

REGIONAL SECURITY DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION IN THE SOUTH: EXPLORING THE NEGLECTED DIMENSION OF BARCELONA

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Executive Summary

This study probes the question of regional security dialogue and cooperation among the Southern partners of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It includes a conceptual discussion of the notion of regional security cooperation, assessments of past experiences with regional dialogue in the Mediterranean and Middle East; an appraisal – on the basis of interviews carried out with NGO activists and policy makers – of current thinking on this issue and developments on the ground; and future prospects for regional dialogue and cooperation among these states, including some recommendations for the EU.

The study benefits from a unique perspective which is a function of the collaboration between two research institutes in the South – in Morocco and in Israel. Because Israel is at the heart of some of the strongest opposition to regional cooperative efforts in the Arab states, this collaboration is most significant. Political and time constraints led to a focus on interviewing in Maghreb states and Israel. While not exhaustive, the interviews carried out were clearly indicative of important trends that deserve to be highlighted.

The working assumption of the study is that lack of progress on regional security cooperation among the Southern partners in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to date cannot simply be summed up as the result of the negative impact of unresolved conflicts in the South – and most importantly, the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The authors advocate thinking about *conflict/tensions*, and *cooperation/CBMs* not as two distinct domains that must be advanced sequentially (i.e. first deal with conflicts, then look to advance confidence and cooperation), but rather as interrelated phenomena. Even when there is tension and conflict, there are very likely common interests that can be built upon, and there is a need to explore attitudes toward the value of such cooperation.

In the first half of the study, two case studies of official attempts to promote regional dialogue and cooperation in the past decade and a half are examined: among the Maghreb states, and in the context of the multilateral talks initiated as part of the Madrid peace process in the early 1990s. Focus is on the reasons for the resistance and other obstacles that hindered these efforts, as well as the conditions for any successes that were registered. In the second half of the study, focus turns to the current situation, assessed on the basis of interviews carried out with officials and non-officials in the Maghreb and in Israel during the months January to May 2006.

When trying to make sense of the multilateral talks of the early 1990s, the widespread acceptance of the fact that the multilaterals depended for their existence on progress in bilateral relations has kept other important dynamics (both positive and negative) hidden from view. Challenging the “bilateral-multilateral construct of dependence” is important for opening a space for multilateral regional dialogue that operates on its own logic, and for clarifying that in certain conditions such dialogue can and should be pursued independently, or in parallel with bilateral conflict management.

The question of how security interests are defined can also not be left to assumption but must be discussed candidly among parties to regional dialogue. The topics of discussion for regional cooperative dialogue must resonate with the participants – they must feel that they have something tangible to gain, in a reasonable time frame.

In the Maghreb, the importance of the 5+5 Dialogue as a regional forum of dialogue, cooperation and global reflection is stressed. Still, this Dialogue is plagued by problems: misunderstandings and divergent conceptions regarding desired relations between the Maghreb countries and other parts of the world has been an obstacle, as have national egoism and rivalries between leaders. The Maghreb is a vulnerable space that needs to be reorganised socially, politically and economically. The future of this region is threatened by dangers to its internal politics, and at the regional level, destabilization is fed by long-standing unresolved conflicts – particularly the question of “Western Sahara.”

This situation not only distances the Maghreb Union ideal, but also encourages the emergence of extremist and radical forms of opposition. Official discourses remain linked to an ancestral logic – living in the shadows of the past as a source of inspiration for the future. Shared development and responsibility are not a question of style but rather a *sine qua non* condition for any future dialogue. Security is also closely linked to good governance.

With regard to current trends and thinking, the thoughts and ideas of experts and intellectuals on the idea of regional security cooperation in the South at the conceptual level were tapped, and data on cooperative initiatives that are already in place (or that are being contemplated) were collected.

In the Maghreb, the results of the interviews relate more to the conceptual level than to concrete programs for cooperation. Major emphasis is on dynamics in the Maghreb and the Arab Maghreb Union, with some reference to the question of Israel's integration in the Mediterranean. The idea of regional security cooperation in the Mediterranean is in the main viewed favorably, as something that should take place on the basis of mutual respect among states at both governmental and popular levels.

Obstacles to progress regard the absence of democracy, violation of human rights, and corruption in Southern states; leaders who want to remain in power even at the expense of their populations' welfare; lack of a clear and mutual vision about the future in these states; and persistent conflict between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara.

Maintaining security and implementing projects of cooperation and development in this region depend on the final resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. Economic issues are also viewed as key for getting such cooperation going; there is a need to work on these issues, in order to get to social and security issues. There is a need to start at the level of civil society and not wait until all political issues are solved, or leave things to the level of states and politicians. Much emphasis was placed on the issue of improving the internal situation in Arab states, and democratic reform was noted as an essential precondition for civil society to assume the important role that it needs to play in regional cooperative dynamics.

As for cooperation with Israel, Israel is recognized as a reality in the region that cannot be denied or reversed, and some agreed that Israel's integration in the region would be beneficial for regional peace and development as it is the most technologically and economically developed state. There does not seem to be an objection to cooperation with Israel, although it was made clear that Israel must fulfill certain preconditions.

In the Middle East, in-depth interviews were held with Israelis – officials and non-officials – that have an affinity to the issue of regional cooperation. Focus was on the concrete initiatives that are already in place, and that could be contemplated down the road. All results were focused on the question of Israel engaging in cooperative dialogue with its neighbors.

Potential areas for cooperation on soft security issues include fire-fighting, emergency and rescue operations, infectious diseases, and the spread of locusts (North from Africa). Beyond their direct security implications, these are issues that if left unattended have the potential of becoming even more serious security concerns. There is a fair degree of potential for cooperation between Israel and Jordan at the state-to-state level, and to a lesser extent with regard to the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian triangle. These venues are significant because of the geographical proximity that creates a sense of interdependence and strong common interest in a number of areas. There are also opportunities for wider regional cooperation, and some official-level initiatives have continued on from the early 1990s. There is no doubt room for more activity at the unofficial level of civil society. It is a question of taking the initiative and setting up the necessary frameworks.

When thinking about regional dialogue and cooperation, the grounds for pessimism are easily conjured up and propagated. However, the most commonly stated reason for pessimism – the negative effect of unresolved conflicts, most importantly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – needs to be seriously reassessed. While clearly not conducive to cooperative dialogue, these conflicts should not be allowed to serve as a reason not to attempt to pursue such dialogue. Other real constraints to progress – such as different conceptions of “win-win”, or internal problems in some of the states and the need to strengthen civil society – need more attention. The grounds for optimism build on the conceptual logic of win-win efforts, past (albeit limited) successes, and some interesting, if very initial, developments on the ground today.

We propose that it is in the interest of the EU to advance regional relations in the South. First, a major complaint against the partnership that comes from the direction of the Southern states is that of asymmetry – the North is a united entity, whereas the South is a collection of states that are not only not integrated, but are torn by some long-standing conflicts. Secondly, the conceptual logic of cooperation has it that once cooperation begins, it can thereafter have a pacifying effect on regional conflicts themselves. Finally, the Barcelona Process is the only remaining official venue where regional states are still meeting on a regular basis, and while there is much criticism of the effectiveness of the forum, there is a basic acceptance of its overall positive intention and nature. Every effort should be made to maintain and enhance the unique potential of this framework of dialogue. In the balance of pessimism and optimism, although there are many problems involved in the initiation of cooperative security dialogue, there are also some useful guidelines that can help in the pursuit of this goal.

Preface

In this study, we intend to probe the question of regional security dialogue and cooperation among the Southern partners of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which has so far been a neglected dimension of the Barcelona process. Our inquiry into this issue includes a conceptual discussion of the notion of regional security cooperation, assessments of past experiences with regional dialogue in the Mediterranean and Middle East; an appraisal – on the basis of interviews carried out with NGO activists and policy makers – of current thinking on this issue and developments on the ground; and future prospects for regional dialogue and cooperation among these states.

Based on an assessment of past and present trends, our aim is to see what can be done to begin to change attitudes and to make room for the initiation of regional security cooperation within the EMP. We examine the conceptual logic of such cooperation for the Southern Mediterranean partners, and look at the common interests that might be served thereby, in an attempt to carve out an approach that might be more readily acceptable. Beyond questions related to the regional parties themselves, we also examine where the EU stands on this issue: the role the EU has played in the past, and what its role can and should be in this regard in the future dynamics of the Barcelona process. As will become clear, our inquiry into these questions takes us beyond the confines of the Barcelona process itself, in geographical, temporal, and conceptual terms.

A methodological note is in order. We wish to clarify at the outset that with regard to interviewing, due to logistical (political) and time constraints, we were able to collect data from interviews carried out in three Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), and in Israel, on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. There is no doubt that the study would have benefited from additional interviews in more states in the South, and perhaps in Middle Eastern states beyond the Mediterranean.

However, while more input would have been (and would still be) useful, the study is qualitative, rather than quantitative in approach. The results of the interviews that were carried out, while not exhaustive, were most illuminating, and clearly indicative of important trends that deserve to be highlighted. Moreover, additional data gathered in the future can be assessed on the backdrop of the analysis presented here.

Finally, this study benefits from a unique perspective that is the result of the very collaboration between our two research institutes in the South – in Morocco and in Israel. And because Israel is at the heart of some of the strongest opposition to regional cooperative efforts in the Arab states, our collaboration is all the more significant. In a sense, the project itself is an experiment in cooperation – in trying to build a bridge between different (and sometimes competing) perspectives on regional issues, and exposing along the way important common ground. Clearly, differences in approach remain, but we have made an effort not to put them in the focus (and turn this into a “two perspectives” paper), but rather to stress the common ground.

Introduction

When considering the question of regional dialogue and cooperation among the Southern partners in the Barcelona process, we take as our starting point the formally stated agendas of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. These set forth two complementary dimensions of the partnership: the *bilateral* relations of the EU with each of its Southern partners, and the *regional* platform. As is well known, to date, bilateral activities have been the much more prominent feature of the Barcelona process. These have been carried out through the Association Agreements, with the more recently devised Neighborhood Policy designed to further enhance the bilateral EU-Southern Mediterranean underpinning. For its part, the regional dimension of the EMP is formally presented by the EU as one of the most innovative aspects of the partnership, and as a framework that is designed to support and complement the bilateral activities. And yet, while hailed in official EU documents as a unique and important aspect of the partnership, only a very small percentage of MEDA funds actually support regional activities; more importantly, in practice these activities have been extremely limited in scope.

The official EU sites make note of the fact that regional endeavors in the political-security realm (partnership-building measures) have not advanced very far due to the situation in the Middle East peace process.¹ Over the years, this explanation has gained ground and we find that many readily accept the conclusion that regional dialogue and cooperation simply cannot be broached in the Southern Mediterranean (and in the wider Middle East) until significant movement has been made in bringing to a resolution the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

An initial question we pose in this study regards the status of this commonly provided explanation. While all sides clearly have a strong interest in seeing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolved, its direct impact on the real ability to advance regional cooperation is questionable. Past experience shows that there are areas where cooperation has been at least partially successful, even though this conflict remains unresolved. Moreover, a look at some of the past attempts to push forward regional initiatives in the South (both with the inclusion of Israel and without) reveal that there are additional factors that have negatively impacted on prospects for regional cooperation that are not at all connected to this conflict. But, due to the propensity to cite the more readily accepted explanations, these constraints have not been brought to the fore.

In fact, our working assumption is that lack of progress on regional security cooperation among the Southern partners in the Euro Mediterranean Partnership to date cannot simply be summed up as the result of the negative impact of unresolved conflicts in the South – and most importantly, the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The purpose of this inquiry is to gain better insight into how this issue has been handled in the past, and how it is perceived today in the South. Our focus is on the potential value that is attributed to cooperative efforts, the actual constraints involved, and future possibilities.

While the starting point of our study is regional cooperation (or, primarily, the lack thereof) in the framework of the Barcelona process, when probing the range of questions that we set forth, we found it helpful to considerably broaden our scope – both conceptually and empirically. In conceptual terms, we take a closer look at each of the elements included in the notion “regional security cooperation” in order to gain greater insight into the subject of inquiry through a discussion of prevailing theoretical perspectives. In empirical terms – when assessing past experience with regional cooperation, and current developments – we take a broad and inclusive, rather than narrow and exclusive perspective on such initiatives. The aim of the broadened spectrum is to enable us to gather more data with regard to past, existing, and potential configurations of cooperation – whether official or non-official, and in different geographical groupings.

Beginning with the notion of “security”, we find that this is a contested concept in the literature on international relations. While it is generally accepted that security refers to the absence of threats to state survival, there is less agreement over what survival is taken to mean, or what constitutes a threat to such survival. What is the major concern for states: their physical survival, survival as a political entity, their independent identity and functional integrity, or their ability to prevent external intervention in their affairs? Does security relate to military threats only, or should the concept be expanded to include reference to additional threats as well – whether political, economic, societal or environmental? Each kind of threat and understanding of survival also elicits a different perception on how such threats should be confronted – or, how security might best be ensured.

These are clearly not simple or straightforward issues – definitions change according to different conceptual premises, and also can evolve over time as a function of developments in the international arena. Thus when we consider security, or regional security, it is essential to clarify what we mean. According to the realist view, international relations are a constant and continual struggle for power among states, meaning that war and conflict are perennial features of inter-state relations.² The neorealist approach shifts focus to the attributes and structure of the international system, characterized by a lack of central authority, better known as “anarchy”. In such a system, there is a high degree of uncertainty which breeds mutual lack of trust, encapsulated by the notion of the “security dilemma”.³ Misunderstanding of state intentions can lead to miscalculations that in turn can have dangerous consequences for states. Within this worldview, where insecurity is a constant feature of international politics, there is also not much room for cooperation, as there are no grounds for placing one’s trust or confidence in the benign intentions of the other side.

Following the end of the Cold War, other conceptual views began to gain ground as competing explanations for international phenomena. Some directed attention away from a focus on the structure of the international system as the dominant independent variable for explaining security interests. These approaches treat international security as something also grounded in domestic politics, identities, ideas and norms – which are viewed to be important determinants of state behavior.⁴ Security itself has been redefined to include a wider spectrum of issues, with military threats only one element in a much broader array of threats. Also, after years in which the bilateral superpower relationship dominated the international security arena, the *regional* context was elevated, and states began to think of their security in regional multilateral terms. Additional concepts such as “multilateralism” and “security communities” also underscored that security was something that could be achieved by states through cooperative dialogue in a regional setting.⁵

For the purpose of this study, we will relate to security in the broadest sense, including both hard (military) and soft (economy, environment, identity, immigration, and human rights) aspects, in order to encompass a host of potential challenges to the well-being of populations, and expand the range of issues that might fall under this broad heading. Moreover, we will stress the importance of the nature of *inter-state relations* as an important factor influencing perceptions of security, beyond the very military hardware that is at the disposal of states.

However, in the context of actual discussions that take place in the region, the fact that there is a debate over competing definitions of security is something that needs to be placed squarely on the table. Understandings of security that are held by states (and individuals) cannot simply be assumed, but rather need to be clarified through discussion. Thereafter an attempt can be made to foster common or shared understandings of what security means for the specific actors who engage in a particular cooperative dialogue, or, at the least, to recognize and take into account the different understandings that exist.

One illustration of the different interpretations of security that resonate with different states was raised in the interviews. When asked about their understanding of the concept of regional security, interviewees from the Maghreb often stressed the importance of regional cooperation (and unity) as an essential means for precluding outside powers from intervening in regional state affairs. This reading of the term – namely, security as freedom from outside interference and intervention in their affairs – would not be the most readily apparent for Israelis, for example, for whom security translates most prominently into freedom from military threats to its existence. Moreover, in certain scenarios Israel depends on the strong support of the US to enhance its security – for example, with regard to the threat from Iraq in 1991, or with regard to Iran at present. Clearly, these different understandings need to be examined and discussed in the context of the regional security dialogue itself.

1. Conceptual and Definitional Background

1.1. When we say security, what do we mean?

² See E. H. Carr (1973), *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, Second Edition, London: Macmillan, and Hans J. Morgenthau (1973), *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition, New York: Knopf.

³ For this approach see Kenneth N. Waltz (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, Columbus: McGraw-Hill, and John J. Mearsheimer (2002), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton. On the security dilemma, see John Herz (1966), *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, New York: Columbia University Press.

⁴ See for example Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.) (1996), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press; Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein (eds.) (1993), *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Michael C. Williams (1998), “Identity and the Politics of Security”, *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 204-225; and Bruce Russett (1993), *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁵ See discussion in Emily B. Landau (2006), *Arms Control in the Middle East: Cooperative Security Dialogue and Regional Constraints*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp.21-25.

1.2. How and why do states cooperate?

International relations literature contains intense debates over the conditions for, and value of inter-state cooperation. As noted above, neorealist theory not only highlights the insecurity that is inherent in the international system, but also does not see much prospect for advancing cooperation among states, for this very reason. While not all neorealists are pessimistic about cooperation,⁶ it is the neoliberals – with their focus on the *absolute*, rather than *relative* gains that accrue from cooperation – who see more opportunities for cooperation, provided states are restrained in their ability to cheat on their commitments.⁷ It is not our intention to reproduce the theoretical debate between these two camps, but rather to highlight some interesting points for our analysis, on the basis of our own position that cooperation can in fact play a significant and mutually advantageous role in the normal conduct of international affairs.

Once the general value of cooperation is accepted, additional questions come to the fore, at the conceptual and empirical levels.

At the conceptual level, the potential value of regional cooperation can be approached from two directions. According to the first, cooperation on a particular issue is viewed more as a means to an end – as a way to build-up mutual confidence and the basis for more healthy and stable inter-state and people-to-people relationships. The logic is that there are advantages to be had for states from the very fact that they engage cooperatively. In this sense, almost regardless of the particular topic under discussion, cooperative dialogue can help to reduce certain risks that stem from uncertainty. Those that approach cooperation from this direction seek to identify contexts in which this logic can be applied in a concrete manner – namely, potential areas where cooperative dialogue might be pursued and Confidence Building Measures (CBM) agreed upon.

The second approach focuses on inter-state cooperation in specific areas more as an ends in itself. Here cooperation is viewed as necessary for confronting certain concrete and pressing regional security challenges that are not delineated according to national borders, and therefore require cooperative efforts. There is an important overlap between the two approaches in the sense that cooperation that is deemed essential for dealing with specific problems can also help to relax inter-state relations more generally. Finding the right balance between the two views on cooperation is a major challenge for regional cooperative endeavors.

In light of the use that is very often made of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an explanation for lack of progress on the regional front, it is also important to understand the relationship between cooperation and ongoing interstate conflict. Here it is important to highlight the role of cooperation in easing the very tensions that fuel inter-state and inter-community conflicts. This is especially the case when the conflicts are marked by a high degree of mistrust and lack of confidence.

Thus, rather than thinking about *conflict/tensions*, and *cooperation/CBMs* as two distinct domains that must be advanced sequentially (i.e. first deal with conflicts, then look to advance confidence and cooperation), we should consider their interrelations, in the sense that even when there is tension and conflict, there are very likely common interests that can be built upon. In fact, the logic of confidence-building is precisely to deal with those tensions and elements of mistrust that hinder opportunities to begin to cooperate. So when one claims that South-South tensions have made specific confidence-building or partnership-building measures virtually impossible, we need to understand that such an argument misses the point entirely. The logic of CBMs – indeed, their very *raison d'être* – is to work to ease such tensions.⁸

Moreover, once an even very limited kind of cooperation begins, this in itself can have an impact on the way states thereafter conceive of their interests. Understanding that state interests are endogenous to cooperative dialogue processes means appreciating that once cooperation begins, interests may begin to evolve. In this sense, the cooperative process itself might help in bringing the sides to conflict to the point where they might more easily deal with the core issues that divide them.⁹

In empirical terms, cooperation refers to different forms of dialogue and various levels of coordination and agreement among states. We will relate to cooperative dynamics at both official and unofficial levels, spanning the full range, from civil society, through Track II initiatives, and to decision-making bodies. The confidence-building role of cooperative dialogue and interaction is particularly suited to the unofficial level of dialogue that takes place in civil society and in the context of Track II initiatives. This is where there is most room for initiatives that are geared to enhancing understanding of the other, and the breaking down of walls of ignorance and lack of trust.

6 Charles L. Glaser (1994), "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help", *International Security* Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 50-90.

7 See Robert Keohane (ed.) (1986), *Neorealism and Its Critics*, Columbia Univ. Press, and Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin (1995), "The Promise of Institutional Theory", *International Security* Vol. 20, No. 1.

8 Emily Landau (2005), "Assessing 10 Years of the EMP: Conceptions of the Barcelona Process", paper prepared for the EuroMeSCo publication *Barcelona Plus: towards a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States*, March. (http://euromesco.com.pt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=50&lang=en).

9 Joel Peters offers a slightly different type of connection when he speaks of progress in the multilateral talks of Madrid as something that "would create a vision of what real peace looks like"; see Joel Peters (1998), "The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Peace Talks and the Barcelona Process: Competition or Convergence?", *The International Spectator* Vol. 33, No. 4.

But, we also need to assess the *actual interest* of regional states to pursue cooperation among them. When trying to understand the basis for cooperation, we need to explore whether states in the Middle East and North Africa in fact feel that they have a need for cooperation, and with whom. How do these states view the cost of cooperation, and what can be done to increase their incentive to cooperate? Can we chart differences among the different Southern states as far as their willingness to cooperate – are some states more willing or reluctant than others, and if so, why? We need to look at examples of cooperation that was attempted in the past; the kinds of cooperation that are already being pursued (and with the participation of which states); and the kinds of cooperation that are likely to gain the support of states (i.e. to be viewed as conducive to regional dialogue). There is a fair degree of skepticism in the region with regard to initiatives that seem geared primarily to propagating additional dialogue (“talk shops”).¹⁰ At the state-to-state level, cooperative initiatives – even if directed primarily to the improvement of the regional atmosphere – are likely to work better if viewed by participating states as something that directly addresses true and pressing common interests and concerns.

It is important to consider the concept of regional cooperation in the context of the post-Cold War world. Generally speaking, with the passing of the bipolar system, regional contexts have assumed greater significance for states, and they have begun to think of security issues more and more as a function of their relations with their regional neighbors.¹¹

When speaking of regional dialogue in the South, we do not limit ourselves to the ten Southern partners of the EMP. We consider initiatives that go beyond this framework to the broader Middle East, as well as more limited sub-regional cooperative efforts that include only some of the Southern partners.

1.3. Which regional context?

¹⁰ This is the result of approximately 15 years of Track II initiatives on regional issues, as well as the multilateral track of the Madrid peace process which entailed many important frameworks of dialogue but relatively few tangible results. Those that seek concrete agreements tend to look down at the value of dialogue itself.

¹¹ See for example David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (eds.) (1997), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

2. Past Experience

Region-wide cooperative initiatives in the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East have been more the exception than the rule in the recent history of the region. Cooperative efforts that include Israel – whether region-wide or in smaller groups of states – have been especially difficult to initiate and maintain over time, although the effectiveness and usefulness of Arab frameworks that exclude Israel, such as the Arab League, have also known their ups and downs. Thus, we will be looking at cooperation both between Israel and Arab states, and among Arab states themselves.

If we accept that regional cooperation can be mutually advantageous for states, what are the real factors that have hindered the further development of cooperative dialogue and initiatives in the region? Has the logic not been understood or accepted, or are the difficulties to be found in the conditions for its application? Has regional interest in cooperation been strong, with everything in place for cooperation to begin, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simply precluded any progress in this direction? When one begins to probe some of these past experiences, it becomes quite clear that the reality is more complex than can be captured by the effects of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even when Israel has been included as an active participant, other factors, that are often not sufficiently appreciated or brought to the surface, have negatively impacted these initiatives.

We have chosen to focus on two case studies where official attempts were made to promote regional dialogue and cooperation in the past decade and a half: among the Maghreb states, and in the context of the multilateral talks that were initiated as part of the Madrid peace process of the early 1990s. In our assessment of these past experiences, our focus is on the reasons for the resistance and other obstacles that hindered these efforts – including whether some states proved to be more resistant than others (and why) – as well as the conditions for any successes that were registered.

2.1. The Multilateral Track of the Madrid Peace Process

The Madrid peace process of the early 1990s was a two track process: comprised of the *bilateral* peace negotiations between Israel and its neighbors, and the *multilateral* talks that took place in a broad regional framework. The multilaterals were an innovative framework of dialogue designed to include Arab states (spanning from the Persian Gulf to North Africa) and Israel, and geared to discussing regional challenges and concerns that transcended national borders. The underlying logic of these talks (active from 1991 to 1996, with a few initiatives continuing into the 21st century) was that cooperative dialogue and initiatives could also help promote regional stability, and gradually foster more normal relations among the participating states. Five working groups made up the multilateral track: water resources, economic development, arms control and regional security, environmental issues, and refugees.

Each of the working groups had its own agenda and pace, and full accounts of their activities can be accessed.¹² What we would like to highlight here is the fact that progress was indeed made in these talks (through the examples of the economic development and arms control and regional security working groups), especially in the sense of creating some initial shared understandings for dealing with regional challenges. We will then discuss aspects of “what went wrong,” as the basis for drawing some lessons from this experience.

Perhaps the most active and successful working group of the multilaterals was the Regional Economic Development Working Group, or REDWG, led by the European Union. Meetings in this group began in 1992, and after the fourth round of talks, which took place in Copenhagen in late 1993, the participants agreed on the Copenhagen Action Plan, which defined the basis for the activities to be carried out by REDWG in the coming months and years. The action plan was a reflection of the group’s willingness to go beyond initial discussions and to begin to try to take more concrete action. Less than a year later, it was agreed to set up a Monitoring Committee, which led to Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians (core states) taking on a more direct role in implementing the Copenhagen Action Plan and discussing future projects. Due to the extent of activities, it was soon decided to set up a permanent Secretariat in Amman for the coordination of tens of meetings and workshops that were thereafter organized.¹³ As Peters notes: “[a]lthough embryonic in its nature and functioning, the REDWG Secretariat in Amman reflects the first tentative steps towards the fashioning of new common structures of cooperation, coordination and decision-making in the Middle East.”¹⁴

Closely related to the work of REDWG was the convening of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) economic summits, launched with the Casablanca meeting of late 1994. These annual summits lasted until 1997. Kaye points out that “[t]he MENA process produced

¹² See Joel Peters (1996), *Pathways to Peace: The Multilateral Arab-Israeli Peace Talks*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, and Dalia Dassa Kaye (2003), *Beyond the Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, 1991-1996*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press. For a study of the Arms Control and Regional Security working group (ACRS), see Emily Landau (2006), *op. cit.*

¹³ This description is based on Joel Peters (1998), *op. cit.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (at the time Peters wrote his article – in 1998 – the secretariat was still functioning).

three institutions: The Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENABANK), the Regional Business Council (RBC), and the Middle East and Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association (MEMTTA).¹⁵ These were surely revolutionary regional dynamics.

The Arms Control and Regional Security working group (ACRS) also generated a number of plenary meetings and a host of smaller meetings on more specific issues, called “intersessionals.” During the four years in which it was active (1992-1995), the participating states agreed to proceed in the first stage with Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), in order to create channels of dialogue in areas that were militarily significant, but did not touch upon states’ hard-core security concerns. Agreement was secured on CSBMs in four broad areas: maritime issues; pre-notification of military exercises; the setting up of a regional communications center; and the setting up of three Regional Security Centers in the Middle East.¹⁶ The fact that the topic of arms control and regional security was included as one of the working groups was a reflection of the post Cold War thinking that began to stress in the early 1990s the importance of cooperative security dialogue in regional frameworks. The idea of step-by-step progress – which was geared to improving inter-state relations instead of focusing attention almost exclusively on arms limitations – was incorporated into the talks through the notion of CSBMs.

As far as the ultimate suspension of the multilateral talks, the explanation most commonly offered for this breakdown is that it reflected the parallel faltering of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. We argue, however, that when trying to make sense of the multilateral talks, the widespread acceptance at face value of the fact that the multilaterals depended for their existence on progress in the bilateral sphere has actually kept additional important dynamics (both positive and negative) hidden from view. While the multilaterals were indeed originally conceived as a framework of dialogue that would remain one step behind the bilateral peace talks – meaning that the bilaterals would lead and the multilaterals would follow – over the years, repeated underscoring of this message has created a sense that the multilaterals had no viability when the bilaterals were in trouble, or that any success registered in the multilaterals was only the result of progress that had been made in the bilaterals.

While the improvement that occurred in Israeli-Palestinian relations in the early 1990s no doubt facilitated the multilateral talks, this does not mean that dependence of the multilaterals on the bilaterals was absolute. In fact, such dependence is not only incongruent with the conceptual view of the multilaterals set forth above, but was not borne out empirically either. Kaye presents important evidence of this, in three main respects. First, the multilaterals were making progress in the two years *before* the Oslo breakthrough; second, although the bilateral negotiations limited the scope of the multilaterals, the multilaterals also had the effect of influencing bilateral peace agreements; and finally, there was variation among the different working groups in terms of their individual degree of success, even though each stood at the same point in time in relation to the bilaterals.¹⁷ Significantly, the ACRS working group, for example, began running into serious problems from early 1995 – well before the elections that brought Binyamin Netanyahu to power, and the faltering of the peace process.

The ACRS experience also suffers from the impact of a “common-knowledge” explanation for its failure: namely, the dispute between Israel and Egypt over the nuclear issue. In this case as well, additional constraints to progress in the talks are normally not considered seriously due to the prevalence of the nuclear explanation. The nuclear explanation maintains that agreement could be secured among the participants in ACRS as long as the topic of discussion was the relatively benign CSBMs. But, when the nuclear issue could no longer be postponed, the zero-sum positions of Egypt and Israel precluded further discussion.

In fact, this is only a partial and very superficial reading and interpretation of the talks.¹⁸ There were additional constraints, and recognizing them has importance for any future attempts to initiate regional security dialogue in the Middle East. We have said that the rationale of the talks was to establish the importance of inter-state relations over military hardware per se. While this was indeed expressed in the talks through discussion of CSBMs, nevertheless, the prevalent explanations of the *failure* of ACRS continue to fall back on the issue of WMD.

For Egypt, however, a perceived threat to its regional identity proved to be at least as important as (if not more than) the nuclear issue as such. For Egypt to be a part of regional dialogue, its regional status had to be accorded recognition. This had implications as far as

¹⁵ Dalia Dassa Kaye (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹⁶ See Emily Landau (2001), *Egypt and Israel in ACRS: Bilateral Concerns in a Regional Arms Control Process*, JCSS Memorandum, no. 59, June.

¹⁷ Dalia Dassa Kaye (2001), *op. cit.*, pp. xviii-xx.

¹⁸ See Emily Landau (2006), *op. cit.* for a close examination of this question.

the prospects for acceptance of the idea of “win-win” cooperation within the talks. The win-win logic applied in ACRS implied that all participants were equally entitled to gain from the dynamics, which included pursuit of gains outside the established patterns of inter-Arab politics (for example, negotiating directly with Israel). But for Egypt, the established patterns were most important in terms of its regional leadership identity, and shifting patterns of engagement translated into a potential loss for Egypt. For Egypt to feel it was gaining something from the talks, they had to be conducted in a way that did not challenge its leadership role.¹⁹

Also hampering the ACRS talks was the fact that the topics included on the CSBMs agenda were not topics that aroused a firm sense of commitment among regional participants in the sense of being perceived by all as addressing an important mutual concern. While the logic of “beginning with what you can agree upon” is an important principle to adhere to – rather than insisting on moving directly to the most controversial hard-core issues – still an effort must be made to find topics that resonate with the states. Criticism was leveled at the particular CSBMs that were discussed in the talks, for being taken directly from the European experience of the 1970s and 1980s (where they made more sense), and implanted in the Middle East context without enough thought given to what might have more meaning for these states.

Some conclusions are already apparent, based on the experience of the multilaterals. *First*, the assumption of the dependence of the multilaterals on bilateral peace negotiations needs to be reassessed. Challenging the “bilateral-multilateral construct of dependence” is important for opening a space for multilateral regional dialogue that operates on its own logic, and for clarifying that in certain conditions such dialogue can and should be pursued independently, or in parallel with bilateral conflict management.

Second, there is a question of how security interests are defined; this is also something that cannot be left to assumption but must be discussed candidly among parties to regional dialogue. The real concerns of states and their interpretations of security must be addressed in the context of carving out a “win-win” logic for cooperation, because there are very likely different conceptions of “win.”²⁰ *Third*, and related to the previous point, the topics of discussion for regional cooperative dialogue must resonate with the participants – they must feel that they have something tangible to gain, in a reasonable time frame. This could be done either by addressing a pressing problem (that all perceive to be such), or by discussing something positive that can be gained for all. This could explain the relative success of the REDWG group which focused on possible economic gains, or of the group that dealt with water (which is a pressing problem for all parties equally), and that, as we shall see, is still (2006) active in at least one respect.

2.2. Integration in the Maghreb

In this section, we describe and analyze the experience of the Arab Maghreb Union and the 5+5 Dialogue. The destiny of the 5+5 Dialogue²¹ – a proposal of some EU members (France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain) – is intrinsically linked to the individual reality of the five countries of the Western Mediterranean. The burden of these countries’ history, the reality of their political regimes, and the construction of their nation states continue until the present to influence political, economic, social and cultural relations among the Maghreb countries and between these countries and their Northern partners.

The 5+5 Dialogue is a forum for cooperation among the countries of the Mediterranean: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia from the Southern shore, and the EU members mentioned above.²² This dialogue was established after the signing of the Arab Maghreb charter in 1989 between the five countries of the South.²³ It aimed to discuss and solve the specific problems and concerns of this region so that dynamics in the Western part of the Mediterranean would cease to be determined by the rhythm and constraints imposed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, the 5+5 Dialogue was created as an immediate response to the great upheavals in the world and the end of the bipolar global system, and a move to a world where threats are more diffuse and amorphous.

The forum was launched on the occasion of a Ministers’ meeting in Rome on October 10, 1990, and was marked by the adoption of the Rome Declaration which was designed to promote dialogue on “political and security questions of common interest” among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the concerned states. The guiding principles of this declaration are the need to create a stable zone of cooperation and security in the western Mediterranean basin in the hope that this process will impact positively the rest of the Mediterranean area.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, see also Emily B. Landau and Tamar Malz (2004), “Assessing Regional Security Dialogue Through the Agent/Structure Lens: Reflections on ACRS” in Zeev Maoz, et al (eds.) *Building Regional Security in the Middle East: International, Regional and Domestic Influences*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 155-179.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that with regard to the economic issue, one of the ideas that saw some real progress in the late 1990s was that of MENABANK. In addition to the potential win-win economic gains, for Egypt, regional status concerns also came into play with the location of the bank in Cairo. See Dalia Dassa Kaye (1998), *Banking on Peace: Lessons from the Middle East Development Bank*, IGCC Policy Paper no. 43, October.

²¹ Fouad M. Ammor (2005), “Séminaire La PESD et la Méditerranée” Bilan et perspectives du volet sécurité du Processus de Barcelone, Institut d’Etudes de Sécurité de l’UE, Paris, Centre de Conférence Kléber, 10 May.

²² For a brief summary of the aims of the dialogue, see: <http://www.5plus5.tn/english/historiqueudialogue.htm>.

²³ The Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) was established with the Treaty of Marrakech, 17 February 1989.

In order to implement the objectives of the 5+5 Dialogue, it was decided to employ different mechanisms; as such, *cooperation involves also the participation of enterprises, social partners, private investors, public and territorial communities and cultural institutions.* In this context, projects focused on the creation of a Mediterranean data bank, viewed to facilitate exchanges of information between the members in the domain of industry, commerce and the preservation of the environment, and the search for adequate solutions to external debts of the Arab Maghreb countries. On the socio-cultural plan, the Rome Declaration focused on issues such as immigration, education, training and communication, as well as cultural questions and the protection of patrimony. The hope was to be able to promote cooperation between universities, as well as scientific, cultural and educative institutions.

A year after the Rome meeting, a second conference took place in Algiers. At this meeting, the recommendations and guidelines of the first conference were confirmed, stressing the need to create relations of good neighbourhood that would allow for dialogue between different cultures in an atmosphere of mutual respect for human rights.

After this meeting, the 5+5 Dialogue was put on hold for 10 years. The reasons for this include: 1) the first Gulf war, which directed attention towards the Middle East instead of the Western Mediterranean; 2) the deadlock in efforts to establish the Maghreb Arab Union; and 3) Algeria's internal problems with the Islamists (FIS). Moreover, during this period, the question of the destiny of Western Sahara, which was meant to be bracketed for a while between Morocco and Algeria, became one of greater importance and urgency.

Thus, the third conference of ministers of foreign affairs took place only in January of 2001. This conference confirmed the strategic importance of the dialogue, underlining that it should complement the other existing processes of cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Ministers stressed the importance of solidarity between the countries and called for taking proper initiatives to accelerate the dynamic of regional integration, thereby reinforcing the capacity of the Arab Maghreb to attract foreign investments. They also admitted that each country should provide financing for the activities that it proposed.

After 2001, the dynamics of the 5+5 Dialogue seemed to be working. The 4th conference took place in Tripoli, in the shadow of 9/11. The ministers stressed that security is a common responsibility, and that the Dialogue is of strategic importance for peace, stability and development of the region. They also focused on the need to develop a complementary regional and susceptible economy capable of attracting foreign investments. The 5th conference (April 2003, in France) again confirmed the importance of the process of cooperation between the Maghreb and Southern Europe. At the time of this conference, the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean bank was discussed with the aim of helping to consolidate economic development in the region. This conference confirmed the priority of cooperation in questions of immigration and human exchanges.

A regional conference at the level of ministers about immigration in the Western Mediterranean took place on October 16-17, 2002 in Tunisia. It adopted the *Declaration of Tunisia* regarding Dialogue related to the issues of immigration.

One of the turning points of the 5+5 Dialogue was the conference of chiefs of states and governments of Western Mediterranean countries that took place in the presence of the President of the European Commission, and the General Secretary of the Arab Maghreb. This conference was held in Tunisia, in December 2003, at the invitation of the Tunisian President. The chiefs of states and governments of the countries of the Western basin of the Mediterranean stressed the importance of the 5+5 Dialogue as a regional forum of dialogue, cooperation and global reflection to defend the common interests of the partner countries and establish a "mutually advantageous partnership".

Still, the 5+5 Dialogue is plagued by problems in the Arab Maghreb, and these constitute the major obstacle to its success. After more than five decades of independence in all Maghreb states, the ruling powers recognise the limitations of their political development. Nationalist discourses that helped to legitimise the political powers are becoming less effective as mobilizing forces. No Maghreb state has succeeded in either ending external dependence, or imposing itself in the international work division. The need for dialogue among the Maghreb countries is also urgent as the enlargement of the European Union towards Eastern and Central Europe creates new requirements in terms of quality, technological input and the dimension of the local market.

An additional explanation of why it has been so difficult to create the Arab Maghreb is to be found in the modern history of the region. The five states of this region achieved national sovereignty under very different conditions. Once independent, the Maghreb states were under-developed, rural, pastoral, and linked to ancient regimes. Their economies were based on agriculture, mining and industry. After gaining independence – in disorder and violence – the Maghreb states were more concerned about affirming their sovereignty and establishing their political structures than working towards answering the need for a unified Maghreb.

There were misunderstandings and divergent conceptions regarding desired relations between the Maghreb countries on the one hand and other parts of the world (the Arab world, third world and big powers) on the other. In addition, national egoism and rivalries between leaders were an obstacle to real dialogue. If many agreements of cooperation in different sectors have been signed since 1989, and if the leaders of the Arab Maghreb Union meet from time to time to try, with mitigated success, to go forward in the implementation of the union, still it should be clear that integration has not yet progressed very far. Intra zone commerce has not reached even 4% of external exchanges of the Maghreb countries, and joint reforms are far from materializing.

Attempting to construct the union exclusively by policy makers (namely, “from above”) – and as such leaving little room for initiative on the part of economic and social actors²⁴ – demonstrates its limits at a time when ruling powers are subject to strong destabilizing pressures. Higher unemployment rates and other sources of frustration that Islamists use in their quest for power, have affected regimes known for their stability. The Maghreb is a vulnerable space that needs to be reorganised socially, politically and economically. Political factors of destabilization in the Maghreb region are numerous. In fact, the future of this region is threatened by dangers to its *internal politics*²⁵, with stability challenged by two tightly related phenomena: the lack of democracy and the economic slow-down. At the *regional level*, moreover, destabilization is fed by long-standing unresolved conflicts – particularly the question of “Western Sahara.”²⁶

In states with excessive centralization of political power, it is difficult for civil society to emerge and have an influence. There is a close connection between democracy and integration: the more that concerned populations feel mature and able to express themselves freely, the more integration advances on a solid basis and in an irreversible way. In fact, there are some pertinent attempts at cooperation in the field of human rights and the status of women, among civil society NGOs in the Maghreb countries.

Among Maghreb countries, there are differential efforts to improve conditions and to modernise administrative practices, as well as to decentralize political power.²⁷

Algeria, with its large human and material assets, has since 1991 been undergoing the most serious crisis since its independence. The successive Algerian governments justify their radicalization by the menace posed by the Islamist “peril.” Tunisia also maintains an inflexible stance towards aspirations for a greater degree of democratization by its citizens for the same reasons. Mauritania, in addition to a lethargic economic situation, with recent discovery of important deposits of petrol, has remained a prisoner of a conflict of influence in the Maghreb region. And Libya, with its clearing up of the Lockerbie affair and its feeling of being misunderstood, gave up its hesitations between the Maghreb and the Machrek, and directed its attention towards sub-Saharan countries. In the near future, the only direction not yet explored by Libya is its participation in the EMP project.

This virtually exploding situation in states in the region not only distances the Maghreb Union ideal, but also encourages the emergence of extremist and radical forms of opposition.

An additional problem is that official discourses remain linked to an ancestral logic – living in the shadows of the past as a source of inspiration for the future. Such discourses are close to the heart and emphasize the unity of language, common history, religion, geography, and destiny. By contrast, successful regional integration experiences are those which are focused on future challenges, through the utilization of human assets. This historical blindness of political leaders credits the Islamists’ discourse and provides them with an opportunity to exalt themselves. Regional dialogue, before being inter-cultural, should be, in the first place, intra-cultural. Urgent southern problems have to be resolved, maturely, within the Maghreb states.

Finally, Western Sahara is a primary bone of contention of the 5+5 Dialogue. In fact, we can say without any risk of error that the question of Western Sahara, which crystallizes the other problems, has strongly affected the relationship among Maghreb countries,²⁸ including the process of unification of the Maghreb, and accordingly the 5+5 Dialogue.

24 Fouad M. Ammor (2003), “L’Etat à l’épreuve du social”, REMALD, Rabat, Maroc.

25 Fouad M. Ammor (2006), “Le Maghreb stratégique”, Cahier Nato College Defense.

26 According to what Tony Hodges the “Western Sahara has never constituted a nation before its colonization, and the current nationalism is a very recent phenomenon which was not demonstrated but in the last moments of the Spanish colonial period,” quoted from: Tony Hodges (1987), “The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism”, in Richard Lawless and Leila Monahan (eds.) *War and Refugees: The Western Sahara Conflict*, London: Frances Pinter, p. 31.

27 For example, since the death of King Hassan II in 1999, Morocco is making efforts to turn a page on its history when human rights were largely violated. Progress in this sense was achieved, such as for example the release of political prisoners, as well as the creation of the Institute of Equity and Reconciliation to redeem violations of human rights committed in the past, the revision of family law by giving more rights to women.

28 “In fact, this issue [the Sahara] represents the biggest threat to the security of the whole region, and constitutes a fertile field of religious terrorism, which is incompatible with the cultural values that we share,” King Mohamed VI of Morocco at the summit of Tunisia 2003.

The signing of the Arab Maghreb Union in 1989 inspired much hope for initiating dialogue and improving relations between the five countries of the region, relegating the question of Western Sahara to a second order. However, without any compromise on diverging positions, this issue can only deepen the tension between Morocco and Algeria, and stop the process of dialogue between the countries of the Arab Maghreb.

Algeria and Morocco take different stances on this issue. Algeria believes that the issue of Western Sahara – in following its course and its resolution at the level of international authorities (UN) – should not prevent the continued construction of the Maghreb. By contrast, Morocco doubts that mutual confidence building can be imagined if created on a vulnerable and uncertain basis. In fact, the Algerian attitude of declaring its implicit or explicit support of Sahraoui separatists engenders an outpouring of public funds of the countries of the region (Morocco devotes some 20% of its budget to the Sahara issue). The arms race is carried out to the detriment of the development of the region. The recent purchase of sophisticated aircraft by Algeria was the subject of many articles in the Moroccan press; some went so far as to announce that war was imminent.

The 5+5 Dialogue remained until recently a simple reproduction of declaratory meetings, without a practical strategy and a will to mobilize the appropriate means to make it a success. It is in this sense that the forum was mainly geared to reacting to problems that arose, without a real strategy and a precise agenda. Moreover, the reality of the forum is that rather than being 5+5, it is more a case of 5+ (1+1+1+1+1). This is to say that, in fact, the cooperation was implemented between the EU members as a unified corpus, whereas each Maghreb state participated in this dialogue in a separate capacity. The real and implicit reason behind this noncooperative behaviour is the competition for regional leadership. In this sense, the success of the vertical axis is dependent on strengthening the horizontal one.

The investment in democracy is a strategic element for the success not only of this forum but also of security in the region and in the EMP. There is also a possibility for the materialization of concrete projects of cooperation among the members of the region, with deadlines, means and precise shared responsibilities.

The French initiative for security in the Western Mediterranean was announced in July 2004 concerning an action plan for 2004-2005 which gave priority to maritime supervision, civil protection and aerial security. This is a strong energizer of the 5+5 Dialogue, intended to be complementary to other existent multilateral dialogues (the Barcelona Process, Mediterranean dialogue of NATO). Through its proposals for concrete cooperation, this initiative needs to be multiplied in the economic, financial and social domains.

To face the weakness of foreign investments, an essential lever of development in the countries of the southern shore (less than 1% of European investments in the world), some thinkers propose a “Marshall Plan” for the Maghreb, similar to what happened in Europe shortly after the end of the Second World War. The financial contribution of the US in the framework of the “Marshall Plan” was vital for rebuilding the Western European Economy.

To sum up, this Dialogue has suffered primarily from the lack of a strong South. Shared development and responsibility are not a question of style but rather a *sine qua non* condition for any future dialogue. Equally important, security is closely linked to good governance in the sense that a rational and well organized management based on democracy in the South is the best way not only to make it a strong independent partner of the North, but also to maintain security and guarantee the resolution of most conflicts among southern states.

Moreover, efforts have to be made in order to reach a concerted agenda between 5+5 partners and to bring their expectations closer together. In general, the EU partners claim more institutionalization (more official, more transparent, and more visible) while the southern countries want the Dialogue to remain informal. This Dialogue has faced difficulties as far as advancing its agenda because the southern countries continue to act in a manner that is in tune with “variable geometry”.

3. Current Thinking and Activities on the Ground

As noted at the outset, beyond the use of secondary sources for the discussion of past experiences, our study benefits from rich data collected in interviews (one-to-one in-depth, as well as focus groups) with both officials and non-officials in the Maghreb and in Israel in the months January to May 2006. Some 40 NGO activists and some 16 policy makers were involved.²⁹ On the basis of a loosely structured questionnaire (in order to enable us to probe unplanned directions, as a function of each interviewee's expertise), we tapped the thoughts and ideas of experts and intellectuals on the idea of regional security cooperation in the South at the conceptual level, and collected data and took stock of cooperative initiatives that are already in place or that are being contemplated. Our aim has been to gain a better sense of: the perceived rationale of cooperative endeavors; the desired or necessary preconditions for pursuing regional cooperation and the interests it might serve, as well as the constraints involved; and the possible role that outside parties might be able to play in encouraging regional cooperation (assuming the regional parties have an interest in pursuing it).

The interviews that we conducted focused mainly on the current situation, in order to take stock of some of the dominant trends in people's thinking about regional security dialogue and cooperation, as well as actual activities on the ground. Some of the activities that are currently taking place are not well known, and gaining insight into how and in what contexts things are progressing, is most important. Joel Peters characterized the 1990s multilaterals as a format of discussion that allowed regional parties to attend to long-term issues that would need addressing *if and when* a settlement is reached.³⁰ In fact, however, as this section shows, and indeed as demonstrated by past experience, regional issues need to be addressed in their own right; their value is not only for when peace has been achieved, but much before that time.

3.1. Maghreb

In the specific context of the Maghreb countries, the results of the interviews have related more to the conceptual level than to concrete programs for cooperation. Major emphasis is on dynamics in the Maghreb and the Arab Maghreb Union, with some reference to the question of Israel's integration in the Mediterranean. One interesting and recurrent theme regards the very logic of regional security cooperation cited earlier – the idea being that the fostering of regional dialogue and cooperation is important as a means of creating a measure of unity that will make these states less vulnerable to attempts of outside powers to intervene in their affairs. The example of the Iraq war was mentioned in this regard – if Arab states had been unified, they could have solved their problems together, and successfully resisted outside intervention. Moreover, US intervention was compared with European in the sense that the latter (viewed as aid) is welcome, whereas the former is considered provocation that in itself engenders violence and discourages attempts at peace (“Arabs accept help but not intervention in their internal affairs.”). The fact that the idea of regional cooperation takes on this connotation of “unification” or of “integration” in the Maghreb states is perhaps not surprising when considered in light of the Arab Maghreb Union experience,³¹ which is a dominant conceptual framework for viewing regional cooperation in this region.

The idea of regional security cooperation in the Mediterranean is in the main viewed favorably, as something that should take place on the basis of mutual respect among states at both governmental and popular levels. There must be respect for principles of good neighborhood and the internal specificities of each country. Most of the interviewees expressed support for the following themes:

- internal political and social stability as a basis of regional security, as it is impossible for a state to contribute effectively in a regional context when it is unable to maintain stability at home;
- the role of diplomacy in opening dialogue among partners in the same region to solve conflicts;
- cooperation in security by exchanging know-how and experiences;
- the need to build up strong economies in order to face challenges to security that are strongly linked to economic growth;
- setting up supranational frameworks to open dialogue for security and peace at the regional level.

29 A Mediterranean meeting co-organized by the International European Movement and a group of Algerian NGOs held in Algeria in January 2006, provided a good opportunity to discuss issues with civil society activists, as well as carry out more focused interviews.

30 Joel Peters (1998), *op. cit.*

31 Fouad M. Ammor (2004), “Le Partenariat Euro Méditerranéen à l'heure de l'élargissement : perceptions du Sud” GERM, Rabat.

So far, there are a number of *obstacles to progress*. These regard the absence of democracy, violation of human rights, and corruption in Southern states; leaders who want to remain in power even at the expense of their populations' welfare; lack of a clear and mutual vision about the future in these states; and persistent conflict between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara.

Significantly, the interviewees gave priority in their answers to questions related to regional security and cooperation in the Maghreb, relating in the main to the Maghreb Arab Union. It is believed that maintaining security and implementing projects of cooperation and development in this region depend on the final resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. It is seen as high time for this conflict to end and to be replaced by reconciliation and mutual solidarity and cooperation. This important effort has to be made by regional policymakers as well as by the civil society actors.

The media in Morocco as well as in Algeria should be more restrained in their mutual accusations, and should instead use their authority to call for dialogue and cooperation; civil society should be active in making people aware of the urgency of such dialogue. Moroccans and Algerians are tired of the conflict – mistrust and psychological warfare play into the hands of fanatic terrorist groups and mercenaries who threaten stability for both states, while both continue to suffer from socio-economic problems. Cooperation would be beneficial to both as they complement each other: each state could learn from the other and better utilize their natural resources, economic potentialities, their young populations, and ambition for development. The three other Maghreb states (Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia) should be more involved in the cooperation process in order to facilitate rapprochement between Morocco and Algeria.

The key to maintaining security in the Maghreb is to implement the Union of Arab Maghreb's project. Despite their desire to implement the Arab Maghreb Union as a means of maintaining regional security and economic integration in the world market, the states have not been able to overcome misunderstanding and mistrust between them. The Western Sahara issue is the major obstacle to any real cooperation between Morocco and Algeria, which has a negative impact on the rest of the Arab Maghreb. The Maghreb Arab Union is a hope that Maghrebi people believe strongly in as the only way for them to emerge at international and regional levels, and maintain security and development.

With regard to cooperation with Israel, the majority of the interviewees recognize Israel as a reality in the region that cannot be denied or reversed. However, they think that Israel should change its violent behavior towards the Palestinians in order to comply with international resolutions. It should be pointed out that some scholars among the interviewees admit that Israel's integration in the region would be beneficial for peace and development in the region, as it is the most technologically and economically developed state.

It was expressed that the Palestinians should recognize Israel and accept its existence, and Israel should recognize the right of the Palestinians to have an independent state. Moreover, the Arab states should give more freedom to civil actors to open dialogue with Israel; the media and NGOs should explain the importance of regional security and the necessity of peace and tolerance and the opening of new horizons of dialogue with Israelis. It was further said that Israel's economic and industrial development and Arabs' natural and financial resources constitute real assets in the region. Conditions were put forth for Israel to be "integrated as a Mediterranean partner": respecting international law; opening dialogue with Hamas.³²

We (both authors) held an interesting joint interview with the Moroccan ambassador to France, who emphasized that the EMP is in dire need of new and energizing ideas. While there are good intentions, there are no results. There is a real need for sub-regional security cooperation in the South, with security viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon. Civil society has an important role to play in terms of injecting new ideas into the official agenda. The issue of natural disasters could be a place to start – when a Tsunami occurs, there are no borders and no political context, just a disaster that needs to be addressed. States like Morocco and Algeria need to ask themselves how they would cooperate on a natural disaster, even when they still have not resolved their conflict over Western Sahara. He stressed the current sense of urgency, and the fact that we cannot afford to do nothing on the regional security agenda; moreover, he was of the opinion that most states in the South would be receptive to these ideas. "Things can be done if states display the necessary courage".

³² It should be noted that some of the views put forth by interviewees with regard to Israel are not accurate: for example, Israel already is a Mediterranean partner, and it has accepted that a Palestinian state be established. However, it seems that these views are more the result of lack of knowledge, rather than the reflection of a political position.

To sum up, we should stress that as far as the Maghreb is concerned, NGO activists believe that while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is important, regional cooperation in the Maghreb is of greater importance to the Maghrebi people. Moreover, economic issues are viewed as the key for getting such cooperation going; there is a need to work on economic issues, in order to get to social and security issues. There is a need to start at the level of civil society – to enhance intellectual exchanges. The message is that we cannot afford to wait until all political issues are solved, and we cannot leave things to the level of states and politicians. A number of conditions for beginning regional cooperation were set forth, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not singled out as the sole constraint. Much emphasis was placed on the issue of improving the internal situation in Arab states. In fact, the issue of democratic reform was noted as an essential precondition for civil society to assume the important role that it needs to play in regional cooperative dynamics. Finally, there does not seem to be an objection to cooperation with Israel, although it was made clear that Israel must fulfill certain preconditions. However, if cooperation is initiated, this would be most beneficial, and Israel's importance to the region is recognized.

In spite of the fact that there is an explicit Maghrebi solidarity with the Arab position towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a positive attitude towards all forms of cooperation with Israel, mainly in the fields of studies, research, and the exchange of youth under certain conditions (as mentioned above).

3.2. Middle East

With regard to the Middle East, in-depth interviews were held with Israelis – officials and non-officials – that have an affinity to the issue of regional cooperation. The results of the interviews focused less on the conceptual level, and more on the concrete initiatives that are already in place, and that could be contemplated down the road. All results were focused on the question of Israel engaging in cooperative dialogue with its neighbors.

Probably the most prominent example that was recounted by interviewees regards cooperative activities that have been initiated in order to confront the potential dangers regarding the spread of avian influenza. Important work in promoting this goal has been done by Search for Common Ground (SFCG), an NGO that promotes cooperation among states and has an important Middle East program. Their activities with regard to “bird flu” actually stemmed from an idea to develop regional cooperation on dealing with WMD attacks, and discussions on public health preparedness for a possible chemical or biological attack. Cooperation was carried out at the level of the Ministries of Health (official level) in Israel, Jordan, and Palestinian Authority, with the occasional participation of Egypt. They set up a system for the exchange of information on infectious diseases (posted on a website), with the aim of creating an autonomous consortium. On bird flu, the sides are working (with SFCG as facilitator) on a protocol for how Israel-Jordan-Palestinians will cooperate if there is an outbreak of the disease. SFCG helped set up conference calls after cases of bird flu erupted in Jordan and Israel in the winter of 2005-06. One of the reasons for the success of this initiative, beyond the fact that it relates to a pressing common problem, is the fact that it was a case of cooperation among medical experts who used a common (medical) language and were more easily able to find and focus upon points of commonality.³³

A representative from Israel's foreign ministry noted numerous potential areas for cooperation on soft security issues: for example, fire-fighting, emergency and rescue operations, infectious diseases, and the spread of locusts (North from Africa). Beyond their direct security implications, these are issues that if left unattended have the potential of becoming even more serious security concerns. For example, with respect to avian influenza, if there is not an ample supply of medicine in the different states, this could be a cause for panic which could threaten the security of regimes. Moreover, an outbreak of the disease in one state can easily cross over borders to another, so that the common interest in dealing with infectious diseases is clear and apparent.

In the Jordanian-Israeli context there is cooperation in the Aqaba/Eilat area in the wake of significant urban development in these cities that has altered the capacity of the land to absorb rainwater, thereby increasing the risk of serious floods. There is also a plan for the protection and preservation of the Gulf of Eilat /Aqaba – this is an important issue for both Israel and Jordan, and cooperation in this regard could well be expanded to Egypt as well. A further context for Israeli-Jordanian cooperation is the issue of fire-fighting in the Jordan valley. One idea for regional cooperation could be setting up a regional center for fire-fighting, including a large training facility. This could be set up in Cyprus, and involve Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians, Turkey and Greece. Generally speaking, the Jordanian-Israeli nexus of cooperation on a range of issues could be the basis upon which cooperation could be expanded to additional states, such as Turkey and Cyprus.

33 In May of 2006, the Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS) convened a workshop on risk communication for avian and pandemic influenza. The workshop included members of the Israeli and Jordanian National Influenza Preparedness Committees and a Palestinian expert on infectious disease from Al-Quds University. “The purpose of the meeting was to help participants to improve their strategies for communicating with the public regarding actual and potential avian and pandemic flu outbreaks and to harmonize the messages that Palestinian, Jordanian, and Israeli governments present to their publics about such outbreaks.” From SFCG, “Middle East Sub-Regional Risk Communication Workshop”, May 17-18, 2006, Report.

Following on the earlier discussion of the multilateral track of the Madrid peace process, interestingly enough, there are still some on-going regional cooperative endeavors that originated in this framework. Of the five original working groups, two continue to be active at the official level: water and environmental issues. The cooperation on water encompasses a host of activities; perhaps the most interesting is the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) operating from Oman. The executive board of this organization includes official level participation from the US, South Korea, Japan, Holland, Oman, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinians, and recently Qatar has shown interest in joining. The activities of MEDRC include encouraging cooperation on joint research projects, and supporting academic research; granting cover for the convening of academic conferences; and work in the realm of capacity building: organizing workshops and training sessions dealing with issues of water desalination from the Maghreb to the Persian Gulf (financial support, and sending experts). MEDRC has become so well known and sought-after in the region that various organizations are willing to pay for their services. Important inter-state cooperation is carried out through the research projects themselves, and also at the level of the Board of Governors, where decisions are made about which projects to support. Here (as was mentioned with regard to bird flu) the fact that activities are carried out with the participation of scientific (in this case water) experts is something that facilitates more productive cooperation.

As far as environmental issues are concerned, an effort is being made to build up economic incentives for dealing with the environment. Projects have focused on treating hazardous waste, and the issue of biosolids. An interesting project focused on “dryland management”, which is basically the study of how to “fight” deserts. It involved official level cooperation among Egypt, Tunisia, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians; the project, however, was discontinued due to mismanagement of World Bank funds.

At the Track II level, many of the initiatives on regional security that were active in the 1990s were discontinued in the past 5 years – those frameworks that kept up regional dialogue tended to shift their agendas away from general schemes for regional security cooperation, to a focus on specific and pressing regional crises: whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the situation in Iraq. However, there is more recently some evidence of renewed interest in exploring the possibility for devising some kind of regional cooperative framework in the wider Middle East, spanning from the Maghreb to the Persian Gulf. One important initiative is being led by a consortium of research centers from five states in the Middle East (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE). Several meetings of officials and non-officials from quite a few states in the region were held over the course of 2005-06, and a working paper on opportunities for regional dialogue and possible cooperation was drawn up in order to serve as the basis for discussions with officials in these states, with the aim of eliciting their interest and support for the ideas that were raised.

In sum, what emerges quite strongly from interviews is the assessment that there is a fair degree of potential for cooperation between Israel and Jordan at the state-to-state level, and to a lesser extent with regard to the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian triangle. The bilateral Israeli-Jordanian or trilateral Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian venues are significant because of the geographical proximity that creates a sense of interdependence and strong common interest among states in a number of areas. As far as the latter is concerned, it was noted that the results of the Palestinian elections have created difficulties, and a possible setback for initiatives that had been contemplated, and had even begun to be implemented. There are also opportunities for wider regional cooperation, and interestingly enough, some official level initiatives have continued from the early 1990s. In light of this, there is no doubt room for more activity at the unofficial level of civil society. It is a question of taking the initiative and setting up the necessary frameworks.

4. A Balance of Optimism and Pessimism, and Way Forward

The potential contexts and conditions for regional cooperative dialogue in the Mediterranean and Middle East are many and varied, and different routes need to be explored.

The grounds for pessimism are easily conjured up and propagated. We have demonstrated, however, that the most commonly stated reason for pessimism – the negative effect of unresolved conflicts, most importantly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – needs to be seriously reassessed. While clearly not conducive to cooperative dialogue, these conflicts should not be allowed to serve as a reason not to attempt to pursue such dialogue.

Regarding the Western Sahara issue, while presented as a clear constraint in past efforts as well as in the present thinking, it seems to be considered more as an explanation for the lack of progress, rather than as a rigid precondition which precludes initiating anything in the present. Indeed, one of the dominant themes that emerged from the Maghreb interviews was that if we wait until all political issues are solved, we'll be waiting a very long time – we must begin at the non-official level today, especially through activities of civil society. And with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, we have shown that its negative impact does not hold up either conceptually or empirically.

On the other hand, some very real constraints to progress – such as different conceptions of “win-win”, or internal problems in some of the states and the need to strengthen civil society – have not been given enough attention in terms of their impact on such dialogue, and the need to address them.

Before moving to the more optimistic results of this inquiry, a few more words are in order with regard to the differential impact of conflict in the two contexts that we examined. We started out our inquiry with the working assumption that lack of progress on regional security cooperation among the Southern partners of the EMP cannot be summed up simply as the result of the negative impact of unresolved conflicts in the South. And yet, it would seem that the conclusion we reached is that while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be regarded as a reason for not pursuing cooperation, in the Maghreb it is much more of an actual constraint. In other words, we end up with a somewhat strange situation in which the played-up (i.e. much talked about) conflict does *not* have a real impact, whereas the much less talked about conflict in fact *has* had a negative influence.

So do conflicts have a negative impact or not? The answer is that it very much depends on what conflict we're talking about, what use has been made of it, and what kind of cooperation states are striving for. Taking first the Western Sahara issue, it has likely had more real impact because the goal of cooperation in the Maghreb has been not just cooperation, but rather integration, which is a much more demanding form of cooperation. Moreover, as stated above, in the Maghreb, the conflict over Western Sahara is presented more at face value: an actual constraint that needs to be overcome to move forward to integration. But it is a local issue that is relatively devoid of more generalized political ramifications.

In the Israeli-Palestinian case, however, we find that the conflict is highly politicized. Many states claim a stake in this issue, and it is prominent in their rhetoric. Rather than assessing its true impact as a constraining factor, these states often use it as a precondition for other things. In various other contexts, cooperation at the regional level (normalization of relations) has been presented to Israel as something it might be “awarded” only in exchange for resolving bilateral conflicts. Thus, the connection between the conflict and regional cooperation has been framed in a very different manner that has encouraged other states to use conflict resolution as a precondition for allowing regional cooperative dynamics to go forward.

The grounds for optimism build on the conceptual logic of win-win efforts, past (albeit limited) successes, and some interesting, if very initial, developments on the ground today. Our inquiry has highlighted some insights that have importance as far as the prospects for enhancing regional cooperative initiatives down the road.

- 1) States should not be deterred from pursuing dialogue; there is nothing to be gained by allowing excuses to be manipulated and put forward as actual constraints. This only serves the purpose of closing the door on a potentially useful dynamic; and of course *not* pursuing regional cooperative dialogue will definitely not help resolve the conflicts in question in any case;
- 2) If there is a true mutual interest to be served by cooperation, cooperative initiatives will have more chance of succeeding. Thus, even if the logic is “cooperation for cooperation's sake” – namely, to enhance stability and generate regional calm more

generally speaking – the specific topics of discussion must strongly resonate with the regional parties. Thus, for cooperation to work, states must be made aware of the real gains to be had in a fairly immediate way. This principle needs to be taken into account in all attempts to promote cooperative thinking and action at the official level. Moreover, specifically in the security realm, different interpretations of security must be raised and debated so that realistic and effective win-win arrangements can be devised;

- 3) At the current stage, strong focus should be on the level of civil society – there is a real role that can be played by actors at this level (whether through education programs, youth exchanges, sports, cooperation on research projects, etc.), or regional contacts and unofficial dialogue that serve as a substitute for official level talks when these are not possible. If states are not yet ready to engage in regional cooperative dialogue, many actors at the level of civil society *are*, and an effort must be made to seek them out and encourage them to implement these ideas.
- 4) Education is a key factor for cooperative dialogue. When we think of the long-term, and of future generations, the question is whether children are being educated to hate and to resist, or to compromise and find a way to live in peace with the other. Which is held most important – life or glorified death?
- 5) The Maghreb interviews especially reflected the need to improve the internal situation in Arab states: to work toward democratization, the reforms of regimes, good governance, stronger economies, and overall internal stability. Democratization will help civil actors play a more efficient role in regional security efforts.

5. To Conclude: Recommendations for the EU

As mentioned at the outset, over the years the EU seems to have accepted (or at least not clearly objected to) the explanation that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has made regional cooperative initiatives in the framework of the EMP virtually impossible. Perhaps this is a result of the EU's own preference for focusing its attention primarily on the bilateral track of the EMP simply because this was the major expression of its interest in the talks. In other words, from a European point of view, improving bilateral EU relations with each of its Southern partners is more important than helping to advance regional ties in the South. In the bilateral North-South relations, the EU maintains a central and active role and a platform of influence, and it worked hard to keep the Palestinian-Israeli issue out.³⁴

An important contributing factor to the ready acceptance of the constraining effect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be a more deeply-rooted specifically European outlook on the Middle East. According to Harry Kney-Tal, who served as Ambassador of Israel to the European Union and NATO, Europe is preoccupied with this conflict: "[t]he Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main prism through which everything coming out of the broader Middle East is filtered, analyzed, classified and referred to." He goes on to say that "despite fundamental changes in the broader Middle East, for the Europeans, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains central, the key to all the problems affecting the region."³⁵ In this sense, the EU was willing to accept the Arab states' desire to hold regional dynamics hostage, and the negative impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the regional agenda of the Barcelona Process (less important to the EU), should thus not be surprising.

We propose, however, that it is in the interest of the EU to advance regional relations in the South, for several reasons. First of all, a major complaint against the partnership that comes from the direction of the Southern states is that of asymmetry – the North is a united entity, whereas the South is a collection of states that are not only not integrated, but torn by some long-standing conflicts. Secondly, the conceptual logic of cooperation has it that once cooperation begins, it can thereafter have a pacifying effect on regional conflicts themselves – therefore, encouraging these dynamics may have a positive effect in the long term on the very conflict that is viewed as having a major negative impact on an array of regional dynamics. Finally, the Barcelona Process is the only remaining official venue where regional states are still meeting on a regular basis, and while there is much criticism of the effectiveness of the forum, there is a basic acceptance of its overall positive intention and nature. Therefore, every effort should be made to maintain and enhance the unique potential of this framework of dialogue.

On the positive side, we have noted the importance of civil society's role in regional dialogue and cooperation, and the fact that this cannot materialize in the absence of democratic reforms in Southern partner states. In this regard, EU programs in the South have been playing an important role in the implementation of many reforms – either socio-political (such as the Family Code and more freedom of expression in Morocco), economic (free trade exchange between the EU and many southern states), or socio-educative (a gentleman's agreement concerning the basic values underlying the educational systems in the region). Such EU initiatives are cornerstones for enhancing regional cooperation in the Mediterranean.

But more must be done to improve the EU's role as a facilitator of regional cooperative dynamics in the South. How can it use the very useful Barcelona framework – that explicitly notes its intention to promote a regional platform – to do so? First of all, the EU will have to recognize that it is in its interest to do more to directly promote these dynamics, which is not a trivial matter. But, enhancing Europe's own conception of security – that highlights collective mutually reinforcing dynamics – should translate into taking clear steps to encourage dialogue among the Southern partners. The EU should do more to devise plans and allocate funds for this purpose, perhaps beginning with the convening of a region-wide Track II initiative. Moreover, taking regional security cooperation in the South seriously means being willing to take a broader view of the "South". For example, to begin seriously considering how the question of Iran, and the threat that it poses to many in the region, fits into such a conception of European regional thinking. There are some initial indications that Iran is an issue that could spark greater interest in regional security dialogue. This should not be excluded from a wider view of regional security cooperation in the Middle East (including Persian Gulf states) and North Africa simply because of the present configuration of the Barcelona process. In the same vein, some issues transcend the Euro Mediterranean region as such. The flux of migrants does not originate exclusively from Mediterranean countries. Sub-Saharan countries should be included in the Mediterranean migration equation.

³⁴ Indeed, in comparing the multilateral talks to the Barcelona Process, Joel Peters notes that "The multilateral talks [were] concerned with redefining the relationship between Israel and the Arab world. In contrast, the Barcelona process has been concerned with re-defining the relationship between the European Union and the Mediterranean states on its southern periphery, and on developing mechanisms for the closer integration of their economies." Joel Peters (1998), *op. cit.*

³⁵ Harry Kney-Tal (2006), "Israel and Europe", in *Europe and the Middle East*, BESA Colloquia on Strategy and Diplomacy, no. 19, June, pp. 56 and 58, respectively.

An important final issue for Europe is how the ENP will impact on its ability to push forward regional dynamics. A serious consideration of this issue goes beyond the scope of the present paper, because it would entail an examination of where the EMP stands in relation to the ENP in Europe's conceptual thinking. However, if with the ENP the bilateral context is given even more of an emphasis, this would likely prove detrimental to the dynamics that are here being stressed.

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In the balance of pessimism and optimism, we have attempted to show that although there are many problems involved in the initiation of cooperative security dialogue, there are also some guidelines that can help in the pursuit of this goal. Moreover, with regard to what are often considered the most difficult constraints – namely, the ongoing conflicts in the South – while they need to be dealt with, it is counterproductive to allow them to be used as preconditions for cooperative dialogue, or as excuses for not exploring this route. This has been clearly demonstrated by our review of past experiences, and has been underscored by data collected in interviews on current thinking.

There is no time to lose. We must try to push cooperative initiatives forward, and realize that without dialogue, regional dynamics will not progress in the desired direction of stability and more peaceful relations. We must do everything possible to identify and capitalize on “win-win” opportunities. If the EU truly values a different conception of security – which favors collective dynamics rather than reliance on military force, deterrence and alliances – it must work in order to advance it. As such, it would do well to encourage dialogue among the Southern partners of Barcelona, and states in the broader Middle East.

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