

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Terrorism: From Rhetoric to Action

Yasar A. Qatarneh

Director

Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, Amman

At last, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) published its code of conduct against terrorism. I have to say I was slightly disappointed. I was expecting a more vigorous and authentic document. Instead, we have witnessed a general statement that lacks direct suggestions or a clear course of action to be adopted and implemented in 'its' fight against terrorism. With this disappointment gradually affecting my opinion of the entire EMP as a viable and feasible institution, two questions come to the forefront and need to be addressed before any judgment is made: why should we expect more from the EMP in this regard? What do we expect from the EMP?

Why should we expect more from the EMP?

As far as the first question is concerned, it is elemental and expected that the EMP agenda against terrorism goes beyond 'condemnation' and 'determination', to that of strategizing and planning, (in the long and short term) the Partnership's vision and policy to fight this dangerous phenomenon. In other words, it has been almost five years since the beginning of the war on terrorism, five years in which a huge number of events have occurred. Thus it is more pertinent and worthy to see a more detailed action plan by the EMP, than a piece of document that consists of 21 clauses, which have all been redrafted from previous UN documents. Notwithstanding, the appreciation of the EMP's willingness to cooperate with international bodies and

extra-regional organizations in the field of counter terrorism, and notwithstanding the appreciation of its endorsement of human rights and the necessity of ensuring that the fight against terrorism must be implemented in accordance with international humanitarian law, it is imperative that the EMP comes up with a 'regionally-tailored' response to the issue of terrorism. In other words, although an international response on terrorism is a crucial necessity, a regional one that takes into consideration the parochial conditions of the Mediterranean region is crucial, if not a priority.

Meanwhile, this question also brings to the forefront the issue of the EMP and the so-called Barcelona Process as a viable and useful inter-regional organization that addresses certain major developments and issues that are of great concern for all countries on both flanks of the Mediterranean. This becomes imperative when we notice that only very recently we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, and with anniversaries we usually take the liberty of assessment and contemplation. With the voices that question the effectiveness and feasibility of the Partnership on the increase, the EMP officials must make sure that they don't present ammunition to the 'enemy' on a silver platter. Specifically, many would suggest that it is immature and unrealistic to expect a common policy on such a sensitive issue from an organization that consists of 35 countries, which are already struggling in principle to acquire and achieve a unified foreign and security policy, whether within the premises of the European Union or the Arab League. Despite the immense weight this line of argumentation shows at face value, a deeper look at it clarifies how shallow and insubstantial the argument it is. There is no single country in the partnership that has not yet suffered directly or indirectly from terrorism. It has always been an issue of consensus in the EMP com-

munity. Indeed, it is quintessential to protect the critical infrastructure of the EMP member states, primarily the economic infrastructure such as transport, telecommunications and energy, but also food and water, and medical infrastructure. In other words, there are a whole series of sectors that could be severely disrupted by well-targeted terrorist attacks, particularly if they were to happen in several member states simultaneously.

What exactly do we expect from the EMP?

The second question to be addressed is what exactly should we expect from the Euro Mediterranean Partnership? My attempt to answer this one-million dollar question will occupy a large part of this article. If the EMP is to succeed in enabling its governments to stop terrorism, it needs to address all terrorism's causes. It must recognize the link between stability, development and justice. In particular, action plans that do not consider reducing poverty, fighting oppression, ending occupation and ensuring respect for religions, would render any effort or work against terrorism futile. This paper argues that EMP could best deal with terrorism when it dissects it on multiple levels. In other words, while the EMP's document acknowledges the need for terrorism analysis to be conducted on various levels, it does not specify strategies that could systematically analyze occurrences of terrorist acts on all levels. The document does not even attempt to develop an integrated framework for the analysis of the causes of terrorism. Accordingly, the important question becomes: what elements, levels or lines of action should form the basis of the EMP's counter-terrorism strategy?

There are three lines of action. First, in the fight against terrorism national agencies should continue to lead, that is to say, national governments and EMP member states should keep full control over their police forces, their security and intelligence agencies and their judicial authorities. Second, these national agencies must work across borders to be effective. This means we must have a vast programme of practical action plans at the EMP level to facilitate cooperation between member states. Examples could include organizations where police forces cooperate; where investigating judges and prosecutors do likewise; where intelligence and security services jointly analyse

the terrorist threat both outside the EMP and within; and where border forces in EMP cooperate more and share experience and best practices. On that basis, we have adopted a long-term programme of action plans to combat terrorist financing and one in which travel across borders is made more difficult for terrorists.

Our third main line of action is to strengthen cooperation between the EMP, on the one hand, and other regional organisations in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere in the world. First and foremost, the United Nations, but also NATO, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The EMP should also work increasingly closely with the United States, Russia, the Balkans, as well as with countries in the immediate vicinity to our east, trying to provide counter-terrorism assistance to countries such as Iraq and Iran. The more they protect themselves, the better that will be for EMP security.

A New Operational Pattern

I want to take the liberty of elaborating on one specific line of action that I believe would be very useful to begin with. Let me explain. The EMP should develop an experimental networking system and a new operational pattern that improves intelligence-sharing to enable all Mediterranean countries to exchange information more effectively. Once approved and implemented, our understanding of the extent of illegal activities, and therefore our ability to control terrorism, will be improved. In the same context, the EMP must develop a concept of information and intelligence-based operations through the sharing of data gathered by Mediterranean-rim countries. A high level of information-sharing process could provide a sound foundation upon which to build in the future. The aim is to develop a much more effective information collection and analysis system and to create an operational system that is intelligence-driven. The main tool for this concept will be a Joint Information Agreement that aims to promote a common information collection and reporting strategy, to provide analysis and warning, and to advise on deployment of assets. Its establishment would encourage the widest sharing of information and ensure that the output is passed in a timely manner to the countries or agencies most likely to be able to make use of it.

Concluding Remark

All these suggestions require cooperation in the EMP to be further intensified. In this regard, it must be noticed that the model of the EMP is bottom up. The central role in the fight against terrorism is with national authorities. The more they do to improve

internal coordination in national governments (for instance, between police forces, intelligence agencies, the physical authorities, the border authorities and prosecutors) and the more they improve their internal coordination, the easier regional coordination will become.