialogue

The OSCE approach to security has in a sense been ground-breaking. Even during the Cold War, the Organization's approach was comprehensive, and security was seen as having various "dimensions". These were the politico-military dimension, focusing on confidence and security-building measures, arms control, and conflict management issues; the human dimension focusing on human rights, democratization, and elections; and the economic and environmental dimension, which looks at matters such as water management, desertification, climate change, energy security, money laundering, and corruption. The participating States of the OSCE have also attempted to ensure that the Mediterranean dialogue touches upon all three dimensions of security. In fact, some have been putting forward the notion that the comprehensive approach to security is precisely what the Partner States and their region would benefit from the most. The Partner States, however, are not all equally interested in all of the aspects of security that the OSCE pursues. The topics of last year's Mediterranean annual conferences bear witness to the efforts to find an adequate way of approaching this matter.¹²

To give but one example, one of the core concepts of the OSCE's political-military dimension is that of Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs). They are intended to increase the transparency of military holdings and movements. Fred Tanner provided a useful analysis of the Mediterranean countries' approach to CSBMs: "Given the multi-level threat scenarios, combined with sub-regional military rivalries and the continuous militarization of the region, the application of classic arms control and militarily significant CSBMs in the Euro-Mediterranean region appears extremely urgent, but also highly unrealistic at this point in time."¹³ Regional players indicate that "the absence of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace [...] precludes parties in the region from applying the progressive CBMs that have proved effective in the framework of the OSCE".¹⁴ The only (small) step in this direction worth mentioning was a simulation event for Partner States modelled on the Vienna Document of 1999.¹⁵ It enabled representatives of Partner States to experience first-hand the implementation of OSCE

12 The summaries of these conferences are available on the OSCE website, at: <http://www.osce.org/ec/43245>.

13 Fred Tanner, The Euro- Med Partnership: Prospects for Arms Limitations and Confidence Building after Malta, in: *The International Spectator* 2/1997, pp. 3-25, here: p. 9.

14 *Statement by Amre Moussa*, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, December 1997.

15 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Vienna Document 1999 of the Negotiations on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures*, FSC.DOC/1/99, 16 November 1999.

commitments undertaken in the politico-military dimension and aimed at creating openness, transparency, and predictability. This initiative received good feedback from the Partner States, but there has been no further follow-up.

Efforts to discuss issues related to co-operation in the economic or environmental realms or commitments in the human dimension have come across similar difficulties.

Representatives of the Partner States occasionally recall informally that, unlike the participating States, they have not committed themselves to implement the OSCE's "*acquis*". In fact, it is clear that in the current political climate, it would be impossible to realize this. To encourage the Partner States to consider at least some aspects of OSCE commitments that are of interest to them, the participating States came up with a formulation calling for voluntary implementation. There are indeed topics upon which the OSCE focuses that are of interest to Mediterranean Partner States. They include issues related to tolerance and non-discrimination, migration and migrants' human rights, including in countries of destination, water management, desertification, anti-terrorism measures, and other related topics. The Partner States follow discussions and activities in these areas closely and occasionally suggest workshops in order to learn more about them. However, it would be difficult to claim that they implement OSCE commitments in these areas.

A further issue of particular interest is the OSCE's focus on anti-terrorism matters and issues related to the funding of terrorism, as well as on the related question of tolerance and dialogue between cultures. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the Secretary General of the Organization repeatedly stressed the OSCE's relevance, particularly owing to the number of Muslim countries among its membership, and the long-standing Mediterranean dialogue. While this chapter will not list the various efforts of the Organization to respond to the burning issues related to anti-terrorism and anti-fundamentalism, tolerance and dialogue, it is worth noting that it is now clear in retrospect that the basic characteristics of the Mediterranean dialogue have not fundamentally changed – in other words, that the opportunity to redefine it has not been taken up. However, this focus has provided new areas for discussion with MPCs and has enlivened the dialogue.

Another matter of interest in the context of this chapter is the OSCE's support for regional co-operation. The OSCE would like to encourage co-operation among the Partner States, including in the context of the Contact Group. Logically, this would mean limiting discussion to topics on which all Partners could agree or even make proposals. While this has been possible to a limited extent, it has also become clear that individual contacts with the Partner States should be pursued in parallel with contacts with regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and the African Union, of which not all of the partners are members.

It should be noted that the OSCE's dialogue with its Mediterranean Partners is currently devoid of the sweeping or visionary perspectives that

have existed in the past, albeit largely informally and unsuccessfully. The most prominent example of such an approach was the proposal to create a Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), an ambitious idea based on the CSCE model. During the 1990 CSCE Meeting on the Mediterranean in Palma de Mallorca this proposal was developed by the so-called 4+5 Group, consisting of four Southern European EC member states (France, Italy, Spain and Portugal) and the five participants of the Arab Maghreb Union (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) with Malta as an observer. Due to a lack of consensus, a non-binding open-ended report was issued, declaring that a meeting outside the CSCE process could discuss a set of generally accepted rules and principles in the fields of stability, co-operation, and the human dimension in the Mediterranean when circumstances in the area permitted. Stephen Calleya, an expert on regional issues in the Mediterranean provided an assessment of the initiative:

“The CSCM proposal thus attempted to institutionalize concepts associated with the notion of a comprehensive international region where such patterns of interaction did not exist. As a result it can be described as a premature initiative [...]. [A] CSCM must succeed and not precede the regional dynamics it seeks to encourage. Its underlying ‘co-operative approach’ to security does not reflect the more conflictual patterns of relations which exist across the Mediterranean.”¹⁶

The concept has been discussed in the OSCE context, for instance at a 1997 OSCE seminar, where it was stated that the “idea of convening a Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) should not be shelved for good: a CSCM could play a co-ordinating role in respect of other initiatives such as the Barcelona Process and the Mediterranean Forum.”¹⁷ From today’s perspective, this seems wishful thinking rather than a realistic opportunity. However, the July 2009 hearing of the US Helsinki Commission on the future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation demonstrates that the CSCM is not off the table entirely. During this meeting, a US Senator referred to an earlier hearing (1993), which focused on the creation of a CSCM, and emphasized that while an individually tailored approach was needed, a separate framework for the region, incorporating similar ideas, would be useful.¹⁸ The concept has also been mentioned by a number of participants at the 2010 OSCE Mediterranean Seminar.

16 Stephen C. Calleya, *Navigating Regional Dynamics in the Post-Cold War World: Patterns of Relations in the Mediterranean Area*, Aldershot 1997, pp. 152-155.

17 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, The Secretariat, Department for General Affairs, *OSCE Mediterranean Seminar on the Security Model for the Twenty-First Century: Implications for the Mediterranean Basin*, Cairo, 3-5 September 1997, Consolidated Summary, p. 8.

18 Cf. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, US Helsinki Commission, *Hearing: The Future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation*, 23 July 2009.

Clearly, the time has not been ripe for such proposals, and the situation in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East does not give much cause for hope at present. Consequently, the dialogue in the OSCE has focused on achievable results, on practical proposals for co-operation, and access to some categories of OSCE work, mostly as observers.

On the other hand, the Mediterranean (and Asian) Partners take a lively interest in discussions that take place within the OSCE on the European security architecture. In fact, on such occasions, and in particular during the discussions in the late 90s that led up to the 1999 Charter for European Security and the so-called Corfu Process, which was initiated in 2008 by Russian suggestions to rethink European security arrangements, the Partner States have been fairly vocal in wishing to be involved. Their interest is twofold: to keep informed of the content of the discussions, and to contribute to them. It is worth adding that while the Corfu Process is ongoing and it is difficult to judge its likely outcome, the 1999 Charter itself arguably brought little new input into the Mediterranean dialogue. It recognized the interdependence between the security of the OSCE area and that of the Partners for Co-operation, as well as the commitment of both sides to the relationship and the dialogue that exists between them. But beyond this, references have been vague.¹⁹ What has, however, been proposed to the Partner States as a result of a discussion among participating States on threats to security and stability was support in their efforts to voluntarily implement OSCE principles and commitments and, more significantly, an invitation to participate as observers in OSCE decision-making bodies more frequently.²⁰ These very pragmatic

19 “Implementing and building on the Helsinki Document 1992 and the Budapest Document 1994, we will work more closely with the Partners for Co-operation to promote OSCE norms and principles. We welcome their wish to promote the realization of the Organization’s norms and principles, including the fundamental principle of resolving conflicts through peaceful means. To this end, we will invite the Partners for Co-operation on a more regular basis to increased participation in the work of the OSCE as the dialogue develops.

[...] The potential of the Contact Group and the Mediterranean seminars must be fully explored and exploited. Drawing on the Budapest mandate, the Permanent Council will examine the recommendations emerging from the Contact Group and the Mediterranean seminars. We will encourage the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation to draw on our expertise in setting up structures and mechanisms in the Mediterranean for early warning, preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention.” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Charter for European Security*, OSCE Istanbul Summit, 19 November 1999, reprinted in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2000*, Baden-Baden 2001, pp. 425-443, here: pp. 439-440.

20 “We will encourage them to voluntarily implement the principles and commitments of the OSCE and will co-operate with them in this as appropriate. As a first step towards increased dialogue, we will invite all our Partners for Co-operation to participate on a more frequent basis as observers in Permanent Council and Forum for Security Co-operation meetings.” OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, in: *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Eleventh Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 1 and 2 December 2003*, MC.DOC/1/03, Maas-tricht, 2 December 2003, pp. 1-10, here: p. 4, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/40533>.

principles underpin all of the ongoing work in the context of the Mediterranean dialogue.

Assessment of the Dialogue

The state of the Mediterranean dialogue is not only a reflection of the political situation in the Mediterranean region, but also of that of the OSCE. In particular, the OSCE has emerged as a lightly institutionalized, consensus-based and regional framework for discussing and responding to relevant security issues. It is important to qualify the notion of “relevance” here: Middle Eastern events are rarely if ever mentioned at official OSCE meetings (apart from the Parliamentary Assembly). The OSCE, unlike NATO and the EU, has largely remained a player only in its own – admittedly rather large – region, with no aspiration to play a more global role. While countries such as the US could imagine the OSCE playing an active role in places like Afghanistan (a participant in the OSCE’s Asian dialogue), others, such as the Russian Federation, have so far found this difficult to swallow. Indeed, the OSCE’s limited budget and the long list of security challenges that exist within the OSCE region itself suggest that activity outside the region might overstretch the Organization. Consequently, while the matter of activity outside the OSCE region has been on the agenda for some time, both in theoretical and practical terms, no consensus has yet been found.

Interestingly, one of the reasons for this, and something that also has a strong impact on the nature of the OSCE’s Mediterranean dialogue, is the fact that the EU member states, which form a caucus in the OSCE and by and large speak with one voice in it, consider it a key priority to prevent the OSCE’s activities from overlapping with those of the EU, including the Barcelona process/Union for the Mediterranean. Clearly, preventing overlap is an important consideration, but in this particular case, it considerably limits possibilities.

A further factor affecting the development of the Mediterranean dialogue is the position of those participating States who wish to prevent overlap with existing international negotiation frameworks and mediation efforts aimed at bringing the conflict in the Middle East to an end. There is also a recognition that putting such issues on the OSCE agenda might overstretch the Organization’s capabilities, potentially causing decision-making mechanisms to seize up, while serving only to further confuse regional players or merely giving them another opportunity to “forum shop”.

The most recent decade of the OSCE’s Mediterranean dialogue can be described as process-oriented. The process in question is that of finding common ground with the Partner Countries and identifying topics of interest and principles from the Organization’s *acquis* suitable for sharing with the

Mediterranean countries. Clearly, the process-oriented nature of the dialogue has been frustrating to some participants.

How do the Mediterranean Partners assess the usefulness of the dialogue with the OSCE? This is a rather difficult question to answer, as concise, quotable assessments do not exist. All of them certainly wish to take part in discussions on the European security framework or architecture. Apart from this, not all of them see the dialogue the same way, and their expectations differ. But their statements at seminars and conferences devoted to the dialogue hint at a degree of frustration, particularly with reference to access. Participating States have picked up on this and have recently made it possible for the MPCs to participate – mostly as observers, but occasionally also actively – in forums that were previously closed to them. This has made the Organization more relevant to the Partners. While MPCs welcome efforts to familiarize them with OSCE commitments in the hope that they will voluntarily implement some of them, as it allows the MPCs to tap into OSCE expertise on their topics of choice, they also consistently stress that they have not subscribed to OSCE principles. The other important matter raised informally by representatives of the Partner States is the confusing relationship of OSCE activities in the Mediterranean with those of other organizations; here there is particular concern regarding the EU, which is developing a dynamic relationship with the Mediterranean countries. To this little can be said, except to refer to the nature of the OSCE.

And how do OSCE participating States assess the usefulness of the dialogue between the OSCE and the Mediterranean states? The answer to this question is also rather difficult to provide. The recognition of the relevance of the Mediterranean to the security of OSCE States does not imply that all of the latter have the same set of concerns or interest in the dialogue. The most active participating States in this field are those from the northern shore of the Mediterranean, together with a number whose agenda is more or less global, such as the United States and Germany, and, finally, the states that chair the Mediterranean dialogue (Kazakhstan in 2009, Lithuania in 2010, and Ireland in 2011). Many of these states, however, have alternative channels for working with the states of the region, especially the EU. It appears likely that those active states find the nature of the dialogue not entirely satisfactory, and do not rely on it as a key forum for co-operation.

The OSCE also undergoes periodic phases of soul-searching with regard to the dialogue with its Partners for Co-operation. For example, in 2004, an Informal Group of Friends on the implementation of a relevant Permanent Council Decision was formed to explore possibilities to improve the dialogue with the Partners for Co-operation.²¹ The chair of this Informal Group pre-

21 Cf. OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 571/Corrected re-issue, Further Dialogue and Co-operation with the Partners for Co-operation and Exploring the Scope for Wider Sharing of OSCE Norms, Principles and Commitments with Others, PC.DEC/571/Corr.1, 2 December 2003; the Decision, which was intended to explore new avenues of co-

sented a report in November 2004, which took stock of the dialogue and proposed ways of enhancing it; the report was annexed to the 2004 Sofia Ministerial Council Document.²² The report clearly stated that “co-operation and interaction with Partner States should remain voluntary and be driven by demand. Co-operation and interaction could be pursued in the form of dialogue, activities, and where appropriate, concrete projects.”²³ A list of fields in which additional interaction could be identified followed and focused largely on opportunities for additional exchange with Partner States in areas such as anti-terrorism activities, border management issues, economic and environmental activities, trafficking in all forms, election observation, promoting tolerance, freedom of the media, and education and training. The report focuses on the immediately practicable and leaves some areas rather vague. Of course, it was itself written following consultations and discussions with participating States and Partner States and reflected the spirit of the times, which clearly did not support bold initiatives in this sphere.

Another such effort was the appointment in April 2009 by the Greek OSCE Chairmanship of two Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for the Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation, respectively. The Greek officials were given the task of reviewing the existing documents and mechanisms for dialogue as a basis for further consultation with the partners. However, they issued no new documents in the period up to the end of their mandates. The Kazakh Chairmanship of 2010 also appointed a Special Representative for the Asian Partners for Co-operation, but none was appointed for the Mediterranean Partners. As of December 2010, it was not clear whether the incoming Lithuanian Chairmanship would appoint a Special Representative for the Mediterranean Partners.

These various consultations and review processes have failed to clearly define what the two sides are gaining through the dialogue and what the expectations of each are in this context.

How Can the Dialogue Be Improved?

Several ways of enhancing the dialogue could be considered. One would be to improve steering mechanisms. Currently, the chairmanship of the Contact Group is automatically granted to the country next in line to assume the OSCE Chairmanship. Yet not every Chairmanship country has an interest or a stake in the Mediterranean region, and some are not well prepared to take

operation, led to the establishment of the Informal Group of Friends on the Implementation of Permanent Council Decision No. 571.

22 Report of the Chairperson of the Informal Group of Friends on the Implementation of Permanent Council Decision No. 571, The OSCE and its Partners for Co-operation, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Twelfth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 6 and 7 December 2004*, MC.DOC/1/04, Sofia, 7 December 2004, pp. 106-134.

23 Ibid., p. 109.

on this role. It might represent an improvement if the state selected to chair the dialogue were to have an interest in the region. On the other hand, however, the rotational principle provides the country that is due to assume the Chairmanship of the Organization as a whole with valuable experience, and is a good way of making sure that not only a handful of states with a stake in the region take an active role.

Alternatively, one could consider ensuring that the dialogue is a two-way street by giving an active role (possibly co-steering) on a rotating basis to a Partner State. This would make it clear that the future of the dialogue is a matter of common interest, and that the participating States and the Partner States are equals in this effort. However, given the existing differences between the Partner States, this could make progress more difficult, as well as providing ammunition to participating States that are sceptical about the Organization's external pursuits.

Another way to improve the OSCE's Mediterranean dialogue would be to make better use of the newly established Partnership Fund. Ideally, the fund would be based on contributions from participating States and Partner States alike. It would have to have a simple mechanism for releasing funds, and its aim would be to give visibility to the efforts of the Organization through funded activities, especially in the Partner countries. It is necessary to note, however, that the nature of diplomatic dialogue and the cautious approach taken by some Partner States do not lend themselves easily to projects and activities involving public exposure and visibility.

In light of this, a further means of improving the dialogue might be to use channels other than the diplomatic. The parliamentary dimension is an obvious candidate in this regard. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is reasonably active in the Mediterranean, and has been the driving force behind a number of initiatives. It must be noted that the PA, to which the principle of consensus does not apply, does not limit itself in its debates and contacts to only the Partner States and is therefore able to discuss issues such as the Middle East peace process and the situation in Iraq. However, in contrast to the parliamentary assemblies of other international organizations, the OSCE PA has limited powers within the Organization, and its influence on the inter-governmental bodies of the OSCE such as the Permanent Council and its agenda is limited. Furthermore, as Andreas Nothelle reports, the national parliamentarians who sit in the PA do not always agree on the OSCE's engagement with the Mediterranean states, as "the strong emphasis placed by some on improving relations with the Islamic world was criticized by others, although a number of delegations saw this as balancing the PA's high-profile activities on the topic of anti-Semitism, which were felt by some partners to

focus too strongly on one side of the tolerance debate.”²⁴ Thus, while pursuing the parliamentary channel is worthwhile, it may not be sufficient.

An additional way to move the dialogue forward could be via co-operation with the civil societies of the Mediterranean Partners, or, to be more precise, with NGOs, via a number of mechanisms developed by the Organization. This would help spread the word about the OSCE and its work beyond diplomatic circles, and reach out to activists who could refer in their work to the Organization’s *acquis* and experience. However, there are clear limits to how far such involvement might go: The civil societies of most of the Mediterranean Partner States are not well developed, and at least some of them are likely to keep the process under strict control.

The issue of broadening the participation of states in the Mediterranean dialogue has been mentioned above. The states from the region whose possible inclusion has been mentioned are Lebanon, Syria, and Libya. The case of the Palestinian Authority, which has applied for partner status, is also receiving considerable attention. As a representative of the Greek Chairmanship stated at the July 2009 hearing of the US Helsinki Commission: “At this particular moment, expanding membership of OSCE Mediterranean Partnership, especially the case of the Palestinian Authority is not simply to add new countries, but to expand a paradigm of confidence building and conflict resolution. Now it is more necessary than ever.”²⁵ The expansion of the geographic scope of the Partnership may enliven and empower the Partner States and their agenda.

However, a number of participating States have indicated that the inclusion of any further states in the dialogue would first have to be carefully considered and discussed by all existing Partner States (with Israel being particularly relevant in this instance). They warn that the dialogue may become gridlocked by such a development. Expansion of the group in the short term thus appears unlikely. Even US Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Hastings, who has strongly advanced the idea of expanding the OSCE’s Mediterranean dialogue, acknowledges that this should take place “following normalization of regional relations and other reforms”.²⁶

Finally, improved co-operation and co-ordination with other international organizations that also have frameworks for dialogue or co-operation with the Mediterranean region could enhance the quality of debate in the OSCE. The OSCE has much to offer the region in terms of experience with a co-operative and comprehensive approach to security, regional co-operation,

24 Andreas Nothelle, The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly – Driving Reform, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook* 2006, Baden-Baden 2007, pp. 347-373, here: p. 354.

25 Sotiris Roussos, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, at the US Helsinki Commission’s Hearing on the Future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, cited above (Note 18).

26 Alex Johnson/Lale Mamaux, *U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairman Alcee L. Hastings visits OSCE Mediterranean Partners to advance co-operation*, 31 December 2008, at: <http://www.csce.gov>.

and confidence-building measures, but it has limited means and clout. Enhancing the OSCE's current co-operation with other organizations may provide a means of overcoming these two limitations. It may also help to address the concerns of representatives of the Mediterranean Partners, some of whom have expressed confusion at the various initiatives and their possibilities. But here too, there may be limits to co-ordination efforts imposed by different memberships, organizational cultures, as well as the make-up and scope of the dialogues.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a dearth of ideas on how to adapt and improve the OSCE's Mediterranean dialogue. OSCE participating States appear to be aware of the need to review possibilities to improve dialogue with Partner States. However, the consulting processes aimed at doing just that have not brought visionary changes to the relationship.

The key question, however, is why there has been so little progress on making the Mediterranean dialogue dynamic and relevant. This is likely to be a result of several factors. The first is that the current scope of the dialogue represents the "common denominator" of the participating States. The current situation reflects what is possible to achieve in a consensus-based organization encompassing a large number of states with differing interests. The state of the dialogue suits an organization that is weak in structure and funds and heavy in agenda. The second is that this is what has been possible to achieve given the political situation in the Mediterranean – not only in view of the conflict in the Middle East, but also the domestic and political situations in each of the Partner States. Quite clearly, none of the participants, neither among the participating States nor the Partners, is ready to go beyond dialogue mode. No dramatic change or improvement of the relationship between the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partners can be foreseen. At the same time, it should be noted that efforts are being undertaken to make the dialogue more effective and more relevant, to allow more access to the Partner States, and to find a *modus operandi* that would allow them to benefit more from the OSCE experience.

But the OSCE should not be overlooked: In a dialogue mode, with no strings or preconditions attached, focusing on interesting the Mediterranean Partner States in its *acquis* and explaining the functioning of a co-operative security framework with a comprehensive understanding of security, it has its role to play in the region. Although the experience of working through a regional, inclusive, and comprehensive organization based on consensus and the understanding that states are accountable to each other and to their citizens may not have a visible and immediate impact, it surely is worth pursuing. And by opening up a venue which allows its Mediterranean Partners to

follow and contribute to weekly exchanges, discussions, deliberations, and decisions on both specific and general aspects of European security, the OSCE participating States have responded to the wishes of those states for more information and input.