



Could decentralization be a response to solve Low Intensity Conflicts?

Conference paper by Arslan Chikhaoui

Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC) in North Africa and the Sahel region are clearly undermining the stability and security of the sub-Mediterranean region with an indirect effect on Europe due to anarchic people mobility heading to north and so-called »refugees or illegal immigrants«.

Avoiding the military option, decentralization could be part of the democratic transition and political dialogue processes already engaged by the concerned states such as for example Mali and Libya. Decentralization could be the response as far as it is not been used as a separatism and division process. Some movements may take the opportunity of decentralisation for achieving territories self-determination, reinforcing ethnic divisions and producing more instability.

Decentralization can help to reduce conflict by reducing inequities between various regions or between a region and the central government. In the case of LICs on-going in the sub-Mediterranean region, it reduces intrastate conflict unless politicians create political parties that mobilize minorities and even extremist groups to demand more resources and power within national governments. However, this depends on how democratic transition happens and features. Some argue that decentralization can promote peace if it encourages state-wide parties to incorporate regional demands and limit the power of regional parties.

Starting from the fact that decentralization is a mind-set more than a process, the states which are facing LICs need to provide a chart framework for defining the culture and the application of decentralization in order to meet the demands of minorities for a greater say in local governance, and increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels. The social cohesion and national unity and identity should be clearly emphasized in the decentralization chart framework.

During the decentralisation process, the greatest difficulty lies in choosing the formula that will be applied to implementing the new forms of territorial management. We also must be careful of which form of decentralisation is applying: devolution, delegation or deconcentration.

In the case of countries facing LICs, I am personally in favour of gradual processes of decentralisation based on the gradual devolution of powers. However, to avoid undesired effects, it is important to take into account the possible risks involved in implementing a decentralisation process as lack of coordination, local tyrannies and corruption, increase in tensions, and encourage territorial inequality.

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