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*A New Starting Point or Another
Dead End? The European Security
Strategy, the New Neighbourhood
and a Euro-Mediterranean Security
Partnership*

Presented by

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A New Starting Point or Another Dead End?

The European Security Strategy, the Neighbourhood Policy and a Euro-Mediterranean Security Partnership

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Introduction

On 12 December 2003 the European Council adopted the European Security Strategy (ESS), 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', the first ever common strategic vision of the Member States, filling the void that had existed ever since the beginning of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in the late 1990s.¹ Although since Amsterdam the Treaty on European Union mentions the types of operations the EU can undertake – the Petersberg Tasks or humanitarian, peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations – the role of ESDP in the whole of EU external action and the conditions for the use of the military instrument had been left undecided for lack of consensus between the Member States. The ESS now offers an ambitious agenda with a global scope that, because of its comprehensive approach to security, has the potential to serve as a reference framework and a driving force for policies in all fields of external action, from trade and development to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and ESDP. 'Building security in our neighbourhood' is among its explicit objectives.

Furthermore, in March 2003 under the heading of 'Wider Europe' the Commission has proposed a Neighbourhood Policy as an enhanced framework for relations with the EU's neighbouring states.² The first Action Plans in that regard are to be submitted to the Council in June 2004. The European Council of that month will further consider an enhanced strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and what has been dubbed the 'Wider Middle East'.

EU policies with regard to its neighbourhood are thus going through significant changes. The aim of this paper is to assess whether these developments – the ESS, 'Wider Europe' and the 'Wider Middle East' – open up new possibilities for the – hitherto flawed – attempts to give substance to the security dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), specifically with regard to politico-military or ESDP-related issues.³ The paper will also take into account the impact of other simultaneous developments such as the proposed upgrading of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the American 'Greater Middle East Initiative'.

The European Security Strategy: Affirming the Partnership Approach

In fact, the ESS affirms the comprehensive approach to security that is underlying – *inter alia* – the EMP and makes it into a general strategy for EU external action.⁴

The starting point of *comprehensive security* is the recognition of the interdependence between all dimensions of security – political, socio-economic, cultural, ecologic, military – hence the need to formulate *integrated* policies on all of them. In the EMP, this approach is evident from the composition of its three baskets, which cover the whole range of relations between the EU and its Southern neighbours: a political and security partnership, an economic

¹ 'A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy. Brussels, 12 December 2003'. <http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/EN/reports/78367.pdf>.

² COM (2003) 104 final, 'Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours'.

³ The specifics of the short-term prevention and prosecution of terrorism, which is considered to necessitate increased Euro-Mediterranean cooperation between the judiciary, police and intelligence services rather than in the politico-military field, therefore falls outside the scope of this paper. Tackling the root causes of terrorism is of course an inherent part of the multidimensional EMP.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the ESS see Sven Biscop, 'The European Security Strategy – Implementing a Distinctive Approach to Security'. Brussels, Royal Defence College (IRSD-KHID), March 2004, Sécurité & Stratégie No. 82, <http://www.irri-kiib.be/papers/Artikel%20V&S%20ESS.pdf>.

and financial partnership and a partnership in social, cultural and human affairs. The EMP added a politico-military dimension to the traditionally economic focus of Europe's Mediterranean policies, but firmly embedded it in a broad framework of relations. In this framework, there is a strong emphasis on dialogue and co-ownership. This cooperative approach, i.e. addressing third States as partners for cooperation rather than as mere objects of policy, is inherent to comprehensive security: on the one hand, unilateral policies would be politically unacceptable to the Mediterranean partners and would lead to an antagonization of North-South relations; on the other hand, cooperation and partnership cannot be built solely on the field of security, but require a much broader base.

In the ESS, the comprehensive approach is translated into the overall objective of 'effective multilateralism', i.e. 'a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order'. At the global level the EU seeks to pursue this objective mainly through the UN, which the ESS sees as the core of the international system, and through the other global and regional partnerships and organizations. With regard to its neighbourhood, the EU will itself assume a leading role in order to 'promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations'. The same approach is to be followed at both levels: dialogue, cooperation and partnership in all fields of external action, putting to value the whole range of instruments at the disposal of the EU.

De facto, this approach amounts to promoting effective global governance, which can be best understood as a system that at the global level ensures access to the same core public goods which the state provides to its citizens at the national level. These *global public goods* (GPG) can e.g. be summarized as: international stability and security, an open and inclusive economic system, an enforceable legal order and global welfare in all its dimensions as an equivalent to national welfare systems. At a certain level of inequality in terms of access to the core GPG, the resulting political instability and extremism, economic unpredictability and massive migration flows risk to become uncontrollable. This gap between haves and have-nots thus represents the ultimate systemic threat to international security.⁵ GPG are not explicitly mentioned in the ESS, but as it words it: 'spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order'. So without any doubt, emphasis in the ESS is on a long-term policy of stabilisation and conflict prevention through the promotion of global governance.

But of course, dialogue, cooperation and partnership cannot be unconditional. States violating the norms of behaviour vis-à-vis the international community or their own population 'should understand that there is a price to be paid, including in their relationship with the European Union'. Partnership with the EU can thus be cut back or enhanced according to performance, for: 'We want international organizations, regimes and treaties to be effective in confronting threats to international peace and security, and must therefore be ready to act when their rules are broken'. In certain cases this can include the use of force, but certainly not exclusively – implicitly, the ESS considers the use of force as an instrument of last resort, in principle to be applied only with a Security Council mandate.⁶ The EU aims for 'early, rapid, and when

⁵ Rik Coolsaet & Valérie Arnould (eds.), 'Global Governance: The Next Frontier'. Brussels, Royal Institute for International Relations, April 2004, Egmont Paper No. 2.

⁶ Although it can be argued that on this issue, if at all, an unambiguous position was called for, in order to prevent further paralyzing divides like on the invasion of Iraq, and because of the exemplary role of the EU: who will yet stand up for the collective security system of the UN if not Europe?

necessary, robust intervention’, but this applies to ‘the full spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention at our disposal, including political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities’.

On the whole, the ESS is a positive project, emphasizing positive objectives – ‘effective multilateralism’ or the core GPG. ‘What for’ rather than ‘against whom’ is the question that determines policy. Thus the comprehensive approach avoids the classic security dilemma. The added value of comprehensive security lies in the integration of all fields of external action under this single agenda of ‘effective multilateralism’. ‘Securitization’ of policy fields other than ESDP, i.e. treating issues as politico-military or ‘hard’ security problems and consequently applying politico-military instruments to solve them, is equally avoided however. Under the global heading of promoting ‘effective multilateralism’, the politico-military is just one dimension of external action, at the same level as the other fields. Thus, the implementation of the ESS should lead to the opposite of ‘securitization’: issues should be dealt with as development, human rights, ecologic problems etc. and should only be put in a politico-military or security perspective when developments threaten to have direct security consequences for the population of the state concerned, for the region or for the EU itself. In fact therefore, the ESS really is more than a security strategy – it is a strategy for external action.

Even though until December 2003 no formal strategic concept existed, a distinctive European approach to security had already been emerging over the last few years. EU policies towards its neighbouring States have been particularly revealing with regard to the EU’s preference for a comprehensive and cooperative approach, aiming at cooperation rather than confrontation. Obviously, there have been exceptions to this line – in the Mediterranean, the conclusion of an Association Agreement with Algeria, quite regardless of ongoing violence in the country, is a case in point – and there will continue to be so. Nevertheless in the ESS, the concept of comprehensive security has now been rubberstamped as the European approach to security.

From Affirmation to Implementation: ‘Wider Europe’

In view of the EMP’s need of revitalisation, reaffirming the ‘spirit of Barcelona’ in itself is insufficient however. With regard to the Mediterranean specifically, the ESS, under the heading of ‘Building security in our neighbourhood’, states that it ‘generally continues to undergo serious problems of economic stagnation, social unrest and unresolved conflicts. The European Union’s interests require a continued engagement with Mediterranean partners, through more effective economic, security and cultural cooperation in the framework of the Barcelona Process’.

This emphasis on the EU’s neighbourhood does not contradict the global scope of the ESS. This is not a question of a hierarchy of priorities: an effective system of governance at the regional level is a component of the overall objective of global governance; because of globalisation, stability of the world order as such is equally important as stability in our neighbourhood. Rather the modus operandi differs: whereas at the global level the EU chooses to act through the multilateral architecture, in its neighbourhood it seeks to assume leadership itself. The EU and its neighbourhood can be considered a ‘security complex’ as defined by Buzan: ‘a group of States whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from

one another'.⁷ Therefore, in this area the onus is on the EU to assume responsibility and take the lead: a stable neighbourhood is a necessity for its own security *and* promoting stability in that area is its duty, since the EU is the local actor with the means to do so.

Although – surprisingly perhaps – it is not explicitly mentioned in the ESS, the objective of ‘building security in our neighbourhood’ and the call to render existing partnerships, including the EMP, more effective, correspond perfectly to the Neighbourhood Policy proposed by the Commission. The aim of the Neighbourhood Policy is to achieve ‘an area of shared prosperity and values’ by creating close partnerships with the EU’s neighbouring States, bringing them as close to the EU as possible without being a member, which should lead to in-depth economic integration, close political and cultural relations and a joint responsibility for conflict prevention. To that end, the EU is to offer very concrete ‘benefits’, basically a stake in the EU’s internal market, to be accompanied by further integration and liberalisation to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital – ‘the four freedoms’. Through a process of ‘positive conditionality’, these benefits will be linked to political and economic reform. As the Commission proposes: ‘The privileged relationship with neighbours will build on mutual commitment to common values principally within the fields of the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human rights, including minority rights, the promotion of good neighbourly relations, and the principles of market economy and sustainable development. Commitments will also be sought to certain essential aspects of the EU’s external action, including, in particular, the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as abidance by international law and efforts to achieve conflict resolution’.⁸ The Neighbourhood Policy thus has a wide stabilizing and preventive scope.

The Neighbourhood Policy’s overall objectives could thus be summarized as:⁹

- preventing conflicts in the EU’s neighbourhood and acts of aggression against the EU itself;
- settling ongoing disputes and conflicts;
- establishing close economic and political partnerships based on shared values, prosperity and security;
- controlling migration and all forms of illegal trafficking into the EU;
- protecting the security of EU citizens living abroad.

The Neighbourhood Policy does not aim to replace existing frameworks for relations, such as the EMP; rather it wants to supplement and build on them. The idea is to strike a balance between, on the one hand, bilateral Action Plans, so that benefits and benchmarks for progress can be tailored to specific needs and circumstances, in agreement with the individual – *in casu* Mediterranean – partners, and, on the other hand, multilateral partnerships such as the Barcelona Process, in order to deal with regional issues and to promote regional integration between partners. The latter is the key to mending the institutional unbalance within the EMP, which sees a closely integrated EU of now 25 Member States facing ten partner States that are only loosely involved in any kind of regional consultation. The Action Plans, to cover the next three to five years, are to address five key areas: ‘political dialogue and reform; trade and measures preparing partners for gradually obtaining a stake in the EU’s internal market;

⁷ Barry Buzan, ‘People, States and Fear. Second Edition. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era’. Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

⁸ Communication from the Commission, ‘European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper’, 12 May 2004.

⁹ Rik Coolsaet & Sven Biscop (eds.), ‘A European Security Concept for the 21st Century’. Brussels, Royal Institute for International Relations, 2004, Egmont Paper No. 1.

justice and home affairs; energy, transport, information society, environment and research and innovation; and social policy and people-to-people contacts'.¹⁰ The next step, if Action Plan priorities are met, could be the conclusion of European Neighbourhood Agreements to replace current bilateral agreements.

Actually, most of the measures that are now being proposed in the framework of Wider Europe are already among the established objectives of the EMP. This holds true for both substance and progress. E.g. in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration partners agreed to create 'an area of shared prosperity', to be based on 'the progressive establishment of a free trade area', economic cooperation and 'a substantial increase in the EU's financial assistance to its partners'. The EMP already comprises a mix of multilateral and regional activities on the one hand and Association Agreements and associated programmes that are negotiated bilaterally with the partners on the other hand. There has certainly never been a lack of ideas to advance the EMP – it is the implementation that has been rather more problematic. There is a lack of 'cross-pillar' functioning in the EMP; each basket is run in a more or less autonomous way, without much coordination with the others. The Association Agreements ought to include provisions on political dialogue, human rights, rule of law etc., but in the actual agreements these remain limited to very general stipulations. The regulations on the MEDA Programme link economic support to the promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms and good-neighbourly relations, but here too in actual practice conditionality is very limited if not non-existent.¹¹ As a result, comprehensive security has been insufficiently translated into practice. The impression created is that the EU prefers stability over democratization and reform.

On the other hand, for positive conditionality to be effective, a *real* 'carrot' should be offered by the EU. Currently, it seems as if the Mediterranean partners are suffering all the hardships entailed by economic reforms necessitated by the projected free trade area, but without gaining much in terms of effective benefits in return, or even the near-term prospect of benefits. Undoubtedly, the most sensitive area in this regard is the EU's agricultural policy, the protectionist character of which produces major negative effects for its Southern trade partners.¹² But in the textile sector as well, limits have been imposed; real free trade applies only to oil, gas and industrial products. It has indeed been argued that the result of these half-hearted policies has been a worsening of socio-economic conditions in the partner countries.¹³ For this situation to be amended, a substantial effort would be needed on the part of the EU.

With regard to the Mediterranean, the added value of the Neighbourhood Policy therefore is not in the substance of the measures and working methods proposed.¹⁴ Care should rather be taken to preserve the *acquis* of the EMP, so as not to lose its rich and varied approach to the

¹⁰ Communication from the Commission, 'European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper', 12 May 2004.

¹¹ Erwan Lannon, Kirstyn Inglis & Tom Haenebalcke, 'The Many Faces of EU Conditionality in Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Relations'. In: Marc Marescau & Erwan Lannon (eds.), 'The EU's Enlargement and Mediterranean Strategies. A Comparative Analysis'. New York, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 97-138.

¹² Not to mention for the EU budget.

¹³ Fred Tanner, 'North Africa. Partnership, Exceptionalism and Neglect'. In: Roland Dannreuther (ed.), 'European Foreign and Security Policy. Towards a Neighbourhood Strategy'. London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 135-150.

¹⁴ The Commission proposes *inter alia* the following incentives: extension of the internal market and regulatory structures; preferential trade relations and market opening; perspectives for lawful migration and movement of persons; integration into transport, energy and telecommunications networks and the European research area; new instruments for investment promotion and protection; and support for integration into the global trading system.

many dimensions of Euro-Mediterranean relations.¹⁵ What the Neighbourhood Policy does offer is an opportunity to re-launch the EMP, the possibility to have a fresh start. To grasp that opportunity, the Member States will have to muster the necessary political will to invest sufficient means and offer the neighbouring States real benefits.¹⁶ Even if membership is not on offer for the remaining Mediterranean partners – except Turkey – other, ‘silver’ carrots can be devised.¹⁷ Opening up to agricultural exports for one, or subsidizing major infrastructure projects. In the longer term, after enlargement perhaps a ‘Marshall Plan’ for the Mediterranean could be the next grand project of the EU, a major scheme as the only way to substantially and durably improve conditions on the Southern shore.¹⁸ These real benefits should be related to clear benchmarks, to ensure real progress towards reform. As partners agreed at the latest ministerial meeting (Dublin, 5-6 May 2004): ‘The level of EU support to the implementation of reforms should be related on a mutually agreed basis in a spirit of co-ownership, to the intensity of the efforts of the partners assessed under the framework of agreed evaluation instruments’.¹⁹

Without a substantial effort the Neighbourhood Policy will suffer the same fate as the ‘old’ EMP: well-intentioned principles, but very limited implementation. Promises only of the proverbial carrot will be insufficient, for they have been made too often already. Implementing the Neighbourhood Policy should be nothing less than a top priority. In the long term, if it is successful, the Neighbourhood Policy could, through permanent close interaction and sharing of norms and values, lead to the progressive emergence of new ‘security communities’²⁰ encompassing the EU – a ‘security community’ in itself that is expanding through enlargement – and the neighbouring regions or sub-regions.

What of the Security Dimension?

Even though no direct security threats to the EU are emanating from the Mediterranean, the EMP and the Neighbourhood Policy cannot do without a politico-military or security dimension as a necessary component of a comprehensive approach. The security dimension, which is included in the first basket of the EMP, must complement policies in the other fields of external action. On the one hand, politico-military cooperation is an aspect of the long-term stabilization and conflict prevention that the comprehensive approach aims for: exchange of information, exchange of liaison officers, observing exercises, joint manoeuvres and eventually joint operations, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament all increase mutual trust, both in North-South and South-South relations. Secondly, in the event of crises that require some sort of military intervention, involving the threat or use of force or not,

¹⁵ Martin Ortega, ‘A New EU Policy on the Mediterranean?’. In: Judy Batt et al., ‘Partners and Neighbours: A CFSP for a Wider Europe’. Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper No. 64, 2003, pp. 86-101.

¹⁶ William Wallace, ‘Looking after the Neighbourhood: Responsibilities for the EU-25’. Paris, Notre Europe, Policy Paper No. 4, July 2003.

¹⁷ Antonio Missiroli, ‘The EU and its Changing Neighbourhood. Stabilization, Integration and Partnership’. In: Roland Dannreuther (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 12-26.

¹⁸ Martin Ortega, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

¹⁹ ‘Euro-Mediterranean Mid-Term Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Dublin, 5-6 May 2004) – Presidency Conclusions’. On conditionality see Dorothée Schmid, ‘Interlinkages within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Linking Economic, Institutional and Political Reform: Conditionality within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership’. Lisbon, Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, 2003, EUROMESCO Paper No. 27.

²⁰ Adler & Barnett define a ‘pluralistic security community’, that can evolve from ‘loosely’ to ‘tightly coupled’ as ‘a trans-national region comprised of sovereign States whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change’. (Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds.), ‘Security Communities’. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

established politico-military cooperation provides a much more effective framework for consultation and, preferably, joint action than ad hoc arrangements or unilateral initiatives on the part of the EU or one or more of the Mediterranean partners. As ESDP continues to develop, the EU becomes an ever more capable actor in this field.

This politico-military dimension, including the willingness to use force if necessary, is not contradictory to the so-called ‘civilian character’ of the EU or the EMP, contrary to what *inter alia* Jünemann and Smith²¹ fear. The defining question is *when*, under what circumstances, and not *if* force can be used. Maintaining the option of the use of force as an instrument of last resort, to be used according to international law, is in line with Maull’s definition of ‘civilian power’ as including military power ‘as a residual instrument’.²² Without the willingness to apply pressure, sanctions and, if need be, force, EU external action will not acquire the credibility it needs to be effective. This leads Stavridis to the assertion that ‘thanks to the militarising of the Union, the latter might at long last be able to act as a real civilian power in the world’.²³ Keukeleire too concludes that what he terms ‘structural foreign policy’ can be effective only ‘if it goes hand in hand with an effective traditional foreign policy which can be supported by military instruments’.²⁴ The deciding factor is that since it has acquired a military capacity, the EU still presents itself, not as a ‘traditional’ power, but as ‘a power which is unique because it will be able to use military means as an integrated part of a much broader range of political, economic and diplomatic means’.²⁵ As Gnesotto states, ‘the great debate of the 1980s over Europe as a civil power or a military power definitely seems to be a thing of the past [...] what the Union intends to become is a *sui generis* power’.²⁶ ‘Comprehensive security’ therefore is a term better suited to the EU than ‘civilian power’, as it emphasises the integration of all fields of external action, and avoids the paralysing debate on the validity of the claim to ‘civilian power-status’ when possessing a military dimension that is inherent in the literature on the latter.²⁷

Proposals to enhance the security dimension of the EMP are abundant. In its 2000 Common Strategy on the Mediterranean Region the EU stated its intention ‘to make use of the evolving common European policy on security and defence to consider how to strengthen, together with its Med partners, cooperative security in the region’. So far however, all efforts to add substance to it have failed in the face of the unwillingness of the Mediterranean partners. Consequently, political dialogue has remained at a low level and only a few partnership

²¹ Annette Jünemann, ‘Repercussions of the Emerging European Security and Defence Policy on the Civil Character of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership’. In: *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 8, 2003, No. 2-3, pp. 37-53. Karen E. Smith, ‘The End of Civilian Power EU: A Welcome Demise or a Cause for Concern?’ In: *The International Spectator*, Vol. 35, 2000, No. 2, pp. 11-28.

²² Hans Maull, ‘Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers’. In: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 69, 1990, No. 5, pp.92-93.

²³ Stelios Stavridis, ‘“Militarising” the EU: The Concept of Civilian Power Revisited’. In: *The International Spectator*, Vol. 41, 2001, No. 4, pp. 43-50.

²⁴ Stephan Keukeleire, ‘Reconceptualising (European) Foreign Policy: Structural Foreign Policy’. Paper presented at the ECPR First Pan-European Conference on European Union Politics, Bordeaux, 26-28 September 2002.

²⁵ Henrik Larsen, ‘The EU: A Global Military Actor?’. In: *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 37, 2002, No. 3, pp. 283-302.

²⁶ Nicole Gnesotto, ‘European Strategy as a Model’. In: *EU Institute for Security Studies, Newsletter No. 9*, January 2004, pp. 1 & 4.

²⁷ This division within the literature on ‘civilian power’ is already apparent in the earliest authors’ writings. Whereas the ‘founder’, Duchêne, used the term ‘civilian power’ to refer to the EEC, which did not possess a military capacity at all, Maull applied the concept to Germany and Japan, which do have armed forces. (François Duchêne, ‘Europe’s Role in World Peace’. In: Richard Mayne, ‘Europe Tomorrow’. London, Fontana, 1972).

measures have been implemented: a network of contact points for political and security matters; training seminars for diplomats; the EUROMESCO network of foreign policy institutes; a register of bilateral agreements among the partner countries; exchange of information on partner countries' adherence to international conventions on terrorism, human rights, arms control and disarmament, armed conflict and international law; and a pilot project on natural and man-made disasters. These measures are limited not only in number, but also in scope: they are mainly declaratory and deal with neither military cooperation nor crisis management. Measures regarding arms control, disarmament or non-proliferation are conspicuously absent, even though these are among the region's most important security issues.

The Valencia Action Plan adopted by the 5th Euro-Mediterranean Conference (22-23 April 2002), an important attempt to define concrete actions to further the EMP, listed 'effective dialogue on political and security matters, including on the ESDP' among the measures to be taken. Subsequently, on 19 March 2003, the Council endorsed a set of proposals aiming to open up ESDP to the Mediterranean partners.²⁸ An enhanced dialogue has been created, including meetings between the troika of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the heads of mission of the Mediterranean partners and meetings at expert level once each Presidency; partners can also establish contact with the Secretariat General of the Council and with the Commission. Flexibility has been introduced – partners can themselves decide on the scope and intensity of their participation – and progressiveness. The initial aim is to familiarize partners with ESDP objectives and procedures. In a mid-term perspective partners that are willing can be invited to observe manoeuvres, to appoint liaison officers to the EU Military Staff and to participate in EU training courses. This gradual process should pave the road to participation by Mediterranean partners in actual EU-led crisis management operations, to which the Council can invite them on a case-by-case basis.²⁹ In spite of this offer on the part of the EU, partner countries have remained extremely reluctant to engage however; so far, the dialogue has gained little substance.

Foremost to explain this lack of political will is the Middle East conflict. On a par with socio-economic conditions, notably the poverty of the majority of the population, and the lack of democratic institutions, leading to de-legitimization of existing regimes, extremism and internal instability, the eternal conflict between Israel and Palestine continues to be the main cause of instability in the region. As such, it is the main stumbling-block for an enhanced security partnership between both shores of the Mediterranean. One cannot expect partners to engage in far-reaching security cooperation when they are divided on the question of an armed conflict hanging over the whole region, and when a number of them criticize EU policy on the issue as too passive. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes abuse the conflict as a ground of legitimacy. Significant steps towards a resolution of the conflict are a necessary prerequisite for a security partnership to really take off. Proposals for a security partnership that ignore resolution of ongoing conflicts are not taken seriously. The same actually holds true for other unresolved conflicts and disputes in the area: Western Sahara, Algeria and, in spite of recent mediation efforts with a view to the island's undivided accession to the EU,

²⁸ On proposals to deepen the security partnership see Sven Biscop, 'Opening up the ESDP to the South: A Comprehensive and Cooperative Approach to Euro-Mediterranean Security'. In: *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, 2003, No. 2, pp. 179-193. Ibid., 'Euro-Mediterranean Security: A Search for Partnership'. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003.

²⁹ The situation is different for Turkey: like the other non-EU European members of NATO, it is already involved in a close dialogue on ESDP, it is automatically invited to participate in all EU operations using NATO assets and it can be invited to EU only operations on a case-by-case basis.

Cyprus – although it is far from certain that in all these cases all parties concerned would welcome any EU involvement. Since EU enlargement on 1 May 2004, the importance of the Middle East conflict for the EMP has become even more pronounced, for with the accession of Cyprus and Malta, and with Turkey having a special status as a candidate member and a NATO Ally, the partners comprise only the Mediterranean Arab countries and Israel.³⁰

The dissatisfaction with the EU's limited investment in the financial and economic chapter is a second reason. It is often felt that the EU puts undue emphasis on the security aspects of the EMP, to the detriment of the economic basket which the Mediterranean partners consider to be the field for priority action.

Thirdly, there is certain distrust with regard to ESDP itself. With the Gulf War and the intervention in Kosovo in mind, there is a fear to become objects of 'Western interventionism'. In the mid-1990s the formation of two multinational military units, EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR, by the EU's Southern Member States was already viewed with considerable suspicion. Indeed, states on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean considered the units to be mainly directed against them. In view of the initial absence of a strategic concept, it was easy to see the development of the ESDP and the creation of a rapid reaction force for the EU in a similar light. It is not difficult to imagine how the debate on 'pre-emption' can fuel this fear of 'interventionism'. Research shows however that more important than actual distrust is a generalized lack of information about ESDP – which can of course easily be abused to create distrust, notably by nationalistic and Islamist sectors of society. This lack of information either leads to scepticism regarding the ability of the EU to become an effective international security actor or, quite the opposite, to unrealistically high expectations regarding a potential EU role in the Middle East conflict. There are positive views of ESDP also however, because its development is seen as evidence of multilateralism and as a way to balance the US.³¹ These positive sentiments must be built upon.

Fourthly, on a more general level, in the partner countries there is limited interest in the Mediterranean as an organizing concept of policy, both among policy-makers and academics. The EMP is mostly seen as a way of addressing relations with the EU; regional dynamics and South-South regional integration between the Mediterranean partners receive far less attention. From the perspective of the EU, security is an obvious dimension of its Neighbourhood Policy, but for the partners themselves, 'Mediterranean security in itself does not seem to have an autonomous *raison d'être*',³² hence their lack of enthusiasm for multilateral security cooperation at the regional level. It should also be acknowledged that Mediterranean partners are less familiar with notions such as comprehensive security, cooperative security or confidence and security-building measures.

Finally, it must not be ignored that for those partner States that have authoritarian forms of government and where the armed forces play an important part in politics, politico-military cooperation with the EU is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it could serve to enhance the status of the current regime – which might in some cases run counter to EU objectives in the field of democratization, human rights and the rule of law. On the other hand, cooperation that is conditional upon reform in precisely those fields would undermine the position of these

³⁰ Fred Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

³¹ Alvaro de Vasconcelos, 'Launching the Euro-Mediterranean Security and Defence Dialogue'. Lisbon, Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, 2004, EUROMESCO Brief. Annette Jünemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-6.

³² Gamal A. G. Soltan, 'Southern Mediterranean Perceptions and Proposals for Mediterranean Security'. Lisbon, Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, 2004, EUROMESCO Brief.

regimes. Furthermore, large parts of public opinion are often not in favour of security cooperation with 'the West', which again would have negative consequences for the regimes' internal power base.

Enhancing the Security Dimension: An Incremental Process

Obviously, in view of the lack of political will on the side of the Mediterranean partners, enhancing the security dimension of the EMP cannot be but a very incremental process. In the field of security, the EU has a major problem of credibility vis-à-vis its Mediterranean partners, which rules out any grand schemes in the near future. But as this lack of credibility is to a large extent based on a lack of information, which is at the same time an important source of distrust, it is not without mending. Two concrete initiatives might be considered by the EU.

Firstly, the EU could step up its efforts to *communicate about the aims and nature of ESDP*. The absence of a strategic concept for ESDP was an important cause of suspicion regarding the true intentions of the EU. Now that the ESS has filled this strategic vacuum, offering as it does a strategic framework for the whole of EU external action, the document should be publicized much more than it is. Even within the EU, the ESS is little known outside the small circles of policy-makers and experts. The EU could consider an exercise in outreach, not only in the limited framework of the EMP dialogue on ESDP, but also to academia, journalists and NGOs in the partner countries. The EUROMESCO network for one could play an important role in this regard.

Perhaps in a later stage such a dialogue about the ESS could lead to a truly *joint reflection* on the specifics of the Mediterranean region, along the same lines as the ESS – the challenges posed by the security environment, the objectives, and their policy implications – in order to arrive at a common document at the regional level, next to the bilateral Action Plans, which could put down guidelines for cooperation and serve as a framework for an enhanced security partnership similar to the way the ESS does – or should – for EU external action. By tackling it from this new angle, the debate on the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability, which has been moribund ever since at the 1999 Stuttgart Ministerial it was decided to postpone its adoption until 'political circumstances allow', could be given a new impetus, be it not in the short term.

Secondly, the EU need not wait for the dialogue on ESDP to have advanced further to *invite partner countries to participate in its operations*. At its Istanbul summit in June 2004, NATO will most probably decide to hand over operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina (SFOR) to the EU, which will then stage an operation making use of NATO assets under the Berlin+ framework. The take-over of SFOR presents an excellent opportunity for the EU to invite its Mediterranean partners, for a number of them have already taken part in NATO operations in the Balkans in the past or are still present with their forces today. In the first half of 2004, Morocco had 350 troops in SFOR and a field battalion in Kosovo (KFOR); Egypt and Jordan have taken part in IFOR, SFOR's predecessor, in the past, while the latter has also participated in KFOR. For these countries at least, taking part in an EU operation using NATO assets, i.e. in a very similar framework, on familiar terrain, ought to be politically feasible. The EU and NATO could very well take a joint initiative to put the proposal to all the States involved in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Taking part in an actual EU operation and witnessing

ESDP functioning in the field should go a long way to improve the credibility of the EU. Participation would of course be on a voluntary basis, open at all times to the Mediterranean partners that are willing.

As Ministers noted at the Naples Euro-Mediterranean Conference (2-3 December 2003), 'some of the Mediterranean partners already work with the EU in peacekeeping activities (Balkans, Africa) under the UN aegis'. E.g. in the first half of 2004 Morocco and Tunisia contributed with contingents of 826 and 465 respectively to MONUC, the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while Algeria, Egypt and Jordan were also present with military observers and/or civilian police. On the EU side in that same period Sweden was present with a contingent of 86, with Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Spain and the UK contributing observers and/or police. Such common participation in a UN operation could be the subject of a fruitful exchange in the framework of the EMP dialogue on ESDP, on lessons learned, best practices etc. It could also lay the foundations for involvement of Mediterranean partners in future EU operations, in Africa e.g., particularly operations at the request of the UN. Would an intervention in the Darfur region of Sudan e.g., if the international community could muster the necessary political will that is, not lend itself to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation? The EU has recently adopted a new Common Position on conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa, outlining an ambitious comprehensive approach, with a strong emphasis on empowerment of African actors.³³ Britain, France and Germany have launched the idea to create 1500-strong rapidly deployable 'battle-groups' to contribute primarily to UN operations. As the EU gradually takes on a more 'expeditionary' role, as can be expected, taking on more responsibility for international peace and security and implementing the ESS, those Mediterranean partners that are willing could easily be involved. This would answer the call from the latest Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial, in Dublin, to explore cooperation in concrete activities.

These very concrete steps would all contribute to increasing confidence between both sides of the Mediterranean and to enhancing the credibility of the EU as an international actor, thus to prepare the ground for a deepening and institutionalization of the security dimension of the EMP in the longer term. The next steps could then firstly include the measures already foreseen by the Council: a more substantial and perhaps also more regular dialogue at PSC and expert level, detaching liaison officers to the EUMS, taking part in EU training and manoeuvres.

In the longer term further-reaching steps can be imagined:

- standard procedures for joint crisis management in the event of crises in the EMP area, to allow for joint decision-making and action; taking into account partners' sensitivities, it would seem recommendable to provide for – at least – automatic consultation whenever the EU considers an intervention in the region; an automatic invitation to participate in any EU operations in the Mediterranean could perhaps follow in an even later stage;

³³ 'Council Common Position 2004/85/CFSP of 26 January 2004 Concerning Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Africa and Repealing Common Position 2001/374/CFSP'. In: Official Journal, 2004, L021, pp.25-29.

- a Euro-Mediterranean situation centre, to collect and analyze data – provided on a regular basis by partners on both sides of the Mediterranean – on a number of agreed items, and to monitor developments with crisis potential;³⁴
- multinational forces including contingents from the Mediterranean partners, e.g. on the basis of EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR;
- joint action on landmines and air/sea search and rescue;
- a wide range of confidence and security-building measures, e.g. prior notification of major manoeuvres, participation in the UN system of standardized reporting of military expenditure, an encyclopedia of terminology on security.

Finally and more generally, in the longer term an update of the Common Strategy on the Mediterranean Region can be considered. A new text, concise, along the lines of the ESS, but also more precise, to be elaborated in much closer consultation with the Mediterranean partners than the current document, could summarize the new approach, based on the ESS, the Neighbourhood Policy and the joint reflection on security proposed above, and translate this into operational objectives.

Obstacles posed by the International Context

For the time being however, the EU had better concentrate on small, incremental but concrete steps, as for more substantial advances to be possible in the security field, the regional context as such must improve significantly as well.

This context imposes that on the one hand, the EU should make an earnest effort and invest sufficient means to implement the Neighbourhood Policy, to answer the socio-economic concerns which the Mediterranean partners hold to be most important, but also to ensure the comprehensive nature of its approach, i.e. to maintain the link between politico-military cooperation, political reform and economic support that is at the core of ‘Wider Europe’. Mutual commitments and objective benchmarks must be clearly defined in the bilateral Action Plans. In the absence of conditionality, politico-military cooperation might be counterproductive with regard to the objective of promoting democratization, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Security sector reform should actually be among the explicit objectives of the EU, especially in the context of the ongoing fight against terrorism, the label of which is all too easily abused by security agencies and armed forces to silence legitimate opposition.

On the other hand, significant steps towards a settlement of the Middle East conflict are a *conditio sine qua non* for the establishment of any durable security arrangement in the Mediterranean. As the ESS itself states: ‘Resolution of the Arab/Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe. Without this, there will be little chance of dealing with other problems in the Middle East’. This can only be achieved through a major joint effort by the EU and the US. Again this view has been included in the ESS: ‘The two state solution – which Europe has long supported – is now widely accepted. Implementing it will require a united and cooperative effort by the European Union, the United States, the United Nations and Russia [...]’. Regardless of the position of the US though, as the Commission has stated, ‘The EU

³⁴ On the idea of a conflict prevention centre see Stephen Calleya, ‘Conflict Prevention in the Mediterranean: A Regional Approach’. In: Bo Hult, Mats Engman & Elisabeth Davidson (eds.), ‘Euro-Mediterranean Security and the Barcelona Process. Strategic Yearbook 2003’. Stockholm, Swedish National Defence College, 2002, pp. 41-59.

should take a more active role to facilitate settlement of the disputes over Palestine [and] the Western Sahara [...] Greater EU involvement in crisis management in response to specific regional threats would be a tangible demonstration of the EU's willingness to assume a greater share of the burden of conflict resolution in the neighbouring countries'.³⁵

Because of the predominance of the Middle East conflict, without significant steps towards its resolution other schemes for the region have very limited chances of success. The American 'Greater Middle East Initiative' (GMEI) is a case in point.³⁶ This originally very ambitious scheme to promote democracy in the 'Greater Middle East', which in the American definition includes the Arab States, Israel, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, has already been watered down in the running-up to the different summits taking place in June 2004 (EU-US, Arab League, European Council, NATO), because of the extremely reluctant reactions of the Middle Eastern States concerned.³⁷ It is difficult to see how such an initiative on the part of the US could have met with any other reaction in the current context of the widely contested American-led occupation of Iraq and of American passivity, or even support for unilateral actions by the Sharon government that run contrary to the agreed road to peace, with regard to the Middle East conflict.³⁸ It could be said that the Bush administration just lacks the moral authority in the region to propose democratic changes.³⁹ The GMEI also seems to span just too large an area, which comprises States that are too different for a single unified approach to be workable, and which does not constitute a single 'security complex'.⁴⁰ The area of application seems to have been defined by the needs of the US' 'war on terrorism' rather than by any inherent characteristics. These differences imply that even if a stable, democratic Iraq emerges in the short term, a democratic domino-effect in the region is highly unlikely. Furthermore the GMEI has at least been perceived as putting too much emphasis on external intervention – or on 'imposing' democracy – ignoring the internal dynamics that are necessary to achieve any durable change. And popular criticism of current regimes does not necessarily translate into support for external intervention; in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, any American or British involvement in particular is highly sensitive.⁴¹

That is not to say of course that promoting reform is not necessary in the States of the region, which is precisely one of the long-standing objectives of the EMP – the EU has not 'discovered' the need for democratization after '9/11'.⁴² In the current context therefore, US efforts would seem better spent supporting the established EMP rather than by launching a

³⁵ COM (2003) 104 final, p. 12.

³⁶ Robin Wright & Glenn Kessler, 'Bush Aims for "Greater Mideast" Plan. Democracy Initiative to be Aired at G8 Talks'. In: The Washington Post, 9 February 2004.

³⁷ At its May 2004 Summit, the Arab League adopted a 'Pledge of Accord and Solidarity', in which leaders called for 'broader participation in public affairs' and human rights and the strengthening of the role of women 'in line with our faith, values and traditions'. The document can be seen as a local response to the external GMEI, although its value on the ground is questionable. 'Arabs Set Rules for Use of Troops in Iraq'. In: International Herald Tribune, 24 May 2004.

³⁸ US Secretary of State Colin Powell paints a positive picture of US policy under the Bush administration, stressing its part in the creation of the Quartet and the promotion of reform of the Palestinian Authority, and emphasizing the negative role of Yasir Arafat: '[...] it is now clear to all where the real problem lies'. Colin L. Powell, 'A Strategy of Partnerships'. In: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 83, 2004, No. 1, pp. 22-34.

³⁹ Martin Ortega, 'Options for the Greater Middle East. Report of the Seminar held in Paris on 3 May 2004'. EU Institute for Security Studies, www.iss-eu.org.

⁴⁰ E.g. India is much more central to Pakistan's security than the Middle East.

⁴¹ Tim Niblock, 'Reform and Reconstruction in the Middle East: Room for EU-US Cooperation?'. In: The International Spectator, Vol. 38, 2003, No. 4, pp. 47-58.

⁴² Volker Perthes, 'America's Greater Middle East and Europe. Key Issues for the Transatlantic Dialogue'. Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2004, SWP Comments No. 3.

separate initiative, with a joint EU-US shift to a higher gear being possible after steps have been taken with regard to the Middle East conflict. The watered-down US proposals are in fact very close to what the EU is already doing – or attempting – in the framework of the EMP. As to the countries outside the EMP, the ESS states that ‘a broader engagement with the Arab world should also be considered’. This can be seen as a reference to the report on the EU’s relations with the Arab world that Romano Prodi, Javier Solana and Chris Patten submitted to the December 2003 European Council, in which they recommend, for the States outside the Barcelona Process, ‘to explore proposals for a possible regional strategy for the Wider Middle East, comprising relations with GCC⁴³ countries, Yemen, Iraq and Iran’.⁴⁴ This one sentence in the Strategy thus ambitiously extends the EU’s definition of its neighbourhood, but rightly so, for relations with these States are less developed, while at the same time certain security issues affecting the members of the EMP, notably in the Middle East, obviously cannot be tackled without them. These States would not be included in the Neighbourhood Policy or the EMP, but an additional framework is envisaged which would be closely linked to both existing frameworks. A strategy document to that end is to be adopted by the June 2004 European Council. Again, the US could support this initiative and envisage further joint steps in a later stage. Indeed, an effective partnership with the Mediterranean and the Greater/Wider Middle East is more crucial to the EU than to the US, because of geographic proximity, the EU’s greater energy dependence and the large Arab population living within the EU.

EU-US cooperation is the key, with regard to the Middle East conflict, as each is only accepted as an impartial mediator by one party to the conflict, and with regard to comprehensive partnerships in the Mediterranean and the Gulf regions, as only their combined financial and other efforts will have a sufficient impact. Unfortunately, Brussels and Washington continue to differ, the former considering the Middle East conflict as the absolute priority to be dealt with before there is the slightest chance of success of dealing with any other matter, while the latter still seem to hope that somehow, the problem will disappear almost by itself if only Iraq can be stabilized and then the process of democratization of the ‘Greater Middle East’ can be launched. As Ottaway and Carothers frankly put it: ‘The attempt to launch a new initiative without discussing the peace process is a triumph of abstract logic over political reality’.⁴⁵ In fact, it can be argued that the US has already missed an enormous opportunity to re-launch the peace process by opting for support for harsh and un-reconciling Israeli policies, under the guise of anti-terrorism, instead of brokering an agreement when, immediately following ‘9/11’, a lull in the violence occurred as all Palestinians were stunned by the horrendous events and their potential impact on the region. The conclusion is that an EU-US forum for permanent consultation and coordination of policies on the Mediterranean and the Greater/Wider Middle East is more than necessary.

Coordinating with NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue

For the large part, the Southern States’ objections with regard to the security dimension of the EMP also apply to NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), except for the fact that NATO, which is generally associated with the US, does not suffer the same lack of credibility as

⁴³ The Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

⁴⁴ ‘Strengthening EU’s Relations with the Arab World’. <http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/EN/reports/78372.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers, ‘The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start’. Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004, Policy Brief No. 29.

ESDP. In the current context, this perception of American domination of the Alliance has a rather negative impact on NATO's image however.

Without any doubt, the participation of Dialogue countries in NATO operations (IFOR/SFOR and KFOR) is a great success; it is probably the most important achievement of the NATO MD. The Dialogue suffers from an inherent limitation however. Because of the nature of the Alliance, the NATO MD obviously concerns only the politico-military dimension, which renders the implementation of the comprehensive approach, linking security cooperation to commitments in other fields, difficult. E.g. Algeria, which originally was not invited to join the MD because of its internal crisis, was admitted in 2000, in spite of ongoing violence in which both the government and extremist Islamists were involved; the political opportunity of this move was therefore highly questionable. Clearly, the EMP, which is more comprehensive in terms of both membership and substance, is the framework offering the better prospects for partnership with and reform in the South, which is not to say that the NATO MD is not very valuable as a North-South confidence-building measure.⁴⁶ It could be argued however that the existence of several frameworks for security dialogue with the Mediterranean alongside each other – the EMP, the NATO MD, and the OSCE as well as its 'Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation'⁴⁷ – in itself is one of the causes of Mediterranean States' reluctance to engage in security partnership, as it is not clear to them what is the purpose of all these separate schemes.

NATO envisages enhancing the MD at its June 2004 Istanbul summit; both deepening the partnership with current Dialogue countries and widening it to new States are being considered. Some are also pleading for a NATO role in support of the GMEI. The Alliance is facing the same reluctance on the part of the Southern States as the EU however. Furthermore, European Allies seem to fear overstretch of the Alliance: given NATO's difficulties to find the capabilities to fulfil its commitments in Afghanistan, the Alliance appears to lack the capacity and, under the current circumstances, the legitimacy to play such a role.⁴⁸

In view of their similar objectives, and in order to ensure that all actions, including those in the economic and social baskets of the Barcelona Process, are mutually reinforcing, increased coordination of the NATO MD and the EMP certainly is the way ahead. Currently, coordination is limited to informal exchanges of information between NATO and the EU. Perhaps in the longer term, in view of the more comprehensive nature of the EMP, NATO MD activities should be focussed on the EMP agenda, in order to achieve maximal complementarity. This would also meet Southern partners' concerns regarding coordination between the different dialogues. EU-NATO cooperation on promoting Mediterranean partners' participation in the EU successor operation to SFOR would be a very concrete and extremely useful example. Furthermore, such an arrangement would better reflect the emerging division of labour between NATO and the EU, in which the latter gradually assumes first-level responsibility for security issues in its neighbourhood, as witnessed e.g. by the planned take-over of SFOR later in 2004. This evolution springs from the long-standing demand, on the part of the US, for more burden-sharing within the Alliance, and the

⁴⁶ Sven Biscop, 'Network or Labyrinth? The Challenge of Co-ordinating Western Security Dialogues with the Mediterranean'. In: *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 7, 2002, No. 1, pp.92-112. Helle Malmvig, 'From Diplomatic Talking Shop to Powerful Partnership? NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the Democratisation of the Middle East'. Copenhagen, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2004, DIIS Brief.

⁴⁷ Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

⁴⁸ Nick Fiorenza, 'A Greater NATO Role in the Greater Middle East?'. In: *ISIS-Europe NATO Notes*, Vol. 6, 2004, No. 1, pp. 1-2.

increasing capacity of the EU to respond to that demand, because of the ongoing development of ESDP. Whether the US, apart from welcoming increased military involvement in the Balkans, is also looking forward to an enhanced EU profile in the Mediterranean, and particularly in the Middle East, is rather a different question though.

Conclusion

The current international situation is extremely unfavourable to any initiatives with regard to the Mediterranean and the 'Greater/Wider Middle East'. The invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, transgressing the bounds of international law, in combination with an attitude of at best passivity towards the Middle East conflict, but often even of quasi unconditional support for the Israeli government, has cost the US dearly in terms of leverage in the region. The invasion of Iraq has certainly increased the appeal of extremism; if anything, a settlement in the Middle East and democratization of the wider region now seem further off than before. The EU as such has maintained a degree of credit with its Mediterranean partners and in the wider region, but rather for not joining in with the US than because of any concrete action it might have taken. In the present circumstances, joining the US in the administration of Iraq, even in a UN framework, would certainly lose the EU its remaining credit, thus removing the alternative channel for action in the region which the EU, in a limited way, still presents, while the added value would be very limited. Militarily, the limited capabilities that the EU Member States that are not already present could deploy, would make little or no difference on the ground. But politically as well, the EU – and the UN and NATO too – would most probably simply be drawn into the bath with the US and forfeit their remaining legitimacy, without the occupation gaining any. For these reasons, a trade-off like some propose, EU involvement in Iraq for a US initiative on the Middle East conflict, would in practice be unworkable. Only a request by a legitimate Iraqi government that enjoys the support of the majority of the population would provide sufficient basis for EU involvement.

The time is not ripe for grand schemes, unless it be with regard to the Middle East conflict. While continuing to put pressure on its partners in the Quartet for a settlement of the Middle East conflict, as the precondition for any major progress, the EU should in the meantime concentrate on the implementation of its Neighbourhood Policy, in the hope that the offer of concrete benefits will succeed in revitalizing the EMP; can take small, but equally concrete steps with regard to the security dimension of the EMP, paving the way for more substantial steps later; and can gradually enhance its relations with States in the 'Wider Middle East', also in preparation of a more substantial partnership in the longer term. The EU still enjoys credit – making use of that, it can prepare the ground for a major initiative in the future, hopefully in close partnership with the US, for in spite of huge differences on how to achieve them, Brussels and Washington ultimately do share the same objectives.