

"5+5" SUMMIT IN MALTA IN 2011

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In 2011 Malta hosts the summit of the "5+5" Western Mediterranean Dialogue. The Dialogue meets at Ministerial and occasionally at heads of government level. Libya is proposing a parliamentary meeting of the "5+5" and the Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives canvassed for it at a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)¹ in Morocco. It is not clear what the "5+5" has achieved so far, but the Dialogue would have certainly fizzled out had the participating states not derived any utility from it.

Since independence, Malta has been a leading advocate of Mediterranean security. On joining the Council of Europe in May 1965, it promised to raise Mediterranean issues in that quintessentially European organization. During the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), often referred to as the Helsinki Process, Malta linked European and Mediterranean security (Helsinki 1975, Madrid 1983) – arguing that the latter was a *sine qua non* for the other. The island's methods were controversial: using the consensual decision-making rule to block progress until her demands were met, Malta risked exclusion from the process. However, watered down versions of her demands were half-heartedly accepted by the CSCE. Malta's stands could have unwittingly jeopardized the more important CSCE objective of improving security in central Europe. One beneficiary from this would have been Mao's China, since Beijing feared that détente and disengagement in Central Europe would free Soviet forces to be redeployed to the Sino-Soviet border.² In January 1972, Malta had recognized the People's Republic and relations between the two countries flourished, with Beijing providing a substantive aid package. On the other hand both superpowers – and particularly the USA, as events from Portugal to Cyprus and the Middle East would show from 1973-74 – perceived Mediterranean security purely from a Cold War perspective and balance of power politics.

The "5+5" began in 1990 as "the Western Mediterranean Dialogue". It was inspired by a 1983 proposal by French President Francois Mitterrand. Initially Malta was excluded from the Dialogue but then joined it in 1991. The "5+5" consists of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia as well as Italy, France, Malta, Portugal and Spain. In 1992, the Dialogue stopped functioning due to the international sanctions imposed on Libya, the deteriorating relations between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara and the Algerian civil war. The latter two conflicts also stopped the Maghreb Union in its tracks. In 1994, Egypt and France set up the Mediterranean Forum from which Malta was initially excluded. Later it was invited to join the Forum and was present at the 1995 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Sainte-Maxime. That year the "Barcelona Process" or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was also launched. This included a

¹ PAM's Secretariat is located in Malta.

² Ruud van Dijk (ed.) (2008), *Encyclopedia of the Cold War*, Routledge, page 187.

security dialogue which however turned out to be a spectacular dead end. In 2008 we witnessed the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The "5+5" is an intergovernmental initiative. One of its aims was to allow the participating states to focus on sub-regional security challenges without linking them to the Middle East Problem. But as I just indicated, the problems of the sub-region itself could also freeze the dialogue - something which may have been overlooked by its architects.

The last three "5+5" meetings, including the ministerial which took place in Tunisia last April, have focused on immigration, organized crime and terrorism. The forthcoming 2011 Malta summit is also likely to prioritize these themes. More than a spoonful of spice was added to the immigration debate when last September the Libyan Leader Colonel Gaddafi let the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi know during a bilateral summit in Rome, that Libya wants €5 billion a year from the EU to stop illegal immigrants from crossing over to Europe. On 1 September 2010, an informal "5+5" ministerial meeting was held in Tripoli on immigration. In the meantime, the EU is still negotiating a first ever agreement with Libya, the only Mediterranean country still with no formal contractual links with the EU.

Italy and Malta both have an interest in stopping illegal immigration in the central Mediterranean. Malta has supported last year's Italo-Libyan bilateral accord which has practically ended irregular immigration flows. In May 2010, the Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni said that 850 immigrants had been turned back at sea as opposed to the some 37,000 estimated to have actually landed on Italian shores the previous year. Malta has experienced a similar dramatic fall in arrivals, from 2,775 in 2008 and 1,450 in 2009 (the Libyan-Italian pact went into operation in the second half of that year) to a negligible 47 in 2010. The Italian-Libyan agreement and the consequent "respingimenti in mare" have drawn criticism from human rights groups, UNHCR and the Vatican while the policy's success has also encouraged Gaddafi to increase the price of his services. Libya does not want to be Europe's border guard. It is not clear what role if any was played by the "5+5" on this issue, so far.

Nevertheless, the "5+5" has proved to be a very useful security dialogue in the Western Mediterranean. But the EU members of this club need to be more forceful in securing EU backing for their stabilization policies in the sub-region. Some years ago they started co-ordinating their action in informal meetings of the so called "Olive Group" of Mediterranean EU states. This group consists of Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Romania. Its main aim is to ensure that the Mediterranean stays on the EU agenda. The group met six times, once in Cyprus, and its last meeting took place in Messina in December 2008. Will it be reborn like the phoenix - reproduce itself rather than by the agency of others?