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Egypt's View on Co-operation with the OSCE

The OSCE Perspective for Mediterranean Security and Co-operation

Whereas the Mediterranean dimension of European security appears to us - from the south - to fall at the tail end of the European security agenda, the European dimension of Mediterranean security is to us a prime concern of high priority. The following are some points that delineate a picture of Egypt's interests and sources of concern.

1. Interdependence between European and Mediterranean security, as evident from an analysis of the relevant European literature, has originated from feelings of doubt and suspicion vis-à-vis most of what comes from the south. In Europe it has become commonly accepted that arrivals from the south are most likely illegal immigrants who circumvent entry and residency laws in their avid quest for an employment opportunity. Much of organized crime, including smuggling rings in Europe, is perceived to be the work of Mediterranean elements. When terrorism and violence strike a European city suspicion first looms around persons of Mediterranean origins. Traditional European images of the communist enemy have even disappeared, only to be readily replaced by Islam as the arch enemy. Mongers of such falsified images pretend to have forgotten that Europe has had the greatest share of responsibility for the brain-drain suffered by South and East Mediterranean states, that European nationals were caught red-handed south and east of the Mediterranean and convicted for smuggling industrial waste and foodstuffs of expired validity, even infected with germs causing fatal diseases. They forgot that terrorism has no nationality, homeland or religion and that violence is the favourite language of the desperate - be they of Arabic, Spanish, English or any other tongue. The traders of those venomous ideas ignore the significance of the image of Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khatib's journey from Medina to Jerusalem to receive the keys of that Holy City and his tactful apology for declining the priest's invitation to perform the prayers inside the church so that this might not later embolden his followers to encroach upon its sanctity. By so doing, Caliph Omar set an example of consideration towards the feelings of Christians.

2. In September 1974 - after an Egyptian initiative - the Council of the Arab League issued a resolution supporting the idea of declaring the Middle East a nuclear-free zone. In December of the same year, Egypt and Iran cosponsored a draft resolution to this effect at the UN General Assembly. This initiative has enjoyed renewed UN support every year. In 1990, President

Mubarak launched a fresh initiative, with the support of all Arab parties, to free the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction. Meanwhile, all Middle Eastern and Mediterranean basin states except for one have joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Yet when security organizations operating in the European arena deal with the issue of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction the fingers of accusation point to Arab states. A greater portion of transparency, frankness, justice and non-selectivity, however, is a precondition for the maintenance of common security.

3. Bilateral, tripartite, quadripartite and collective military arrangements are unilaterally embarked upon by European countries in the Mediterranean basin. Despite reiterations of the strategic interdependence between Europe and the Mediterranean states, many questions still linger regarding the terms of reference of such arrangements, the conditions of their implementation and the extent to which they respect principles of international law and respond to the requirements and viewpoints of Mediterranean states.

4. Unilateral attempts to achieve absolute security - attainable only in fiction - constitutes an unyielding recipe for the outbreak of violence and hostilities. What is more realistically achievable - and herein lies the gist of the experience of security and co-operation in Europe - is reciprocal and common security. To this end we know but one path: just peace.

The OSCE, which has repeatedly underlined in its documents the importance of Mediterranean stability to European security, is called upon to consider the enhancement of its participation in efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

5. Since lasting peace is indivisible, prosperity must be shared for it to last. Hence, exploring the ways and means to reduce disparities in economic and social development in the Euro-Mediterranean sphere is imperative for enhancing mutual and common security.

6. To survive and thrive, a cultural or social system should stem from the environment in which it is set up; otherwise, it is doomed. Imported formulae for social relationships cannot last. Respect for cultural specificities should urge us to exert our every effort to pin down our differences and overcome their consequences through an intensification of confidence-building measures of cultural nature.

7. Restrictions imposed on the transfer of sensitive technology under the pretext of maintaining security should not turn into insurmountable barriers in the face of Mediterranean states. These restrictions should not prevent them from gaining the facilitated access to technology that is necessary for carrying on with their economic and social development. In addition, agencies set up and arrangements concluded in the realm of the European weapons industry should not obstruct Mediterranean states from acquiring those

weapons systems needed for safeguarding their national security with due respect to the notion of military sufficiency.

8. The preservation and protection of the natural environment should not find expression in a new division of labour whereby environment polluting industries are moved from industrialized nations to their Third World counterparts in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. We welcome OSCE traditional concern with environmental protection as a source of assistance to us in introducing methods of technological innovation in harmony with the requisites of environmental protection. On the other hand, it has to be emphasized that environmental concerns should not be used as a pretext for erecting protectionist barriers by setting up excessively high environmental standards.

Possibilities of Applying the OSCE Experience in the Mediterranean

1. The Mediterranean cannot be viewed as a distinct security zone in its own right. This is particularly true when the criteria of security as propagated by the OSCE are applied: comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible. Until recently, the Mediterranean had been perceived as an extension of other security zones, namely Europe, within the context of the East-West confrontation, and the Middle East with the Arab-Israeli conflict and super powers rivalries both in mind.

From the perspective of the Security Model for the Twenty-first Century, the geostrategic significance of the Mediterranean certainly extends eastwards and southwards to include the Gulf, the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Even with the restricted definition of the Mediterranean as a merely geographic feature, any talk about the implications of interdependence between Europe and the Mediterranean will have to take into consideration the perceptions, viewpoints and concerns of powers in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa that do not figure on the list of Mediterranean partners for co-operation (MPC). Until a common and precise understanding of this elementary issue is agreed upon, question marks will remain concerning the significance, value and purpose of the relationship between the OSCE and its MPC.

2. Having repeatedly cautioned against the disregard of strategic and cultural specificities of our part of the world, I will have to dwell for a while on this topic in the hope of coming to agreed terms with the reader.

a) I beg to differ with any reference to the diversities with which the OSCE is presently teeming. For most of the time in which the CSCE process has been going on, the big partner to the east and original author of the process itself was the Soviet Union, governed from Moscow, which despite its own great history and distinctive personality shared many features with other Orthodox

Slavic cities of Europe. The Iron Curtain covered such different and distant lands and peoples as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan that later broke apart in the course of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I dare claim that if there had not been the element of uniformity at that time and if the beginning of the CSCE process had been postponed until today, the same results would have been hardly achievable.

b) The CSCE process has been evolving in the shadow of certain concepts such as strategic stability, mutual deterrence and military sufficiency. Those concepts were coined and fine tuned during the sixties and seventies by powers carrying an extensive variety of nuclear weapons systems in their respective arsenals. They have no or very little relevance to us in an Eastern Mediterranean characterized by a flagrant imbalance in the distribution of military power.

c) The European theatre in the seventies was dominated by the interaction of bloc politics where a leading power bestowed its nuclear and security umbrella on its satellite bloc members and regulated their intra- and interaction, whereas in our region each individual country has its own security agenda.

d) In spite of rivalries and ideological confrontation, there was no occupation of territories by force nor any existing state of belligerency between CSCE partners. Both ailments are still plaguing us in the Middle East.

e) Strategic balances of power south and east of the Mediterranean are extremely complicated. They overlap and extend far beyond regional borders as conventionally agreed upon. To illustrate this we will have to consider answering questions like these: would the capabilities of a country like Syria be assessed in relation to those of Israel, Turkey or Iraq? What would the implications and requirements in terms of power capabilities of the history long pan-African responsibilities of a country like Egypt be? To what extent would tensions in the Indian sub-continent be reflected in power relations within the Middle East? What really is the impact on Mediterranean security of the Euro-Asian security relationships strongly emphasized in recent years after the emergence of the PfP that has brought NATO to the borders of China and the advent of a network of new pipelines transporting Central Asian oil and gas to the Mediterranean shores?

f) The region is a theatre of global competing interests owing to its geographical location, natural resources and religious holy symbols which it is rich with. This adds to the complexity of the region's security status.

g) While the two blocs of the CSCE belonged to the same Western civilization, in this part of the world, the existence of a multitude of cultural categorizations even within the same civilization has a serious bearing on very significant issues like respect for human rights and the quality of governance. The perception of human rights in some societies where fundamentalism is the code of life is at variance with its perception in a standard European soci-

ety and even in some other Mediterranean societies. The rule of law and conventional democratic practices would seem at a total loss in societies where nomadic life predominates and the chief of the tribe incarnates the law. Specificities of the Mediterranean such as these render it very difficult and extremely dangerous to attempt automatically to transplant OSCE experience to the Middle East under the prevailing conditions.

Future Co-operation with the OSCE

1. Until now it has been the norm in our relationship with the Organization for it to attempt to apply to us the whole set of concepts and lessons drawn from its experience. This approach ignores the gradual, accumulative perfection acquired through the performance of the CSCE during more than twenty years. It fully disregards the radical differences existing between the Europe of the seventies and the Mediterranean countries of the nineties. However, we see the importance of an adaptation process in which we agree together on concepts and measures that could selectively be chosen for test application by the Mediterranean partners for co-operation.

2. The centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Middle East politics has never prompted us to try to involve the OSCE in the quest for its settlement. We clearly see the limits of the Organization as well as the conditions for the success of the peace process. But we want the OSCE to come close enough to Middle Eastern realities to realize the inhibitions that conflict puts on the ability of the parties to go along with certain concepts and measures familiar to the Organization.

3. Greater participation of the Mediterranean partners in the formulation of the Security Model was repeatedly called for. Egypt vehemently supports this call and requests the immediate implementation of the Budapest and Lisbon Summit resolutions to the effect of giving the MPC access to the bodies of the Organization, at least with regard to discussions relating to the Mediterranean dimension of the Security Model. Greater access has already been granted to Japan, allegedly as a prize for a generous financial contribution. Until this is a routine practice that allows the putting to use of the opportunities made possible to us by our present status any talk about reviewing or upgrading the status of the MPC will have no meaning.

4. Political and security interdependence between Europe and Mediterranean countries are being explored and debated in several fora: the Barcelona Process involving twelve Mediterranean partners with the EU, NATO and the WEU. To avoid redundancy and mistrust and proceed in line with the requirements of the Security Model for co-ordination with other security organizations, greater transparency is needed. We should jointly investigate the

value and feasibility of a meeting on the Mediterranean dimension of the European Security Model with the participation and active contribution of the representatives of the MPC.

5. Co-operation between the MPC and the Organization is bound to be a long and evolving process that requires much interaction, cross fertilization and mutual education. Involving the MPC in field activities of the OSCE will certainly be of great value. The recent experience in which Mediterranean countries took part in the monitoring of the electoral process in Bosnia and Herzegovina was extremely beneficial.

6. Accordingly, Egypt submitted a concept paper to the Organization highlighting the objectives, principles, challenges and fields of co-operation between the OSCE and the Mediterranean partners for co-operation. In it we proposed specific steps such as:

- seminars dealing with cultural confidence-building measures;
- workshops aimed at activating economic, scientific and technological co-operation;
- joint efforts to protect the environment;
- exchange of information on the promotion of tourism;
- establishing an integrated information network on the conditions of labour;
- exchange of information on combating terrorism and other interrelated phenomena such as organized crime; and
- exchange of experiences in the fields of peaceful settlement of disputes and building civil societies.