

Mario Sica¹

The New Mediterranean Dimension of the OSCE

From Helsinki 1975 to Budapest 1994

The interest of the CSCE/OSCE in the Mediterranean area dates back to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. The Act included a Declaration on the Mediterranean establishing a specific Mediterranean dimension. The Declaration proclaimed the principle of indivisibility of security in Europe and in the Mediterranean and the objective of a balanced development of cooperation in the two areas. To this end, a contribution by the Mediterranean countries to specific CSCE activities of mutual interest was foreseen.

Since then and up to the 1990 Paris Summit the Euro-Mediterranean relationship was confirmed on many occasions in the CSCE process, along with the need to intensify contacts and cooperation between the two areas.

Nevertheless, the profound changes of 1989-90 took their toll on the Euro-Mediterranean relationship. The pressing problems of transition caused the CSCE to concentrate on crises on the European continent. Most of these crises involved successor states of the former USSR, thereby attracting attention towards the easternmost parts of Europe and even the Asian regions. The increasing institutionalization of the CSCE was also designed to respond to these crises. All these developments tended to increase the Central and Eastern European dimension of the CSCE, while the Mediterranean one remained peripheral.

The Helsinki Document 1992² laid the foundations of a widened dialogue with the Mediterranean states through their participation in the CSCE Review Conferences, the intensification of contacts and the exchange of information. Some of the non-participating Mediterranean countries were showing a concrete interest in being more closely associated with the work of the CSCE, along with the intention to share, at least to a certain extent, its principles and values.

Building on these developments, the Rome Ministerial Council of 1993, with the statements of the Foreign Ministers of five of these countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia), represented a turning point towards a

1 Ambassador, Head of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE. This article reflects the personal views of the author.

2 Cf. CSCE Helsinki Document 1992: The Challenges of Change, Helsinki, 10 July 1992, in: Arie Bloed (Ed.), *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993*, Dordrecht/Boston/London 1993, pp. 701-777, esp. Chapter IV, para. 7 and 8 (p. 731), and Chapter X (p. 764).

qualitatively different dialogue between the CSCE and the "non-participating Mediterranean States".

During 1994 the Italian Chairmanship of the CSCE further developed the Rome conclusions by promoting a decision, formally taken in the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO; now: Senior Council) on 3 March 1994³, setting out the specific forms and modalities of a possible contribution by the five Mediterranean countries to the activities of the CSCE.

The Italian Chair also called a meeting in Vienna of the CSCE Troika and the five countries at the level of Senior Officials. The meeting resulted in an invitation being addressed by the CSCE to the five countries to participate in the Budapest Review Conference. Their participation in turn gave these countries an opportunity to voice their expectations concerning the evolution of the CSCE and their relationship with it.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Martino also chaired an unprecedented meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the five Mediterranean countries and of the CSCE Troika States, on the sidelines of the Budapest Summit. The meeting discussed further developments of the Mediterranean dimension of the CSCE, which the CSCE Troika could then propose for inclusion among the Budapest Summit Decisions. Ministers agreed that among the issues to be discussed in the CSCE-Mediterranean dialogue, priority should be given to the security issues. Following a reference to the CSCE in the recent agreement between Israel and Jordan, attention was drawn to the possibility of making use of some elements of the CSCE/OSCE experience (for instance the confidence-building measures) also for disputes or conflict situations in the Mediterranean area. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres proposed to enlarge the dialogue to include Jordan and even, in forms to be agreed, the Palestinians.

The 1994 Budapest Summit and its Aftermath

After prolonged discussions and negotiations at the Review Conference, the Budapest Summit (5-6 December 1994) took a specific decision on the strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean.

This decision⁴ included a series of concrete measures. An informal contact group was established in Vienna in the framework of the Permanent Council. The group was to meet periodically to carry out a dialogue with the five Mediterranean States with a view to facilitating the exchange of information

³ CSCE, 25th Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials, Journal No. 2, Decision 5c, pp. 3-4.

⁴ CSCE Budapest Document 1994, Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era, in: Helsinki Monitor 1/1995, pp. 79-106, here: Chapter X, pp- 104-105.

of mutual interest and the elaboration of ideas. Furthermore, it was decided in Budapest that a seminar on the CSCE experience in confidence-building measures would be organized in 1995 in Egypt, and that other seminars on topics of mutual interest could be organized in the future. The practice of high-level (Ministerial) consultations between the CSCE Troika, including the Secretary General, and the Mediterranean States was officially endorsed. Finally, representatives of the five States could be invited to meetings of the Permanent Council solely devoted to Mediterranean questions, or to Senior Council meetings dealing also with those questions. The same could be done in the meetings of the Forum for Security Cooperation.

The various points of the Budapest Decision have all been implemented. The *contact group* has met approximately once every two months during 1995 under the chairmanship of Italy as member of the OSCE Troika, representing the Chairman-in-Office.

The first meetings dealt essentially with organizational matters, namely the preparation and follow-up of the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the OSCE Troika and of the five States, and the agenda and preparations of the Cairo Seminar on "The OSCE Experience in the Field of Confidence-Building" (26-28 September 1995). Soon, however, the contact group agenda became more structured. The first regular item became an information on an aspect of the life of the OSCE, in the form of a briefing given by the Secretary General or other OSCE dignitary. Furthermore, points of substance - such as "Security Risks in the Mediterranean" and "The Emerging Security Model and the Mediterranean" - were discussed. Points of view were exchanged and valuable proposals and recommendations presented, so that the contact group became more and more an active instrument of political dialogue with the Mediterranean countries.

Among the proposals submitted to the contact group, the "Preliminary Ideas on Future Cooperation between the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners" submitted by Egypt stand out for their comprehensive and far-reaching nature. They include such areas as political cooperation, improved knowledge of the OSCE, a contribution to ongoing OSCE work on the Security Model for Europe for the 21st Century, economic cooperation, migration, disarmament and arms control, terrorism and organized crime, the environment, science and technology.

It was on the sidelines of the contact group activities and of this enhanced political dialogue that the question of a more positive and accurate *nomenclature* (instead of "non-participating Mediterranean States") was raised. This led to a recent decision by the Permanent Council to call the five States "Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation" (MPC), without altering their status within the OSCE.

A *meeting at Ministerial level* between the OSCE Troika and the Five took place on 13 July 1995. It was preceded by the preparation at expert level in Vienna of an "intelligent agenda" based on a discussion of the political and security situation in the Mediterranean and in the OSCE area and initiatives both by the OSCE and the Mediterranean States in some areas or key fields, as well as of a cooperation program between the OSCE and these States, including the development of principles, rules and mechanisms applicable among these States. The Ministerial meeting was well attended and the exchange of views which it produced further enhanced the dialogue.

Among other matters, Ministers reviewed preparations for the *Seminar* to be held *in Cairo* (according to the Budapest Decision) from 26-28 September 1995 on "The OSCE Experience in the Field of Confidence-Building". The Seminar demonstrated the usefulness of the "OSCE model" in the field of security and, at the same time, the need to respect the specificity of the region. As the Mediterranean States pointed out, there is a profound difference between the East-West relationship in the Cold War years and the situation on the Southern rim of the Mediterranean, characterized by acute military imbalances, geo-political fragmentation and consequent bilateral tensions and absence of dialogue, as well as cultural and religious diversity. This is why, rather than attempting to transpose directly the OSCE experience and methods, new solutions specifically adapted to the Mediterranean context should be worked out.

To this end, Israel has proposed the establishment of a "Joint Centre of Mediterranean Defence Studies", as well as an Economic and Technological Community in the Mediterranean.

Another initiative resulting from the Ministerial meeting was the *Information Visit to Vienna for Senior Officials* of the five States, which was organized from 8-10 November 1995. The Senior Officials were briefed at the OSCE Secretariat on the various aspects of the life and activities of the Organization. On this occasion a *Special Meeting of the Permanent Council* was organized on 8 November, to deal with Mediterranean issues (again, in compliance with an aspect of the Budapest Decision). The meeting dealt with proposals for future cooperation between the OSCE and the five States. At the meeting, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia presented a "non paper" suggesting a study on terrorism, and even a declaration on terrorism to be adopted at the upcoming Budapest Ministerial Council. These suggestions are presently being examined in the contact group with a view to the Lisbon Summit.

Prospects

In the last two years the dialogue and cooperation between the OSCE as a whole and the Mediterranean countries have been picking up speed. Further improvements can be made through a closer connection of the contact group with general OSCE activities, as well as through more regular reports by the chairman of the group to the Permanent Council. Much will depend on whether it will be possible for the contact group to work out a meaningful contribution to the ongoing OSCE work on the Security Model, in the perspective of the 1996 Lisbon Summit.

It is also conceivable that in the future the dialogue may extend to Jordan and the Palestinians, as proposed by Israel (Jordan already hinted at its interest in joining it), and, depending on developments in the Middle East, to other states as well. To some extent this may tend to shift the focus of the relationship from North Africa to the Middle East.

Nevertheless, further developments of the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE will not be supported by those states (notably the US, but some Northern European states as well) which still regard the OSCE as predominantly an East-West affair and security in the OSCE area as being substantially menaced by East-West risks and challenges. The OSCE has also to find its modalities of action concerning the Mediterranean dimension. Clearly the "pedagogical role" of the OSCE towards the MPCs - that is, the presentation of the OSCE experience so that the MPCs can develop similar principles, rules, mechanisms and measures in their own area - cannot exhaust the dialogue: at the same time the OSCE has to take into account the need for close coordination of its own Mediterranean dimension with the activities carried out in other, more operational fora, such as the European Union's Forum for the Mediterranean (the "Barcelona process").

In my opinion, besides the "pedagogical role" of the OSCE, the two avenues that can usefully be pursued in the OSCE framework are, on one hand, the *definition of common principles* that could advance the progress of the MPCs towards OSCE values and standards; and, on the other hand, conceptual work leading to *greater political awareness* of the importance and root causes of problems - such as organized crime, terrorism and illegal migration - which affect the stability and security of both the MPCs and the OSCE area.