

Civil Protection: The New Dimension of Mediterranean Security

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It is commonly argued that the end of the Cold War not only drastically diminished the threat of war in Europe but also served to broaden the security agenda of European states. Transboundary risks and non-military threats, such as terrorism, organised crime, climate change and pandemics, are nowadays acknowledged to be among the prime security threats facing citizens and societies in Europe and elsewhere. Consequently, traditional security policies (territorial defence) are losing ground (Gärtner 2003), and policies to protect civilian populations and societal functions in case of large-scale military invasion (civil defence) are increasingly being replaced by policies aiming at providing safety and security in the face of natural disasters and terrorist attacks (civil protection) (Alexander 2002).

A concrete expression of this trend can be seen in the development of civil protection cooperation in the European Union (EU). EU civil protection aims at protecting “people but also the environment and property, including cultural heritage, in the event of natural and man-made disasters, acts of terrorism and technological, radiological or environmental accidents, including accidental marine pollution, occurring inside or outside the Community” (Bremberg & Britz 2009:298). Furthermore, civil protection has also become a venue for regional cooperation in Euro-Mediterranean relations since the mid-1990s. The most recent example was provided at the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) summit in Paris in July 2008, where it was decided that civil protection would be one of several projects that the UfM would focus on in order to bring the states and societies of the Mediterranean Basin closer to each other.

The Origins of Euromed Civil Protection...

Regional cooperation on civil protection was originally conceived of as a confidence-building exercise in line with the aim of the Barcelona Declaration to promote peace, stability and security in the Mediterranean. As such, Euromed civil protection enjoys high levels of political support. At the Euromed Foreign Ministers meeting in Lisbon in 2007, it was recognised that the “rising trend in vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters in many parts of the Mediterranean confirms the need for greater safety and security measures to be in place to the benefit of its citizens,” and the heads of state and government at the UfM summit in Paris in 2008 declared that the “effects of climate change are evident for all. The Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable and exposed to such disasters.” It is not hard to understand the political logic behind the support of civil protection, since it deals with less sensitive security issues, such as natural disasters, rather than directly addressing the intractable conflicts in the region. However, it should be noted that the operational and practical side of Euromed civil protection has steadily grown in importance and this is something that might serve to help alleviate regional tensions in the longer run.

Civil protection cooperation on a regional level in the Mediterranean has mainly been funded by the EU and realised through two subsequent programmes under the auspices of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Generally speaking, the two Euromed programmes are seen as a success in terms of the high number of activities realised and participating states. The first Euromed programme aimed at promoting cooperation in the field of civil protection was launched in 1998 following a joint proposal by Egypt and Italy. It was called the “Pilot Programme for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean system of mitigation, prevention

and management of natural and man-made disasters” (1998-2004) and concentrated mainly on training and information, exchanges of civil protection experts and technical assistance. It has been noted that “through the various training courses and seminars and the exchange of experts, the programme allowed the networking among practitioners from all the participating countries” (Courela 2004:13). Moreover, it went ahead at times of high tension in Euro-Mediterranean relations caused by events such as the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 or the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 (ibid).

The successor programme, the “Euromed Bridge Programme for the Prevention, Reduction and Management of Natural and Man-made Disasters” (2005-2008), introduced risk prevention, information to the public and mutual assistance in the event of major emergencies (Bremberg et al. 2009). Several training exercises and expert exchanges took place during the Bridge Programme, involving practitioners from both EU Member States and Mediterranean Partner Countries. An evaluation report on the Bridge Programme concludes that “the bringing together of Mediterranean nationals has continued to build confidence and reinforce a common understanding of the importance of collaborating together in reducing risks and responding to disasters” (Olding 2007:3).

...and the Next Step

In March 2009 the third Euromed civil protection programme was launched. It is called the “Euromed Programme of Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters” (PPRD South) (2009-2012) and will contribute to the long-term aim of developing an effective and sustainable “Euro-Mediterranean Civil Protection System.” It should be noted that the PPRD South and the UfM’s “civil protection project” are actually the same thing. The programme is expected to develop in-depth knowledge of risk exposure in the region, reinforce existing prevention mechanisms at the regional, national and local levels, improve the capacity for a coordinated, effective and efficient disaster response, and improve the information and awareness of populations regarding risk exposure, prevention and response.

The PPRD South is funded with some €4.4 million through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), and the European Commission estimates that the EU has spent about €15 million on

Euromed civil protection since 1998. The programme is directed by a consortium of EU Member States and Mediterranean Partners, headed by Italy and co-directed by Algeria, Egypt, France and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR). In a similar fashion, the Pilot Programme was directed by an Italian-Egyptian consortium and the Bridge Programme by a French consortium (with Italian, Egyptian and Algerian co-directors).

In October 2009 the Directors General of National Civil Protection Authorities of the 27 EU Member States and the 14 Mediterranean and Balkan Partner Countries of the UfM (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) met in Brussels for a Steering Committee meeting to discuss and approve the action plan for PPRD South. For example, training workshops, study visits and a full-size disaster simulation exercise at the regional level are scheduled to be organised under the programme.

The External Dimension of EU Civil Protection?

Cooperation on civil protection among EU Member States has developed rapidly over the last couple of years, and with the Lisbon Treaty in force there is now a treaty-based article on EU civil protection. In the 1980s, it was conceived of as a means for the EU to support Member States in handling large-scale environmental and industrial accidents, but with the advent of climate change and global terrorism, the cooperation has become much more politically salient. The Community Civil Protection Mechanism was adopted in 2001, not too long after the terrorist attacks in New York, and in 2004, right after the Madrid bombings, the European Council adopted the Solidarity Clause, declaring that the EU Member States will “act jointly in a spirit of solidarity” and mobilise all means available to assist a Member State that is hit by a terrorist attack or natural disaster. The tsunami in South-East Asia in late 2004 made it clear that the EU needed to develop means to support EU citizens and not only local populations when disasters strike in third countries.

All 27 EU Member States and 3 non-members (Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway) participate as full members in the Community Mechanism, and it has a number of tools at its disposal. The most important

instrument is perhaps the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC). Both EU Member States and non-members can make appeals for assistance through the MIC. Furthermore, the Community Mechanism serves as a means for the EU to cooperate with non-members on a regular basis by involving partners in exchange and training programmes. The Mechanism provides the legal basis for granting EU assistance for prevention and preparedness to Member States and non-members, as well as to civil protection operations inside and outside the EU. Participation in the Community Mechanism is open to all EU candidate countries, whereas other third-party countries may cooperate in activities under this instrument where agreements between them and the EU so allow. For example, Croatia, the FYR Macedonia and Turkey participate as EU candidates, and the European Commission has signed administrative arrangements with Australia, Russia and Ukraine. The Commission has also suggested the possibility of signing such an arrangement with Morocco.

The Community Mechanism has been activated in a Euro-Mediterranean context several times since 2001. For example, the Mechanism was used to coordinate the assistance sent by several EU Member States to Morocco after the Al Hoceima earthquake in 2004. Moreover, the MIC received requests for assistance from both Cypriot and Lebanese authorities to help them handle the humanitarian crisis and environmental damages caused by Israel's offensive in southern Lebanon in 2006. Several EU Member States contributed with personnel and equipment to the EU civil protection operation. During the devastating forest fires in Greece in the summer of 2007, several EU Member States and non-members (among them Turkey and Israel) dispatched assistance. Other examples include earthquakes in Algeria (2003) and Italy (2009), forest fires in Albania (2007), Italy (2007), Portugal (2004) and Spain (2006), and floods in Algeria (2006). It has already been mentioned that civil protection is a prioritised field of cooperation for the UfM. Interestingly, the geographical scope of Euromed civil protection has recently expanded to include countries in the Western Balkans. Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro now participate in the PPRD South together with the original Mediterranean Partners. The PPRD South also brings Euromed civil protection firmly under the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in terms of funding and

programming. All ENP Action Plans for the Mediterranean Partners contain references to the need for enhanced cooperation with the EU on civil protection and disaster management. Even though there is no ENP Action Plan for Algeria, this country has been one of the most active partners in Euromed civil protection.

It could be argued that the Commission seeks to strengthen the EU's role in regional cooperation on civil protection by appealing to a functionalist logic in order to counter non-military threats and transboundary risks to civilian populations and societal functions in Europe and vicinity. The EU does not have exclusive capacities to manage disasters and emergencies (i.e. there is no standing "EU civil protection force"). Instead, its main role lies with the ability to coordinate and facilitate the use of Member States' capacities and resources when an emergency affects several Member States or transcends the capacities of one affected state inside or outside the EU. The Commission proposes progressively establishing "a wider Euro-Mediterranean space for civil protection" closely linked to the Community Mechanism. It should build on existing cooperation and consist mainly of programmes (such as the PPRD South), networks, mutual assistance (coordinated through the MIC) and early warning systems. To this end, Euromed civil protection is increasingly being shaped as the external, albeit highly interconnected, dimension of EU civil protection.

Future Challenges to Euromed Civil Protection

Judging from the experience of cooperation in the EU since the 1980s, joint training programmes and simulation exercises involving civil protection practitioners play a crucial role in fostering common understanding on prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters. According to the Commission, the key to success is the intertwinement of civil protection authorities around the Mediterranean Basin and the exchange of experiences and best practices among EU Member States and Mediterranean Partners. In a "Euro-Mediterranean space for civil protection," the Community Mechanism could function as a regional hub for civil protection cooperation in terms of both coordinating real-time disaster assistance and facilitating training courses and technical assistance.

However, there are problems that need to be solved for a “Euro-Mediterranean space for civil protection” to emerge. First, the EU and its Member States need to decide on what role the Community Mechanism should play “beyond Europe” and how non-member states in the Mediterranean could participate in it. There is now a legal basis to allow third countries to participate in the Mechanism, but this is done in an ad-hoc fashion and they are not offered full membership. Today, the Balkan partners and Turkey participate in the PPRD South as part of a pre-accession strategy. When Croatia joins the EU, it will also become a full member of the Community Mechanism. However, as of today, this is not an option in the case, for example, of Morocco. Second, the role of the Community Mechanism also needs to be clarified in relation to other international organisations operating in the field of humanitarian aid and disaster relief, most importantly the UN. It has been noted that when disasters strike abroad, the Mechanism has had to operate in somewhat of a “policy vacuum,” since there is no coherent EU policy on civil protection operations in third countries. This situation might change for the better with the Lisbon Treaty in place and with other policy changes relating to EU disaster management already underway. The fact that the UN/ISDR is co-directing the PPRD South is thus a step in the right direction.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the ways in which civil protection and disaster management are organised in the Mediterranean Partners varies considerably. Morocco and Algeria have proper civil protection directorates at the Ministries of Interior, whereas civil protection in Jordan is handled with meagre resources by the Ministry of Environment. To be fair, the organisation of civil protection varies considerably among EU Member States, too, and this has at times hampered the development of EU civil protection (Bremberg & Britz 2009). Euromed civil protection relies heavily on personal contacts among the participants. Such contacts have indeed proven valuable for the right people to contact each other quickly when disasters strike; however, they may also be an obstacle to further institutionalisation of cooperation. A network of contact points for the Community Mechanism in the Mediterranean Partner Countries has been established, but it runs the risk of super-imposing a network system on top of existing domestic structures without incorporating or even really building on them. Also, it needs to be taken into account

that the often hierarchical structure of civil protection and the role played by the armed forces in many Mediterranean Partner Countries might hamper the smooth functioning of such networks, since civil protection practitioners are not always allowed to act with discretion to the same extent as their counterparts in EU Member States. In a sentence, the shift from civil defence to civil protection is not as prominent in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East as it has been in most European states in the post-Cold War era, for obvious reasons.

To conclude, enhanced regional cooperation on civil protection holds the promise of addressing some of the most pressing post-Cold War security challenges facing the states and societies in this conflict-prone and disaster-struck region. Indeed, the EU has an important role to play in supporting Euromed civil protection. However, there is still a long way to go before proclaimed political aims can be transformed into sustained and institutionalised political action to the benefit of the peoples of the Mediterranean.

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