Rodolfo Ragionieri

5 Fragmentation and Order in the Mediterranean Area

5.1 Times and Spaces

Amongst the many problems we face when dealing with the Mediterranean, the first and certainly not the least important is how to define it; is it a region of international politics, or more generally an area that separates (and unites) other regions? Strictly speaking, the Mediterranean cannot be defined as a region (or sub-system) in the sense usually used in international politics, whether from a theoretical, journalistic or analytical point of view. Indeed, it does not show those characteristics of cultural and political homogeneity, of exchange and institutional integration, that distinguish the regions of the international system.

To get round the difficulties inherent in defining a region or sub-system, we might first of all look at it from the point of view of politics and security. Those states whose perceptions and calculations regarding security in the political-territorial sense cannot be considered separately can indeed be considered regions from the point of view of security (or security complexes, according to Buzan’s definition). If we use this definition, Europe on the one hand and the Middle East and North Africa on the other hand can be considered security complexes. In turn, Europe and the Middle East-North Africa can be subdivided into different areas. In fact, Europe already includes an area that is united (or is soon to be united, at least in a historical perspective), in Western and Central Europe; and to this we can add Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The Middle East-North Africa includes (to use the Arab terms) the Maghreb and Mashreq, as well as the state of Israel. The security perceptions and calculations of Iran and Turkey are related not only to the Middle East and North Africa, but to other areas as well, and they must therefore be considered as transitional countries.

If we limit ourselves for the moment to this point of view, Turkey, Russia and Iran are countries that border with different regions (or security complexes). The first one can indeed be thought of as a part of both Europe and the Middle East, and

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furthermore has consistent political and economic interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moreover, historical connections and the common "Turanic" heritage make the plan for a Turkish role in the area not totally over-ambitious. Of the second, the least extensive, but politically and economically the most important, territory is geographically part of Europe. Furthermore, the most part of Northern Asia (with its immense underground resources) is part of Russian Federation territory, which borders on the Pacific Ocean, and therefore figures in Eastern Asian political strategies, as well as being massively present in Central Asia. Iran is, from the point of view of political-territorial security, included in the Middle East, in Central Asia (where the enduring conflict in Afghanistan is one of the main security concerns for Iran), and is thus connected to the Indian subcontinent through the not always simple relations with Pakistan.

From the point of view of identity, Russia and Turkey are also countries with strong cultural characteristics (at least as far as the dominant nations, that is the Russians and the Turks respectively, are concerned), but where there exists a significant debate on their place in the geography of the cultures. The not completely clear (and maybe irresolvable) matter of Russian identity, or the place in Europe for the original and peculiar Russian culture is indeed an important issue. Also in Turkey, despite Kemalist modernization, the matter of identity and belonging is caught up between the centralised nation state, processes of democratic consolidation, the rise and crisis of Islamic parties and movements, Ottoman inheritance, and pan-Turkish ambitions. In a historical perspective this strain can be explained by the fact that the process of formation of the "Turkish nation" started at the beginning of this century and is consequently not at all completed. Turkish national identity is thus strongly asserted, but is fragile. The multiplicity of different options in the foreign policy menu reflects this predicament. If one looks at this problem from the inside, the perception of threat from alleged ethnic and religious centrifugal forces can be seen as the root of many idiosyncrasies. Examples for that can be considered Turkey’s attitude with respect to religion in politics and the treatment of minorities, primarily the Kurds.

These two countries, therefore, certainly cannot be considered exclusive elements of any one region. Turkey, moreover, connects two sub-regions in the Mediterranean, the