

The Middle East and the Mediterranean Region in the Italian EU Presidency

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Italy presented its July-December 2003 EU Presidency programme at the Council held on 21st July 2003. The programme is elaborated in a document entitled «Europe: Citizens of a Shared Dream», in which the Mediterranean and the Middle East feature as prominent parts. Three issues are regarded as priorities, and which the EU Italian Presidency intends to pursue: (a) post-war Iraq; (b) the Road Map process in the Middle East; and (c) the development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in the Mediterranean area. It is true that Iraq is regarded by the Italian programme as less of a regional issue and more of a European and transatlantic matter. What is brought to the forefront of Italy's actions, in its capacity as the President of the EU, is the target of reconciliation in Europe, both among its own countries and with the United States. The programme stresses the transatlantic perspective with which Italy will pursue EU reconciliation: «The Iraqi crisis has, of course, had the effect of weakening the transatlantic link; we therefore need to put that critical phase behind us and re-establish the traditional special relationship with Washington». In this sense, the question tackled by the Italian Presidency with respect to the Middle East and the Mediterranean is more related to the Road Map and Euro-Mediterranean issues, and has less to do with Iraq itself. As far as the Middle East peace proc-

ess is concerned, the programme highlights that «the formation of a representative Palestinian government, the publication of the Road Map and the renewed involvement of the United States, Europe and Russia in re-launching the peace process all entail increased responsibilities for the Italian Presidency, but they also point to considerable opportunities». In fact, the Italian government is devoting special and assiduous consideration to Israeli-Palestinian relations in the framework of the Road Map process.

In general, Italy is sceptical about the possibility of organising the conference that would permit the advance from the first to the second stage of the Road Map. However, the country is undertaking the organisation of the donor's conference. The approval of the denominated Marshall Plan for Palestine by the G7 in Dubai is a step towards achieving a plan that Italy has always supported and fostered.

When it comes to the attempts at resolving the conflict, the main guidelines for its diplomatic action are clearly stated in the Declaration on the situation in the Middle East released by the Presidency on 11th September 2003, in Brussels. In this Declaration, the Presidency points out the short term goals that the two parties are expected to pursue in order to create the proper conditions for the Road Map to be achieved:

The European Union urges the two parties to remain strongly committed to the need for continued dialogue and the implementation of the Road Map, and regarding this purpose to take the following measures:

- On the part of the PNA: the formation of a new government; re-organ-

isation of its security forces; re-establishment of public order and the instigation of visible efforts to dismantle the terrorist organisations; implementation of the already initiated reforms and organisation of free and transparent elections.

- With respect to the Israeli government: the withdrawal of their army from the autonomous areas; the eradication of target killings; the removal the road blocks and other restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people; the freezing of all settlement activities and on the building of the security wall along a route that jeopardises a political solution to the conflict.

A exemplifying point of the Presidency's policy is to assure a balance between European relations with Israel and Palestine. In the Italian government opinion is very firmly held regarding the issue that the Israeli misperception of a European imbalance in favour of the Palestinians has to be corrected. The situation calls for a confidence-building campaign with respect to Israel and the Israeli people, as well as conduct that is constantly geared at acquiring and maintaining credibility on both sides

However, in its day-to-day diplomacy, Italy insists along with the Palestinians on the absolute need to contain and suppress terrorism in order to be able to establish proper conditions of security for Israel; and in their talks with the Israelis the necessity of the new Palestinian leadership for more-convinced supporters has not been overlooked; the incompatibility of target killings with any cease-fire; and the fact that the construction of the security fence will

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

Background

- The origins of the Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary dialogue can be traced back to the work programme approved by the twenty-seven EuroMed foreign ministers, the Council of the EU and the European Commission, who gathered in Barcelona for the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on 27th and 28th November 1995. The European Parliament was invited to take the initiative with regard to launching this dialogue, alongside other Parliaments. It was for this reason that a meeting had taken place in Malta in May 1998 in preparation for the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum. The first Forum was held in Brussels at the end of October 1998. All in all, four Forums have been organised, three of which were staged in Brussels and one in Bari.
- Other EuroMed parliamentary meetings also took place after November 1996, namely the Conferences of Presidents of Euro-Mediterranean Parliaments (consisting of three meetings), the EuroMed Parliamentary Women's Forum (of four meetings), the Euro-Med Parliamentary Conference on Agriculture (one meeting), and even an Eastern Mediterranean Parliamentary Youth Conference. However, these initiatives are not to be officially included in the institutional context of the Barcelona Process.
- Acting on a proposal of the European Parliament, the twenty-seven foreign ministers backed the Forum's conversion into a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA). The EMPA is due to be announced on 2nd December 2003 in Naples, on the occasion of the sixth EuroMed Ministerial Conference. The first plenary session of the new Assembly could possibly take place in Greece in 2004. A link must be established with the EuroMed Partnership's other bodies,

as well as with the parliamentary initiatives referred to in the previous point.

Essential activities between June 2002 and June 2003 related to:

- The Fourth Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum took place in Bari (Italy) on 17th and 18th June 2002. The meeting was jointly chaired by Mr Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament (EP), and Mr Abdelwahad Radi, President of the Moroccan House of Representatives. The presidents of the upper and lower houses of the Italian Parliament participated in the inaugural session, along with a representative of the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU. A final declaration and a resolution on migration were adopted by consensus.
- During the second half of 2002 and the first half of 2003, contact was established at the highest levels between the Forum's three components, namely the Parliaments of Mediterranean partner countries, the Parliaments of the EU's Member States and the European Parliament. The aim of this contact was to establish an agreement with regard to the essential elements of the future Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA).
- On 4th February 2003, the Forum's working group on migration and human exchange staged its second meeting in Brussels, on the premises of the EP, jointly chaired by Mr A. Radi and Mr Jorge Hernández Mollar, President of the Commission for Justice and Home Affairs of the EP. This group had initially met on 21st May 2002, also in Brussels.
- On 5th February 2003, the working group (envisaged in the final declaration corresponding to Bari) that was set up to examine the Forum's transformation into an assembly (EMPA WG) held its first meeting in Brussels, jointly chaired by Mr A. Radi and Mr Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, vice-president of

the EP. Along with a questionnaire concerning the constitutive elements of the new Assembly, the meeting's conclusions were passed on to all the relevant Parliaments. The results of the survey were subsequently summarised and examined on 16th October 2003 (see below).

- The president of the Greek Parliament, Mr A. Kaklamanis, issued an invitation to hold the Fifth Forum at Elounda (Crete) on 28th and 29th March 2003. However, the situation in Iraq compelled the Forum's co-presidents and the president of the Greek Parliament to postpone the event *sine die*.
- After this enforced postponement, the Forum follow-up working group met in Brussels on 26th and 27th June 2003, also on the premises of the EP, under the joint chairmanship of Mr A. Radi and Mr Joan Colom i Naval, Vice-President of the EP. The three issues debated consisted of the situation in the Middle East (with the participation of Israeli, Palestinian and Syrian representatives, among others), the EU's policy of friendly neighbourhood and an assessment of MEDA II.

- The EMPA WG held its second and final meeting in Brussels on 16th and 17th October 2003. The Forum's three components reached an agreement on the constitutive elements of the future EMPA. A final Forum will therefore be responsible for approving the conclusions of the WG, as well as for notifying the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference thereof on 2nd and 3rd December 2003 in Naples, in order for them to be formally approved.

Further information:

http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/delegations/EMED/default_en.htm

http://www.europarl.eu.int/conferences/default_en.htm

seriously compromise any chance of agreement. All these measures weaken the new Palestinian leaders to which the Western countries are offering their support with a view to replace the old leadership's ambiguities.

In particular, Italy has condemned the idea of the expulsion, and assassination, of President Arafat. While the new leaders have to be supported, Arafat has to be respected as he expresses a wide Palestinian consensus.

With regard to the international com-

munity, Italy believes that monitoring activities, currently in the planning stages in the Quartet, have to be initiated straight away in their current first stage with the purpose of reassuring Palestinian people in regard to the Israeli re-occupation of territories. According to the Italians, Europe can already provide a contribution to monitoring, by taking advantage of its previous experiences in civilian monitoring (the force deployed in Hebron) and the new assets within the framework of the European

Security and Defence Policy-ESDP. Europe should take a leaf out the United States' book, presently conducting monitoring activities independently. However, their activities focus on security against terrorism, while neglecting broader issues of popular security. With respect to the second Italian priority, the Euro-Med Partnership, the role of the ESDP is also a central one. According to the programme: «The Italian Presidency intends to pay special attention to the dialogue with the coun-

tries of the Southern Mediterranean ... with which it is important to establish the ESDP as a factor of regional stability, and therefore of mutual benefit.» In this respect, Italy is pursuing the objectives envisaged in the 23rd April 2002 Valencia Action Plan by stating that: «The political dialogue ... must focus among other things on ... effective dialogue on political and security matters, including on the ESDP ...». The successive Presidencies have pursued that task by organising special seminars with a military participation (Barcelona, May 2002; Rhodes, November 2002 and Corfu, May 2003). With the same perspective, during the Italian semester the EU-ISS organised on a seminar in Brussels on «ESDP and the Mediterranean» on 18th September 2003 at the request of the Political and Security Committee. The Italian Military Centre for Strategic Studies organised a similar seminar in Rome on 25th September 2003 on «Security, Stability and Cooperation in the Mediterranean region». Both seminars have discussed the potential of the ESDP in the Euro-Med framework.

Beside the ESDP developments and their relevance for the EMP, the Italian government has set out a highly detailed account of its priorities in the document on common strategy that

every Presidency has to prepare in accordance with general regulations established by the Common Strategy of the European Union for the Mediterranean Region adopted by the Santa Maria de Feira European Council in June 2002. This document states three main priorities:

- To complete the project of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures and Civilisations, thereby facilitating its establishment;
- To promote the evaluation of the functioning of the FEMIP, with a view to incorporating the FEMIP in an EIB majority-owned subsidiary dedicated to the Mediterranean partners;
- To include a Euro-Med Parliamentary Assembly with consultative powers in the Euro-Med framework, by relaxing the necessary accord on such an assembly of the European Parliament and Euro-Med national assemblies.

The Commission, in a communication of mid-October 2003 aimed at setting the agenda of the Ministerial conference of 2nd to 3rd December 2003 in Naples, recommended these three objectives explicitly.

The Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures and Civilisations is expected to ease contacts, particularly at the level of civil society, and to help policies on migration, the struggle against racism and xenophobia, as well as a general mutual understanding.

As for the existing FEMIP (Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership), established according to the decision made by the Barcelona European Council of March 2002, as an EIB counter, it will be incorporated into an EIB subsidiary with the aim of fostering private investment in the Southern Mediterranean Partners. At many venues in the past, the Italian government has supported the idea of setting up a Mediterranean Development Bank. The EIB subsidiary will not be a bank of its own. However, it will be an independent body dealing with the substantive challenge of encouraging European private saving for investment in the South Mediterranean area, and hopefully act as a decisive factor for its development in the Euro-Med framework.

To quote its own words, the Italian Presidency programme hoped «to turn to good account» all these initiatives presented at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in Naples at the beginning of December.