



MEDITERRANEAN: MEETING AND ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

WORKING PAPER

By Luigi Guidobono Cavalchini

A) History and Great Trends.

There are few areas in the world, where events connected with the juxtaposition and coexistence of different civilisations have so strongly conditioned the contemporary world, that can match the Mediterranean.

Some of the world's earliest civilisations developed in the Mediterranean: Assyrian-Babylonian, Egyptian, Minoan, Phoenician, Etruscan, Greek and Roman.

It was along the Mediterranean coasts that the monotheistic religions developed, with the idea and belief in only one God, which has been a common factor in the sensitivities of Jews, Christians and Arabs.

And around this Sea, different empires have come into being. The Roman Empire was able to give the peoples around its shores a politically integrated organisation, whose like has never been seen since.

In the first century of the Common Era, the Mediterranean provided the base for an empire characterised by multiculturalism, even though it was divided between the mainly Latin-speaking West and the basically Greek-speaking East. Under Diocletian this organisation was to spread from the Atlantic to the Caucasus, influencing all its northern and southern coasts as well as the southern shores of the Black Sea.

Having identified the Empire with the Mediterranean, it was held for a long time that the decline of the former had coincided with a crisis in the latter, in a debate that dated the end of the Roman Empire to coincide with the Barbarian invasions, or the economic crisis, or the deposition of Romulus Augustulus.

The fall of the Western Empire - that is to say, the break in the linkage between the Mediterranean and the Empire - marked the dawning of the Middle Ages, which coincided with the political fragmentation of the Mediterranean, symptomatic of the separation between the Eastern Empire and the Roman-Barbarian kingdoms, and with the Arab occupation of the Iberian peninsula

(which was to continue from 711 until the 15th century, that is to say, until the "reconquest").

The expansion of the Arab world on the one hand and, on the other, the birth of a continental Europe built on the Carolingian Empire, set the seal on the split between the northern shore and the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

Moreover, the Crusades, which began at the end of the eleventh century and lasted throughout the remainder of the medieval period, had two main goals. The first was to rescue the Christians of the East and the second was bound with the "liberation" of Jerusalem and the other places made holy by the life of Jesus.

The settlement of the Balkan Peninsula by the Slavs between the eighth and ninth centuries, facilitated by the weakness of the Byzantium Empire, was in many respects misunderstood or only perceived as a secondary issue in comparison with the emigration towards Europe of the Germanic peoples, subsequently fuelling the idea of "Slav otherness" driven by the burgeoning nationalisms.

The transition to the modern age characterised by the discovery of America and the opening up of the Cape of Good Hope route, shifted the centre of gravity of European trade to the coasts of the Atlantic.

In the 19th century, the Mediterranean witnessed the geopolitical trends of the European nations in a tangle of divergent interests, with the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Czarist empires and the European nations - in particular France and Great Britain - on a headlong collision course.

North Africa was to become the theatre in which the European powers were to set their imperialism in motion, anxious to underpin their colonial expansion policies. In that same period in the Balkans, particularly because of the weakening of the Ottoman Empire - by now known as the "sick man of Europe" (which means that from the 19th century it was considered to form part of the Old Continent) - the centuries-old ill-feeling between Austria-Hungary and Russia caused by the determination of both empires to consolidate their spheres of influence in the area, was rekindled.

The drive in the direction of the warmer seas, which began with Peter the Great and tenaciously taken up by all his successors, made the Mediterranean dimension a fundamental factor in the foreign policy pursued by Russia, which, until the outbreak of the Second World War, had to vie above all with Britain, which was anxious to protect the most important means of communication with its vast empire, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal.

The impetus given to national imperialistic designs through the colonisation of North Africa (which was also pursued in the 20th century by Italy), the break-up of the three empires during the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, the splitting of the Ottoman Empire based on the Sykes-Picot agreements, the Balfour Declaration on the creation in Palestine of a Jewish

"national home", and the emergence of a variety of unstable state formations in the Balkans, were very soon to propagate the tensions and the standoffs throughout the whole area.

During the Second World War, the Mediterranean was only a secondary front, and even afterwards, in the Cold War, it continued to play what was really only a marginal role in the ideological confrontation between the West and East, which hinged essentially around Central Europe.

Despite being marginal, it was not without risks, however: the containment inaugurated by Truman and continued by Eisenhower to offset the Soviet threat in the Middle East led, particularly after the 1956 defeat of the French and the British at Suez, to the direct assumption of responsibility by the United States. Beginning in the 1960s, the United States was to take over the Middle Eastern legacy of the British Empire.

The end of the Cold War, underlined by the Gorbachev-Bush Summit, symbolically held in Valetta Harbor, Malta, December 1989, which paved the way for future negotiations on arms control issues and future of Germany and Europe, was to radically change the geostrategic world stage and, of relevance to our purposes here, the geostrategic scenario of the Mediterranean basin.

A sign of the new times was the attitude of the two Great Powers when Iraq, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. On August 3 Baker and Shevardnadze issued a joint statement condemning the Iraqi action and Baker later declared that this was "clearly the day the Cold War ended". The beginning of an unprecedented cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union took place in September 9 at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki, Gorbachev and Bush declared: "We are determined to see this aggression end, and if the current steps fail to end it, we are prepared to consider additional steps".

On October 30 -November 1, 1991, Gorbachev and Bush cosponsored the Madrid Conference, hosted by the Government of Spain, with the aim to inaugurate two separate parallel negotiating tracks in the Middle East. For the first time Israel entered into direct, face-to-face negotiations with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians, whereas the issues concerning the entire area, such as water, environment, arms control, refugees and economic development were discussed in a multilateral format. The multilateral negotiations opened in Moscow in January 28, 1992.

It was the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and to an even greater extent, 11 September and the United States intervention in Iraq, that heralded in new prospects for the Mediterranean: Palestine and its relations with the State of Israel, fundamentalisms, the demographic imbalances between the two opposing southern shores and the resultant migration flows northwards, and the North-South divides in terms of economic and social conditions all raise the whole issue of a specific Mediterranean interest which cannot be dissociated from the foreign policy of the world's leading powers and the work of the international organisations. On the other hand, outbreaks of terrorism

and Islamic extremism seemed to be re-exhuming the idea of the Mediterranean as the new world's line of divide.

As far as the Balkans are concerned, the internal problems experienced by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the death of Tito in 1980 were compounded by the changes taking place in the international arena, as the Cold War came to an end.

In March 1991 the first armed clash between Croatian police and Serbian paramilitary groups occurred as a consequence of a change in the Croatian constitution, which relegated the Serbian population living there to a minority status. The signals that Yugoslavia was beginning to break apart did not at first cause serious alarm among Western Countries and only when it became apparent that Slovenia and Croatia seemed determined to secede from the Federation the West turned its attention at what was happening in the Balkans.

The so-called "Slovene war" played a mayor role in shaping the attitude of western Governments towards the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Prior to this war, the European Union and the United States were in favor of maintaining the unity of the nation and, later on, the Kohl's determination to grant recognition to Croatia and Slovenia on the basis that all the six of Yugoslav Republics were eligible for independence helped history to take its course.

This brief and incomplete overview of history leads to the conclusion that the original character of the Mediterranean area lies in the fact that there is no other part of our planet in which so many contradictions and similarities, tensions and convergences, identities and differences, have emerged across time as they have here. Even Plato compared the Mediterranean not to a sea but to a pond on whose banks too many frogs croaked!

They are civilisations and cultures, each the heirs of the others, that have then lived side-by-side, enriching one another. But they are also civilisations and cultures, which, at many times in the past, have been at loggerheads, or have clashed, causing extremely deep-seated crises. The memory of events of history that may seem distant, such as Carthage or Poitiers, or the Crusades and Lepanto, Constantinople and Vienna, bring back to mind the most acute and dramatic stages in these crises.

The main question that we have to answer is whether the Mediterranean must be condemned to be a theatre of intractable differences, or whether there is still room today, in the age of globalisation, to envisage possibilities for dialogue and civil debate, while taking note of the "long-term" tendencies that are bound to linger on, and which have influenced the civilisations that have come into being and grown around this sea.

And if we answer this question in the affirmative, we then have to try to indicate the most appropriate means of achieving the desired goal.

There is, however, one caveat to be borne in mind: experience shows us that the conflicts and the tensions that have broken out here and there in this area have almost never been limited to any one single territory. The conflicts and the tensions with which we are familiar - the Middle East, the Western Sahara, Cyprus, as well as the former Yugoslavia - have brought with them a powerful propagating force, making it necessary to relate them all to some common denominator. Yet the specific features of each individual situation, due to cultural, economic and social factors must be borne carefully in mind, as well as the features of their geographic positioning.

It is in this framework that we must consider the function of the Mediterranean as a logistical platform, which is indisputably bound up with that ability to communicate with others that has always been a feature of the Mediterranean peoples, from the Phoenicians to the Greeks, and from the Romans to the Arabs and the Venetians. And today, the "Inner Sea" could once again acquire a centrality linked to its geographic position in the dynamics of globalised world traffic.

B) About the Barcelona Process

To offer a carefully thought-out and realistic answer to this main question about whether or not conflict is structurally inherent in this area, one has to take account of the attitudes and perceptions of the players, particularly those most directly involved.

In the Old Continent, whose southern shores and Balkan shores belong to the same region (which means that in relation to the problems they do not constitute "otherness") the objectives of guaranteeing security and economic and social stability in the Mediterranean are considered above all in terms of narrowing the divide between the wealthy North and the impoverished South.

This is a different perception, not necessarily in contrast with, but complementary to, the United States' view of the East-West axis as more important than the North-South one. For Washington, not only must the "hot areas" of the Middle East be accessible for military purposes, but also because of the immense energy resources in the Middle East area. But it is nevertheless true that the Broader and Middle East and North Africa Initiative which was launched by the G8 in June 2004 with the aim of fostering dialogue and consultation in a spirit of partnership, fits into the context of a much wider-ranging policy in the light of the Iraqi experience.

Having said that, the configuration of the Mediterranean dimension of Europe is not only linked to defining its relations with United States (also to avoid the overlapping of their respective initiatives) but above all to the very essence of the integration process currently taking place within the European Union.

To the Mediterranean member states of the Union, the notion of an enlarged Community taking in the states on the southern shore, namely, a Community which makes it possible

to overcome the bilateral method, seems to be the goal that we should be pursuing in order, among other things, to redress the balance in the wake of the enlargement of the European Union to the Central and Eastern European countries.

In this regard, the establishment of a free trade area by 2010, contemplated by the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, forms part of this approach and one can therefore understand how the obstacles to trade stemming from the extraterritorial application of America's sanctions legislation (in particular the Helms-Burton Act) have been perceived in Europe with disappointment and even irritation regardless of their underlying motivations, intended to strike at "rogue states".

But in Europe, and reflecting its policy based on realism, a number of attitudes are emerging, conditioned by historical "legacies" which are not only leading to reluctance to support Turkish accession, but also to an exaggerated emphasis on the cultural roots of the Old Continent and anti-immigration rhetoric, taking on the appearances of safeguarding national identities.

However, it is precisely the removal of tensions in Central Europe following the end of the ideological standoff between the West and the East that has helped to focus more attention by governments and large sections of public opinion in the Union on the geostrategic challenges facing the Mediterranean. This applies in particular to the need for to address the root causes of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, organised crime and illegal immigration into the Old Continent, adopting appropriate measures to foster economic and social development and to strengthen the organisational structures of societies on the southern shore.

It is in this context that, even before the Barcelona Process, a number of different initiatives were taken, mostly focusing on the question of security between the States in the region. These included the Euro-Arab Dialogue, which was launched in 1974 following the great energy crisis (and which continued with ups and downs until the first Gulf war), the Venice Declaration on the Middle East of 1980 and the 1990 Italian-Spanish Initiative for a Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean. However the institution in 1989 of a group of four member states of the European Community, and five states of the Arab Maghreb Union, the so-called "4+5 Group", which later on became the "5+5 Group" with the accession of Malta, focused more on developing economic ties between the two sides of the Mediterranean.

Why is it that the Barcelona Process, which led to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, has seemed to mark a seachange in relations between the European countries and their peoples, and those on the southern shore of that Sea?

A few general remarks are called for.

For the member states of the European Union, a reorganisation of the major geostrategic balances which is likely to have a radical effect on the equilibria of the Union itself, with its eastward enlargement, has led to a rethinking of past attitudes and to basing relations with

the northern Mediterranean and the Eastern Mediterranean countries on the idea, not only of agreements with each one of these countries, but also of a framework agreement that is able to offer organic and unitary answers to issues of jointly concern.

The Mediterranean countries that are not members of the Union have also been driven by the fear that their societies might not manage to make the most of the benefits of globalisation, and have therefore felt that the European Union might be able to help them solve their structural problems, particularly with regard to unemployment.

Two different types of instruments - bilateral and multilateral - have been adopted to foster the attainment of fundamental objectives, linked to the issues of politics and security, economics and finance, as well as social, cultural, and human right-related matters.

Without wishing to play down the value of some of the results achieved in the past 10 years, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has suffered from certain shortcomings due to the fact that crises still persist in the area (the Western Sahara, the Middle East, and Cyprus), helping to harden the lack of communication between some of the Mediterranean non-EU member states, and the fact that within the partnership that are too many constraints that have undermined its autonomy and capacity to make proposals.

There is no doubt that the Barcelona Declaration originally raised many new hopes, stemming from the conviction that a global and non-fragmentary response to the many problems of the southern shore would be able to contribute towards the security and stability of the Mediterranean. This conviction was strengthened on the back of the hopes - that soon proved to be excessive - raised by the signing of the Oslo agreements.

Even though it has been said that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership rationale differs from the one that led to the conclusion of the Helsinki final act, it should also be recalled that economic, scientific and technological, cultural and human rights cooperation provided under that Act was solidly based: namely, the establishment of the idea of security as a result of recognising the inviolability of the borders and territorial integrity of the signatory states.

The European Union's strategy for the Mediterranean, which took the form of the partnership between the 15 member states of the Union (the membership in 1995) and 12 partners from the southern shore of the Mediterranean, was criticised by many observers because it was geographically restricted. But this narrowly defined policy was linked on the one hand to the existence of pre-existing and well-developed relations with the North African states (the legacy of their colonial past) and on the other hand the lack a geographic proximity with the Gulf States, where, moreover, the presence and interests of the United States prevail.

The importance that the European Union wished to attribute to respect for human

rights and democratic principles as the basis for political dialogue with its Mediterranean partners was certainly influenced by the Union's own experience of integration. But it should be recognised, with equal candour, that the "political conditionality" linking the grant of economic assistance to compliance with the Union's own principles and values, has only been applied to a limited extent so far.

How do the non-EU member states of the Mediterranean perceive the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership?

Generally speaking, many observers emphasise the lop-sided nature of this partnership, with the European Union as the sole player, and all the other partners quite content to work haphazardly, without coordinating their positions, and sometimes even adopting opposing stances.

As to the substance, it is noted that the attitudes of public opinion in those states, and of their governments, are very ambivalent: it is a love-hate relationship, with the result that young people who are unable to find work in their own country consider Europe to be the only way to escape from a life fraught with difficulties, and as the only alternative open to them, even though they realise that this entails committing crimes.

The change that is still being levelled against the European states, and against the West in general, is that they create the impression that certain values, such as the rule of law, justice, equality and democracy are not so much values in themselves but rather instruments to be used on the basis of pure convenience and realism.

In the same way, Europeans and the West are criticised for supporting authoritarian regimes, which are the very ones that create the conditions of instability which they claim they wish to eliminate.

As far as the impact of the policies under the Barcelona Declaration are concerned, observers in the non-EU Mediterranean States doubt whether they coincide not only with the interests of the people on the southern shore but also those on the northern shore, because they would by no means encourage sustainable development or shared prosperity and improved North-South co-operation.

In this regard it should be noted that the free trade area excludes agricultural products where the South has a competitive edge over the North, and that the bilateral agreements refer to the liberalisation of trade in manufactured products and capital movements, but provide no indications regarding the movement of people.

In short, it is widely believed in the Mediterranean non-EU member states that the European Union is implementing a shortsighted policy to protect its own short-term interests, such as cheap energy, the protection of its markets and employment within the European Union.

C) Mediterranean in the light of 9/11.

The perceptions of a number of different authors can help us to better identify the state of the Mediterranean in the light of 11 September and the military intervention in Iraq: a scenario in which the issues of security, which traditionally relate to conflicts between and within states, and the proliferation of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, are bound up with "sensitive" issues of a new kind in the political, social, economic and environmental protection spheres.

In short, the research that has been conducted in recent years by a number of countries on the southern shore has been in response to a need for soft security to overcome the profile of many countries subject to authoritarian regimes, a lack of strong protection of fundamental human rights, economic backwardness and seriously degraded environments.

With regard to the Israeli Arab confrontation, since the President's Clinton peacemaking efforts collapsed in 2000 several efforts have been made to reduce the tension between the two sides. In particular, in November 2001, at the UN General Assembly, Yasser Arafat condemned the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks carried out in the United States. On the same occasion, the President of the Palestinian Authority stressed the importance of the Jordan- Egyptian Initiative, the Tenet Plan and the Mitchell Report as starting points for calming the situation and getting the parts back to the negotiating table.

Moreover, in 2002 Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia launched the so-called Arab Peace Initiative, offering the ending of the Arab Israeli conflict, a peace treaty with Israel, the recognition of the state of Israel in exchange of the withdrawal of Israel from almost entirely all of the occupied territories.

Most "peace-minded" initiatives launched at the turn of the century by moderate Arabs have been hampered by the American decision to intervene militarily against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime.

Finally, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip in August 2005, could give a boost for an internationally recognised Palestinian State. Several observers indicate that, if Mahmoud Abbas succeeds in maintaining the cease-fire worked out in February, and Ariel Sharon will be able to cope with the West Bank issue by neutralising the Israeli internal opposition, the prospects of reaching a peaceful settlement through negotiations between the two sides could look more promising. In this regard the outcome of the general elections scheduled for the next year in Palestinian territories as well as in Israel are crucially important.

Coming back to a more comprehensive framework of the Mediterranean issue, some of the reforms seem to be moving in this direction, such as the general election in Iraq, the municipal

elections in Saudi Arabia, extending the vote to women in Oman, the creation of human rights commissions in Egypt and Qatar, the reform of family law in Algeria and in Morocco, and the announced reforms regarding civil society in Egypt. These are all measures that move in the right direction, even though they are still not satisfactory from the point of view of respect for fundamental freedoms and good governance.

Significant, in this connection, are the conclusions reached by independent Arab experts in the third Arab Human Development Report (AHDR 2004) published by UNDP. This Report examined 22 Arab countries and emphasised the need to redress the authoritarian character of the governments in the area precisely to prevent any "chaotic social upheaval" from taking place even in the short term.

The Report points out that the problems of the Arab world cannot be solved with a cultural response because the reasons for restrictions on freedom of opinion, speech and association to which those societies are subjected are more political in character. Removing these causes would mean in particular removing the "black hole" of the lack of a power which is capable of adequately protecting and safeguarding the rights of citizens.

The emergence of new states coinciding with the end of the colonial period was not brought about without tensions and conflict. And it was precisely the rallying call to national pride that formed the mortar that shored up the new state entities, thereby creating fertile ground for the establishment of strong local powers, in view of the lack of any responsible middle classes, made up above all of the military.

Although part of the responsibility for the present state of backwardness in "human development" can be put down to the colonial powers, one cannot conclude that there is an "unbridgeable" divide between the North and the South, and between the West and the Arab World. Bernard Lewis, in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, rightly points out that "to speak of dictatorship as being the immemorial way of doing things in the Middle East is simply untrue. It reveals ignorance of the Arab past, contempt for the Arab present, and lack of concern for the Arab future".

D) Foundations for Security.

The problems that we are confronted with today regarding the "human development" of the Arab world may be reduced essentially to two.

The first is based on the fact that in no other part of the world is the gap so wide in terms of wealth, economic, social and human development and demographic growth, as exists between the southern and the northern shores of the Mediterranean basin. This is why we have to ask whether and how the community of states, and in particular the member states of the European Union and the international organisations should intervene in order to help bridge this gap, bearing

in mind that the creation of a collective security system to counter terrorism, strengthen non-proliferation and bring peace to areas in conflict, cannot be disassociated from fostering respect for fundamental human rights, the rule of law, good governance, and sustainable development.

In this connection, the third Arab Human Development Report provides useful information by stating that the reform initiatives from outside do not necessarily coincide with the viewpoints of the Arab reformers and the initiatives proposed by international institutions or by third countries can only be usefully considered on the following terms: the Arabs must be acknowledged as having the right to define their own view of freedom and good governance; relations between Arab reformers and their external supporters should form part of a partnership scenario, and not a protectorate; in other words the reforms must be pursued by the stakeholders themselves, even though they can be given encouragement from outside.

Against this background, the "outsiders" - whether that be the European Union under the Barcelona partnership, the "Quartet" that created the Road Map or the Sea Island G8, which adopted the United States Greater Middle East Initiative - weight must be given to the "enlightened" interlocutors in the area, overcoming every prejudice regarding their religious background and bearing in mind that Western policies towards the Arab world are often implemented out of ignorance.

One wonders what can be done to resolve the contradiction of adopting a dual approach of supporting authoritarian regimes on the one hand, and bringing pressure to bear for democratisation (which, if too premature, can lead to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and their replacement by even harsher dictatorships), on the other. But we must also ask ourselves whether the West is really capable of taking a comprehensive and more realistic approach to the Arab world at all. The cooperation schemes that have been envisaged so far and that have been partially implemented, as in the case of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, need a new "lease of life", in the sense that the innovative impetus and the importance of the political dimension that they entail must help to supersede their functional and sectoral character in order to overcome conflicts, and bring about not only economic but also social, development and institutionalised co-operation, in the sense of cooperation which ranges beyond what is purely conventional.

But to make them acceptable, these ideas must also be proposed in order to offset the often unreasonable conviction that the West uses and abuses international law to suit its own purposes at will. In Arab eyes, apart from the difficulties of understanding the legitimacy of pre-emptive action, a political solution to the Palestinian problem would also mark a return to the international rule of law from which, rightly or wrongly, they consider themselves to have been excluded, and consequently create a more constructive and less conflictual relationship with the rest of the world. Moreover, by stressing unilateralism over cooperation, pre-emption over

prevention and hard power over soft power, the Bush Administration has given rise to a lot of misunderstandings with some of the US' natural allies in Europe.

A policy showing a greater understanding in this direction, and also entailing more cooperation, which is certainly the one inaugurated by the European Union under the Barcelona Declaration, would help to give credibility to the work of the Community of nations; from this point of view, the debate that has transformed the Greater Middle East Initiative into the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future may be considered to be a weakening of United States unilateralism for the benefit of that cooperative approach which underlies the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It should be added, in passing, that the idea underlying the latest proposals of the American Administration that in order to foster democracy support cannot be given to authoritarian regimes and that a cooperative platform has to be developed, is vividly present and has in part been put into practice in the initiatives of the European Union.

The second problem to which reference has been made earlier has to do with the relationship between economic and social development on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and settling the current conflicts, beginning with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this connection, virtually all the political leaders in the Arab world (and let us remember the stances adopted in December last year in Rabat at the Forum that was contemplated in the American Initiative launched at Long Island) consider that finding a solution to the Palestinian issue is the key condition for hastening the process of reforming Arab civil society and combating international terrorism.

But how far this condition is instrumental, and not rather a means of putting off the reforms *sine die* in a process that threatens the current stability of the established powers in the region, still remains to be seen, particularly because a number of independent observers, including Arabs, harbour doubts about the sustainability of this approach, and are putting forward arguments to refute it.

The AHDR 2004 Report seems to place the continuing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories together with the uncertain results achieved so far by the United States in bringing peace to Iraq in a process designed to curb the self-determination of peoples, viewed as an external conquest of freedom.

E) The Balkans and the Black Sea.

The issues regarding the stabilisation of the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East bear many similarities with those of the Western Balkans, where the loss, at the end of the 1980s of the conditions that had acted as a mortar holding together the six states of the Yugoslav Federation, has transformed the whole area into a theatre of vicious warfare, with massacres of whole populations.

It was the collapse of real socialism, and particularly the death of such a charismatic figure as Marshal Tito, that triggered the ethnic cleansing operations and more generally of incommunicability which is still making the situation in the area precarious. In order to better understand these events, we ought to first of all examine the rather controversial notion of the "Balkans area".

The definition of the Balkans, which dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, and the work of the German geographer Zeune, was strongly influenced by the historical and political events that led to identifying this peninsula, for example, with the territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire which, by definition, excluded those that fell under the direct or indirect influence of the Habsburg and the Romanov Empires.

Some scholars also maintain that it is the course of the Danube that marks the northern borders of the Balkans peninsula, thereby excluding Romania from membership of the region.

Slovenia and Croatia, two of the six states forming part of Tito's Yugoslavia, never concealed their aspiration to join the European Community individually, even before the 1991 dissolution of Yugoslavia. And the reasons they gave for this aspiration, apart from questions of their level of economic development in comparison with those of the other four Yugoslav states, had to do with their geographic as well as their historical positioning.

Many European and American politicians, at least until the First World War, also considered Hungary as forming part of the Balkans, while quite a few Croats even today still claim that their culture remains alien to the traditions of the region in which they live.

The fact that Sarajevo provided the pretext for triggering the First World War led public opinion worldwide to consider the Balkans as a toxin that is able to imperil the health of nations, particularly the European countries.

In more general terms, and in the light of these considerations, one can explain the way in which the governments of the area and their public opinion at home tend to try to forget or to conceal their Mediterranean character, and to claim to belong to Central and Eastern Europe instead, while at the same time rejecting any multicultural characterisation in the name of a claim to some strong national identity.

We should also recognise that the centuries-old ethnic, religious and cultural rivalry between the populations in the peninsula can largely be put down to the attitudes of the Great Powers, whose commitment in the past was to make this an arena in which to fight out their ambitions and their interests without any consideration of the rightful local demands, except to use them for their own ends.

The 1878 Berlin Congress sanctioning the independence of Serbia and Montenegro, and

permitting Austria-Hungary to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria's ultimatum to Serbia in 1914, and the 1923 Lausanne Treaty which, among other things, provoked the "Great Exchange" of populations between Greece and Turkey, Italian military intervention in Greece, marking the beginning of a historical phase that ended with the creation of pro-Soviet regimes in Bulgaria and Romania and the attraction of Greece and Turkey into the western orbit, were all stages in a process in which the populations in the area were unable or unwilling to placate the tensions, the stand-offs and pride.

What has happened to Greece, the first Balkan state to enter the European Community, stands as an example to the whole area. For Athens, accession in 1981 almost in the wake of the Cyprus crisis, was ultimately dictated by the twofold need to shore up a fragile democracy that had emerged from seven years of military dictatorship, and to seek adequate political guarantees for its security and stability.

Greece's experience of a gradual rapprochement to the European Union provides a basis for making comparisons with the present state of the countries that used to form part of Yugoslavia.

The presence for over 40 years of a Federation of six States, that managed to achieve unity thanks to a charismatic regime based on self-governance at home, and on Non- alignment in its external projection, was certainly the result of a very intelligent policy designed to maintain the necessary equilibria in terms of the changes that were constantly taking place on the world stage.

The beginning of the post-Tito era, which can be dated back to the decision taken by Milosevic to modify the 1974 Constitution (meeting the aspirations to autonomy of Kosovo and Voivodina) to give greater weight to Serbia when voting on the Federal Council, merely served to fuel the concerns of the Croats and the Bosnian Muslims and the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, about the resurgence of a pan-Serbian spirit.

References to the empire built up by Dusan in the 14th century, and even more so recalling the battle fought in Kosovo in 1389, further boosted the idea of the "Greater Serbia" in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Battle of Kosovo is the symbol of Serbian heroism, but also of the humiliation of the Ottoman invader, and is so deeply rooted in the identity of that people that it makes them forget the contribution the Albanians made to fight off the Turks.

The November 1995 Dayton accords, which set a deadline for ending the conflict between the three communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were based on the former plan drawn up by the Contact Group (then made up of France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia and the United States) and gave rise to a state organisation based on two entities: one Croatian-Bosnian, and

one Serbian. Even though the ultimate purpose of this agreement was to bring about reconciliation between the three communities, it still gives rise to considerable doubts, precisely because of the wide margin of ambiguity underlying it. For Dayton is exposed to two dangerous interpretations. For it is not known whether Bosnia and Herzegovina has been partitioned, or whether it has been newly unified, and the definition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an "inextricable maze" with two entities, five presidents, three parliaments, three governments and two armies, two alphabets and three religions, succinctly sums up the present situation, and the risks to which it is exposed.

A different, but equally precarious solution has come about as a result of what has been happening in Kosovo.

While recourse to the use of military force against Serbia in 1999 was designed by NATO to prevent the repeated violations of human rights, the creation of a constitutional system for Kosovo is still, to this day, essentially unresolved.

Security Council resolution 1244 of November 1999 entrusted the provisional administration contemplated in a resolution with the task of facilitating "a political process designed to determine Kosovo's future status, taking into account the Rambouillet accords". These accords refer to an ill-defined "substantial autonomy" for Kosovo within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The diplomatic breakthrough ending Nato's air strikes has been reached on 6 May 1999 in Bonn, where the G8 adopted the peace proposal, which Milosevic signed in June. The settlement of 3-10 June was the result of the Russian peace process, which seemed to have reached a compromise between the Rambouillet and Serbian positions, especially as far as Nato's presence in Kosovo was concerned.

The G8 agreement differed substantially from Rambouillet in that it shifted the focus of diplomacy to the United Nations, in tackling civil issues and in organizing an international presence which Russia had long insisted should have been at the centre of efforts to resolve the crisis.

The European Union's plan for a stabilisation and association process drawing its inspiration from the EU's enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe forms part of the strategy adopted by the Thessaloniki European Council of June 2003, which confirmed "the determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkans countries, which will become an integral part of the European Union, once they meet the established criteria".

The recent Report of the International Commission for the Balkans emphasises the need to jointly address both the issues of the future constitutional arrangements of the States in the region and the most urgent economic and social issues.

Where the report points out that the current European Union stabilisation and association process has only partially managed to make an adequate response to the problems of the

Western Balkans, it stresses the need to define and implement a "member state building strategy", particularly for Bosnia and Kosovo.

These conclusions are not far away in terms of their objectives from those envisaged by the European Council, namely, the gradual integration of the Balkans into the European Union as an immediate means of overcoming the current state of precariousness, and to prevent dangerous drifting in the medium and long-term away from the path of stability and economic and social development.

One wonders whether the aim of European Union membership will really make it possible to overcome the dilemma between an agreed solution by all the parties involved and a solution in some way imposed by the International Community. From this point of view the situation in Kosovo is exemplary, because faced with Belgrade's total rejection of the independence of its former Province, the overall European solution would be much more acceptable if public opinion - not only in the Balkans - could see it as a means of overcoming narrow nationalistic and, essentially, obtuse ideas.

Within this framework, the allocation of the financial resources needed to foster the economic and social development of the Balkans should be examined in autumn at a Summit held with the European Union. This will be an important event not only because it should define the amount of resources which the European Union is ready to allocate to the Balkans as part of its 2007-2012 financial perspectives, but above all because each of the States in the peninsula should be given a roadmap at that Summit, setting out the path to accession.

How far this "plan" involving a region which was under Ottoman influence for centuries, can remain influenced by Turkey's membership of the European Union, is not easy to predict. We would merely say here that the prospect of Turkey's membership has a long history behind it. For it did not arise with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, as was the case with the Central European states. It dates back to over 40 years ago with the signing in Ankara, in September 1963, of the Association Agreement with the European Economic Community.

According to the Treaty of Rome, association is not an institution as an end in itself, but expresses an intermediate stage towards the full membership of any European state, once specific conditions have been met. One can therefore understand why the idea recently broached by a number of member states of a "privileged partnership" did not appeal whatsoever to the Turkish government, precisely because it flies in the face of both the letter and the spirit of the founding treaties.

Supporters of Turkey's accession, quite rightly, stress the contribution that Turkey has made since becoming a member of NATO in 1952, to defending the values of Western civilisation against a possible Soviet threat.

According to this opinion, Turkey's accession would complete the Kemal Ataturk plan, and help it to overcome that identity crisis stemming from the fact of being a hinge between continental Europe and Asia, between the West and the Third World, and between an outward-looking attitude following in a tradition dating back to the time of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the appeal of Islam as an alternative to possible rejection by Europe.

On the basis of these considerations, we must not ignore the geostrategic importance of the areas bordering on Turkey: this is not only a reference to the Middle East but above all to another dimension of the Mediterranean: the Black Sea. The Black Sea region, geographically situated at the intersection of Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, is invaluable to the Mediterranean basin, both economically and politically. With Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq topping the list of strategic challenges facing the International Community, anchoring democracy and security in the Countries of this region has become imperative in the light of the efforts to be made in order to facilitate the process of reform and modernization in the wider Middle East.

A security concept for the Black Sea should take into account some aspects relating, first, to the challenges which confront the region, especially the frozen conflicts (South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Transdneistria and Ngorno-Karabach) and trans-border crime. Second, despite its ethnic and cultural diversity, the region has its own "commonality", coming from the past. Third, Armenia and Georgia are highly dependent net energy importers surrounded by some of the world's most important energy producers. At this regard, for the Caucasus Countries the top priorities are twofold, i.e. diversifying their energy needs and cashing in on transit revenues as their neighbors develop export facilities throughout their territories.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the Countries of the Black Sea were able to undertake bold steps in the direction of a mutual cooperation through the exploitation of the important assets in their possession, such as geographical proximity and interdependence of their economies. The real breakthrough occurred in 1992 when the Heads of State and Government of eleven Countries (Albania, Armenia, Azebardjan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) launched a process known as Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

Building a wider Black Sea Area that is stable, secure, democratic and prosperous could become a project of international cooperation binding the regional countries including the Russian Federation as well as the Mediterranean Countries, the European Union and the larger Euro-Atlantic community.

F) Final Remarks.

The Mediterranean is an area with deeply rooted and distinguished cultural and religious

features, and the peoples living around its shores have inherited an ancient legacy of knowledge and wisdom: an intellectual curiosity, which urges them to meet, dialogue and become more familiar with one another.

At this regard, Granada symbolizes an important moment in the Mediterranean history, when the most vibrant intellectual and cultural force in Europe was rooted in Islam, and when the heart of Islam was in many ways rooted in Europe. Al-Andalus introduced Europe to paper, algebra, advanced irrigation techniques and translations of many of the classic works of Greek philosophy.

On the other hand, throughout the centuries the Mediterranean has faced a sort of harsh contradiction between the concept of unity and the disparity of local realities. Unity, in terms of interdependence, prevails in the sense that what happens on one of the Mediterranean shores unavoidably affects the others. But local realities are more or less confronted with an anguish caused by globalisation, whose pace has accelerated and imposed itself, often brutally, on local traditions and identities, throwing up problems with which all the countries overlooking Mediterranean basin are familiar, and with which they have to come to terms daily.

From the results described above, several conclusions could be drawn taking into a serious account the factors of instability threatening the region. 11th September has added new, disturbing dimensions to security. Rooting out terrorism in all its forms, and removing the instruments through which it operates, still remains one of the major tasks to which the community of civilised nations must continue to address itself.

The Mediterranean- with the Balkans regional crises, and above all the Middle East issue-is conditioning the international stability today, more than ever before. This awareness has spread well beyond its geographic borders, and finding and developing ways and means in order to create common bases for an enhanced dialogue, and lay the foundations for more complete political and security cooperation among all the countries concerned, remains a greatest challenge of our century.