

The OSCE Mediterranean Partnership: A durable and determined dialogue?

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The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and are not necessarily those of the OSCE or CTBTO.

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Introduction

The OSCE is based upon a comprehensive, cooperative and indivisible approach to security, widely recognized for its practical and forward-looking perspective in addressing a wide scope of issues. The concept of regional and intra-regional co-operation among nations, international institutions and civil society is entrenched in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and is a key aspect of the Organization's success. From the outset, the OSCE has sought to counter security challenges, based on decision-making by consensus among participating States. Rooted in a long-standing tradition of consultation, dialogue and transparency, the OSCE is a particularly well-placed forum for multilateral cooperation with a variety of actors.

The Mediterranean Chapter on the inter-linkage of security between the regions in the Helsinki Final Act is visionary and far-reaching. It covers various themes aimed at promoting interaction between the Mediterranean region and other parts of the world, and provides a solid foundation for peace-building, preventive diplomacy and cooperation.

This article seeks to shed light on the early stages of the partnership when the Mediterranean Chapter became part of the Final Act, as well as the general expectations and underlying challenges of the Mediterranean dialogue. By providing a brief overview of the main developments in the Mediterranean dialogue, the article endeavours to discuss the durability of the partnership between the OSCE and the Mediterranean region, while questioning whether there is a determination to move forward and make it more sustainable. Against the backdrop of the Arab Spring and the associated social, economic, and cultural upheaval across the region, the article explores new possibilities for progress. These events have exposed opportunities for new areas of OSCE support vis-à-vis democracy-building and strengthening civil society.

The early years: Promoting security and stability in the Mediterranean areas as a whole

The inextricable link between politico-military security, human, economic and environmental dimensions is evident throughout the CSCE/OSCE process. Through its executive structures and field operations, the Organization is active in all phases of the conflict cycle: early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. Based on its versatile tool-box in preventive diplomacy measures, the OSCE remains a vital forum to clarify, consult, and adopt decisions, thereby contributing to mitigating tensions and conflicts.

The OSCE lends itself to providing a framework for confidence-building in all three dimensions of security, not only among its own members but also among members and Partner States, and among partner countries themselves. It is precisely within this confidence-building framework that the Mediterranean dialogue operates. The current OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation (MPCs) are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

The concept of including a Mediterranean Chapter stems from a proposal by Malta that had gained independence just under a decade earlier, at a time when it was embarking on new avenues of foreign policy, based on its geopolitical location at the peak of challenging East-West relations. Its initial proposal suggested full participation by all Mediterranean States, including those outside the European mainland.¹ Malta's proposal sent waves through the discussions on the Helsinki Final Act, in particular when it went as far as being ready to halt consensus on the adoption of the final text.

From its vantage point as a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean, lobbying for a chapter on the Mediterranean was highly important for Malta's security. Prior to the adoption of the HFA, non-participating Mediterranean States could make statements in the public part of the meeting, but were not invited to the closed deliberations. After long and arduous discussions, the HFA was adopted to include a Mediterranean Chapter, which has been reinstated in several CSCE/OSCE documents until today. The ultimate success of entering this chapter in the Act was an expression of the political will by participating States and non-participating Mediterranean States (as they were referred to until 1995) to cooperate in various fields.

It is interesting to note that up to nine countries participated in CSCE meetings from the early 1970s onwards, and these included: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia (see e.g. the Helsinki Final Act, the CSCE follow-up meetings and the 1986 CSBM Conference in Stockholm). Malta (and a number of countries on the Northern

1 Victor J. Gauci, *The Genesis of Malta's Foreign Policy, A Personal Account*, 2005, Agenda, Malta, pp 106-114.

Mediterranean rim) continued to back the importance of involving the Mediterranean countries in CSCE proceedings, throughout, the 1970s, 80s and 90s, until today.

After the end of the Cold War, the OSCE became significantly institutionalized from the mid-1990s onwards, and so did the dialogue, which has developed steadily, including calls on OSCE and Partner States to work closely to identify fields of co-operation and interaction to enhance mutual security.

For several years, a systemic dialogue was difficult and unrealistic due to the disinterest by some States in involving MPCs in the daily issues of the OSCE. And that for a variety of reasons — from an underlying fear of becoming embroiled in the Middle East conflict to focusing attention on tensions and conflicts beyond the region, when there was still a great deal to take care of ‘at home’. The concept of considering funding for projects beyond the OSCE region was also not yet mature. Some of the main incremental steps in the development of the OSCE Mediterranean Dialogue reflected the overall current real politics of the day. As the dialogue on threats and challenges to security took a new turn following 9/11, the involvement of Partner States in OSCE work to face global challenges increased.

Relations with Partner States evolved at a more regular pace after the setting up of the Contact Group with Partner States started to convene in 1995 and the annual Mediterranean Conferences. The Contact Group was established within the framework of the Permanent Council in order to facilitate the interchange of information of mutual interest and the generation of ideas.²

In 1998, the Secretariat created a post for a focal point for the Mediterranean Partner States, which also advised the Chairperson of the Contact Group and provided substantive support in organizing the annual Mediterranean Conference. The coordinating and advisory role of the focal point proved beneficial for Participating and Partner States alike, as the dialogue developed based on a stocktaking of suggestions, grievances and recommendations with a view to moving forward. The focal point also assisted the Chairperson in giving better continuity to the process. The Contact Group was increasingly promoted by different Chairpersons as a venue for increased interaction and the exchange of information, in particular, as the MPCs were unable to participate in the weekly Permanent Council and Forum for Security Cooperation meetings until later on. The Chairperson started to meet each of the Ambassadors of the MPCs bilaterally before the agendas of the CG meetings were drafted, and held informal brainstorming meetings with all the Partners and participating States to prepare for Contact Group meetings.

The desire to be more involved in OSCE meetings was common to all Partners. Thus, in the following years, side-events were introduced on the margins of meetings, such as the Human Dimension and Economic Dimension meetings, and at meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, that has now evolved into an annual OSCE Parliamentary Mediterranean Forum meeting.

Thanks to the more active and regular exchange between Participating and Partner States, a more structured dialogue became visible. It departed from a dialogue that was questioned because of its sustainability to a widely accepted dialogue where efforts are undertaken on both sides to find rapprochement with the aim of carrying out joint activities for the benefit of enhanced security. Partners became more actively involved following their shared interest and requested to be more closely associated in OSCE deliberations, including in security discussions. The arrival of Afghanistan³ as a Partner State and a project-based approach out of the OSCE area also opened the way for a somewhat more operational approach with Partner States in general.⁴

The OSCE has granted Partners a kind of observer status without naming it as such. From January 2007, under the Spanish Chairmanship, the Partner States were invited to take their place at the table of the Participating States, a move

2 For details please see Elizabeth Abela/Monika Wohlfeld, *The Mediterranean Security Dimension*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed), *OSCE Yearbook 1999, Baden-Baden 2000*, pp435-446.

3 Afghanistan became an OSCE Asian Partner for Cooperation in 2003.

4 Monika Wohlfeld, *The OSCE and the Mediterranean: Assessment of a Decade of Efforts to Reinvigorate a Dialogue*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed), *OSCE Yearbook 2010, Baden-Baden 2011*, p323.

that was strongly welcomed by the Partners. The fact that the participating States and Partner States meet around the same table could be regarded as a confidence-building measure in itself. This has been one of the successes of the dialogue, from a historical vantage point, namely meeting regularly with a view to identifying issues of common interest. At the same time, Partner States, like participating States, make national statements and share information with others. Just like OSCE States, each of them represents a diverse country, with differences in history and culture.

For both the OSCE and its Partners, strengthening the dialogue offers distinct mutual advantages, including the opportunity to draw on each other's experiences in promoting a comprehensive concept of security. Over the years, the partnership has moved towards more of a two-way mutually beneficial approach, as noted in recent statements by the OSCE Secretary General, HE Ambassador Zannier (2011 MC in Vilnius): Our work with our Partners must reflect the real security needs of the OSCE community. And, it must be responsive to the needs of our Partners. The ODIHR director also underscores this aspect: In engaging with Mediterranean Partners, we have no ambition to 'teach' or 'lecture'. We would just seek to share with our partners what we have learned, and learn from them in return (2012 OSCE Mediterranean Conference).

The enhancement of relations between Participating and Partner States in general is of major significance having led to a regular exchange of views and support, in particular since the region continues to face challenges that have hindered a structured regional approach. Many of the Participating and Partner States are also members of the Arab League, the African Union, the Arab-Maghreb Union, the EU and the OIC. The OSCE has forged ties with all. Through a cooperative effort (based on the Platform for Cooperative Security), the actors could provide long-term support for countries in the Mediterranean region towards regional integration.

The 'Arab Spring' and the call from civil society

In the wake of the Arab Spring, the OSCE has offered support and assistance to Partner States. Some of the areas where the OSCE can bring in cutting-edge experience include free and fair elections, building the justice and legislative system and civilian institutions. The OSCE is also well placed because of extensive institutional contacts at local, regional and international levels.

The 2010 Astana Summit Declaration underscores the Euro-Atlantic-Euro Asian connection, and though the Euro-Mediterranean angle is not specifically mentioned, in today's complex and interconnected world, where transnational threats and challenges are ever present, the interlinkage of security among regions, including the Mediterranean and the Middle East, is implied.

At a recent OSCE meeting, the Jordanian Foreign Minister stated that 'Change has come, will come and continue to come'. A similar message was made at the recent Annual Security Review Conference by the representative of the Arab League, Assistant SG Hesham Youssef, 'The Arab world is finally passing through its transitional period towards democracy and rule of law. Every country is unique, ... but change is the name of the game'.

The Arab Spring is a process that has started at grass-roots levels in Arab societies. Civil society in these countries is calling for support and assistance to create the urgently needed structures to conduct day-to-day democratic responsibilities. Mr Youssef cited a number of areas where Arab societies had to deal with difficult questions such as 'the relation between church and state, the role of political Islam, questions of transitional justice and reconciliation, constitutional issues, and achieving the right balance between different authorities, and to ensure the rule of law would prevail, dealing with minorities, ethnicity and religion on the basis of citizenship, social justice and dealing with questions like poverty, unemployment, education and healthcare'.

The use of social media as an important communication tool for activists in the Arab Spring was essential. In the same way, social media could be used to disseminate information and make more visible the activities of the OSCE as a contribution to democracy-building, human rights and the rule of law.

Democracy and stability go hand in hand. Representatives of civil society have expressed a strong interest in the OSCE experience as discussed in the Mediterranean Partner Countries' Civil Society Conference in Vilnius in December 2011. Some of the OSCE documents have been translated into Arabic for easier access over the public website. The OSCE and Partners could consider embarking on a broad outreach programme to exchange information and the lessons learnt on

subjects of mutual interest. A programme on training and capacity building could be launched consisting of live lectures to be offered with access over the Internet, and reach out not only to civil society, but also to government officials, students and academics, journalists, and so on.⁵

Courses could be designed to explain the history of the CSCE, the success stories in the three dimensions that have ameliorated people's daily lives, as well as hands-on experience such as in election monitoring, the protection of human rights, gender issues, and be open to persons from Member and Partner States, countries of the Mediterranean littoral, and others from around the world.

Conclusion

Over the years the partnership has moved from an ad hoc arrangement to a regular structured dialogue, proving that it is durable with a solid foundation for further interaction. The incremental steps forward were endorsed at the level of Summits and Ministerial Council meetings. A clear determination with well-defined activities to continue to develop the partnership, particularly after the Arab Spring, will depend on all those involved, Participating and Partner States, other international organizations and civil society. The OSCE with sufficient political will could play a significant supporting role through the partnership.



5 The example of the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) could be emulated. The CDI provides a multidisciplinary, free of charge training and educational programme based on modern, innovative and cost-effective methods. Through live lecture courses by Commission staff and leading experts, a robust e-learning platform, and an expanding network of global partnerships, CDI promotes active engagement with the current and next generation of CTBT experts in disarmament and non-proliferation — with a focus on women and the developing world. By expanding the pool of specialists in the political, legal and technical aspects of the CTBT, CDI increases awareness and stimulates an understanding of the Treaty with a view toward its entry into force and universalization. In addition, a network of global partnerships is being established to strengthen and broaden participation in the CTBT's global monitoring and verification efforts, while at the same time facilitating access to the many civil and scientific benefits of the International Monitoring System, such as tsunami early warning and the tracking of potentially dangerous radionuclides.


































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