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Report of the Advisory Committee to Reform and Develop the “Arab Regional Order”

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Advisory Committee
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The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship is a regional hub of a dynamic community of academics, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and members of the general public interested in exploring traditional and innovative forms of collective actions, locally-grounded policy debates and in advancing realistic solutions to the obstacles to effective civil society and citizenship in the Arab world. In doing so, the Institute provides training workshops and programs beside regular teaching at AUB, encourages and provides evidence-based research in areas related to political participation, accountability and good governance, produces policy/practice recommendations to improve citizens’ engagement and civil society roles in mediation, deliberation and self-organization. It also promotes

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Introduction

The advisory committee of the research project on "Reform and Development of the Arab Regional Order" realizes the importance of collective Arab action in the face of growing challenges and overwhelming changes in various sectors, on Arab, regional and international levels. The committee is also aware of the necessity for an effective response to these challenges and for the strong drive of Arab populations to reform the official institutions of the regional system, represented by the League of Arab States (LAS) and its related entities, redesign them, and enable their performance. This would allow the Arab order to cope with geopolitical changes; rationalize, streamline and enrich inter-Arab interactions; and devise Arab participatory policies capable of effectively dealing with factual data, fulfilling common goals, and building a better future for Arab nations.

In light of these goals and aspects, the advisory committee shouldered the responsibility for research, analysis, appraisal and conclusion work - all in a systematic manner, and the management of this research project up until the restructuring of the LAS in a manner that enables it to take up the challenges, the changes and the requirements of the present time, and to envision other alternative or parallel scenarios.

The advisory committee revised and assessed the reform operations that the LAS underwent in the past, as well as the lessons learned from them, especially the final report prepared by the independent committee headed by Lakhdar Brahimi, which was approved by the League's ministerial council and developed by the LAS' former secretary general on September 13, 2011. The advisory committee also reviewed some of the literature and research on the League and the reports issued by Arab and international research institutes. Moreover, it polled a number of top officials who have worked at the LAS, from secretary generals, and current and former ministers and ambassadors to former delegates to their respective countries; in addition to intellectuals, academics, experts in Arab economy, media personnel, young leaders, and civil society members.

The advisory committee also organized, in partnership with the Centre for Arab Unity Studies and the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut, panel discussions on the LAS and collective Arab work, as well as the corresponding problems and failures, and the likelihood of their alleviation, in a manner that boosts the role of this regional organization in building international peace and security, inclusive human security, sustainable development, and regional integration, which - in turn - serves to optimize the interests of member states.

The advisory committee worked on this project over almost 22 months, and held its meetings in Amman, Beirut, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Cairo. A number of basic principles governed the work of the committee, primarily the below:

To carry out a comprehensive review of the achievements and successes of the LAS since its establishment, especially in the past four decades. Moreover, to perform an objective diagnosis of variants on the Arabic, regional, and international levels - whether in the relations and interactions between nations and peoples, the new ideas and concepts, and the international clusters, or in the transitions in security, sovereignty, knowledge and globalization; adding to this the repercussions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution as well the acceleration of geopolitical, geographical and demographic changes, including the emergence of a multi-polar and multi-faceted world, and finally the shifts in the World's balance of power.

The basic principles that governed the work of the committee also include the emphasis of the recommendations on the necessity of inducing an inclusive development process on the model of lessons learned from the experiences of successful regional systems around the world that managed to shift from the concepts of consultancy and cooperation to the concepts of integration. These successful systems also set vital areas apart from political discords, and possessed the political will and vision, as well as the financial resources and the commitment to fulfill the undertakings within the framework of collective action.

The report is divided into four chapters, as per the following:

The first chapter presents the essence of the successes that the LAS has achieved, as well as the failures and challenges it has faced, and the reasons and factors behind the blunders.

The second chapter tackles the most prominent changes in the region, along with global transformations and their impact on changing rules of engagement among countries, in addition to the emergence of violent non-state cross-border actors and other emerging forces which seek formulating a new international order and a regional security system that bear different characteristics.

As for the third chapter, it focuses on the process of revitalizing the Arab regional order; reforming its official organization represented by the League of Arab States and its specialized entities; and developing the Arab joint action, its priorities, and the integrative path in the region. This chapter includes a number of recommendations on reforming the LAS system, boosting progressive and continuous cooperation, as well as leveraging the participatory work characterized with realism and ambitiousness.

The fourth chapter presents a number of possible future scenarios, including forecasting the continuation of the LAS and the keenness of its member countries on its survival as a common symbol of the Arab World, even without subjecting it to radical reforms.

Chapter 1; League of Arab States: Successes and Failures

The League of Arab States is the official organization of the Arab regional order. Ever since its formation in 1945 and until today, it has been a mirror of this regional system, reflecting its characteristics and performance. It aims at assuring the willingness to adhere to Arabism as an identity, strengthen ties among member countries, coordinate political plans, achieve cooperation among these countries in a manner that preserves their independence and sovereignty, respect the governance system of each country, look into the affairs and interests of member countries, avoid force in settling disputes among them, mediate in cases of conflict, and reconcile countries. It has also allowed member states wishing for a more proximate cooperation than it is stated in the League's Charter, to hold among them conventions and treaties, as they desire, in order to achieve these purposes.

The History of the LAS has been associated with all the events and developments that took place in the countries of the region and its surrounding since the end of WW2 and until today. The League has helped many Arab countries gain their independence and resolve several conflicts. It has raised awareness on the concept of Arab integration. Arabs have looked at the League in the light of ambitious dreams and have held it responsible for the failure and inability to fulfill the dreams of an Arab unity and development, and the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, among other major issues.

Within the framework of the League, several collective Arab initiatives were taken on political, economic, cultural, media, social, environmental, sports, heritage and legislative issues, among others; in addition to the Arab Peace Initiative, the dialogues initiated with regional blocs, the coordination in a number of foreign policy areas, and the founding of a number of cooperation projects and joint councils.

During the past 70 years, member countries have concluded dozens of treaties and agreements within the framework of the League of Arab States, which include: collective agreements on culture, civil aviation, postal union, joint defense, economic cooperation, judicial and commercial transactions, capital transfer, economic integration and coordination of petroleum policies, in addition to agreements related to the Arab Company for Navigation, the Arab Monetary Fund, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Arab Academy for Science, the Technology & Maritime Transport, and the Arab radio and TV channels, among other treaties and agreements. Member countries have also founded, under the LAS' umbrella, common special councils and organizations, such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Labor Organization, an Arab council for nuclear research for peaceful purposes, the Arab Charter on Human rights, etc. Member countries also established joint ministerial councils for interior, media, education, youth, culture, justice, environment, and health affairs, among others. The level of influence and effectiveness of these councils has varied depending on the extent of the development of interactions and inter-relations. However, agreements and programs, especially in common vital fields, have often been stymied as political disagreements culminate.

The major factors behind the blunders and failures of the reform and development processes include:

1. The lack of a joint and comprehensive Arab strategic vision for sustainable development, and the disputes over the priorities of joint Arab action.

2. The frailty of the cooperation culture among member states, which encompasses gradual cooperation, as well as the weakness of the political will for an Arab integration.
3. The exorbitant diligence on regional sovereignty, driven by doubts and a dilemma of mutual trust, and by the fear of the dissolution of the national state.
4. A clash - sometimes silent/ implicit and explosive at other times - between political Arabism and political, conservative or radical Islam.
5. The presence of wide gaps between the sizes and wealth of countries, and their cultural and social development, which has caused a leadership crisis in the locomotive of joint action.
6. The transformation of the League sometimes into a battleground and a field for polarization among member countries.
7. The subjection of the League to attempts of hate-induced blockade or a lack of legal recognition from regional and international powers.
8. The presence of sterile bureaucracy and outdated systems and regulations, the shortage of working human resources and of the League's financial resources, and the inconsistency among member states in paying their assessed contributions.
9. The prevalence of the rule of chaos in the present stage, which has paralyzed the League; the pervasiveness of the internationalization of Arab issues and crises; and the increase in external penetration and foreign meddling in the affairs of member states.
10. The impediment to establish an Arab Peace and Security Council for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.
11. The proliferation of the "all or nothing" culture in the policies of several member states, which enabled any emerging disputes between two or more countries to threaten and strike every achievement in another area, or to deter any cooperation in another area.
12. The absence of a serious accountability system that allows such behavioral political mood/ambiance, consequently posing a threat on the

concept of cooperation in the fields of gradual cooperation or of field-specific cooperation, while differences persist in other areas.

13. The absence of a strong or democratic institutional system in some Arab countries and the advent of the logic of personalizing politics, as well as the temperament of accepting this logic or defying it.

Conclusions:

- No member country has ever claimed that the mission of the League of Arab States is achieving Arab unity. Instead, it is deemed to achieve the actualization of cooperation, coordination and consultation, to a significant degree of cultural, economic and social integration; the coordination of foreign policies; and the provision of advanced levels of collective security and mutual solidarity in order to fight off challenges and threats facing the Arab World and the Arab national security.
- Since its inception, the Arab League has issued more than 5,000 resolutions but more than 80% of them have not come into force, even though most of these resolutions have been passed unanimously or by consensus. Member states have dealt with the League as a mere technical secretariat that should implement various wills, and that has no role in drawing up public policies within the Arab context, or in holding any member state accountable for abstaining from implementing resolutions adopted at the meetings and that this member state had approved.
- It was evident for the authors of this report that there is a major complex problematic behind these failures/ shortcomings, in addition to what was previously mentioned from causes of disability and failure, which are: the absence of the political will among member states; the frail presence of the public and the civil society that should push and motivate towards regional Arab

integration and agglomeration; the fragility of the culture of cooperation, accountability and group work; the subjection of the concept of joint cooperation to the needs of national sovereignty; the weakness in implementation mechanisms of agreements that are unanimously issued; and the presence of a regional and international

environment that is not conducive to the activation of joint Arab action, especially in the framework of the administration and settlement of Arab disputes.

Chapter 2: Regional Variables and Global Transformations

1. The credibility of joint Arab action has significantly deteriorated in recent years and the League of Arab States has become unable to carry out its missions; especially in the light of the escalation of Arab conflicts and civil wars, the prevalence of insecurity and the suffering of major urban hubs in the region from organized cross-border terrorism based on religious jihadism, racial or ethnic references, the widespread chaos, the jarring external meddling, the clashes amongst international powers and their competition in and over the region, in addition to a gruesome increase in the number of civilian victims of violence (victims of killing, displacement and destructions of houses and buildings) as well as the emergence of unprecedented threats that have shaken the foundations of the "nation state" and its social fabric in many countries.
2. Among the most prominent of these variables is also the regressions of the rules of conduct known by Arab countries, embodied in the legitimization of the stark intervention in the affairs of the Arab system - militarily and politically, and decision-wise - especially by Turkey, Iran and other international powers; besides the emergence of non-state actors and the revival of subnational identities and proxy wars.
3. The emanation of a system of regional chaos in the region, based on the absence or fall of clear and stable rules and customs that govern relations among states; and the emergence of a revolutionary interventionist logic in the name of major ideologies, which pries into the affairs of other states in the region and undermines the most basic level of national sovereignty. The outspread of the role of non-state actors has also contributed to this regional chaos as these actors play interventionist roles and functions and legitimize themselves in many countries. Moreover, most of them receive strong regional and international backing as they boast a visa for intervention under the pretense of the aforementioned ideologies.
4. The proliferation of failed states, or those en route to failure, especially since the eruption of Arab revolutions, or the so-called Arab Spring. What we see today is the flare-up of some countries, such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, and the disintegration of society under the guise of sub- and supra-national identities, which are in turn hostile and extremist identities. This situation has grown into a magnet for external intervention.
5. The emergence of the phenomenon of identity revival - specifically sub-national identities - from religious to doctrinal, ethnic and regional, at the expense of the collective national identity. This is undoubtedly due to the failure to build the modern national State. We have started witnessing a doctrinal clash, or in the guise of doctrines under strategic titles. The unnatural emergence of some countries and the factitious borders drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement also contributed to the issue; aside from the failure to build the modern national State, to realize inclusive development, and to apply the principle of equal citizenship after the birth of these countries at the end of the colonial era.
6. The inability and failure of the nation state to shape up a new social contract based on a cooperative system that guarantees fair representation of various constituents and actors of the national community in member states.
7. The revival of the imperial interventionist logic in the mindset of two reawakened and rising powers - Iran and Turkey - that seek to reinforce and spread their dominance in place of the power gap prevailing in the current Arab regional order. They intervene under various pretenses and, sometimes, in the name of Islamic or doctrinal ideologies at this stage.
8. The prevailing regional chaotic "system" witnesses three types of wars that feed each other: the Arab-Iranian Cold War, a proxy war in raging conflict zones, and civil wars. This turmoil has left serious negative out-turns on the Arab

regional order, their institutes, and their inter-states interactions.

9. A clash between the growing demographics and the uneven development. According to the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) issued by the United Nations Development Programme in 2014, the Arab region is the most youthful compared to other regions in the world (60% of the population is under 30 years old) and the unemployment rate reaches around 30% among Arab youth.
10. The outstretch of extremist and violent ideologies – Islamist, doctrinal, and ethnic – that reinforce and legalize external intervention; contribute to the spread of terrorism and chaos in the region; yield more victims, refugees, displacements, and migrations to Europe; and prolong the extent of human misery.
11. At the same time, the World was, and still is, undergoing drastic and accelerating changes, such as the rise of new World powers to the top of the global system and the upsurge of the phenomenon of populism, which is extreme in its nationalism, in a number of countries, especially in the West, USA, and Latin America. Moreover, the phenomenon of national self-sufficiency is on the rise, as well as the return to the focus on self and the unprecedented shakeups that have wrecked the system of regional blocs and international treaties.
12. It seems now that globalization has grown feeble and broken and has become under indictment. The World is now in search of formulating a new international order with

different features, perhaps a new globalization with different features.

13. The "nation states" itself appears to be passing through a phase of worrisome in light of all these major transformations; the financial, economic, climate and social global crises; the flood of refugees and migrants; and the increasing serious political, security and cultural implications along with increasing migrations.
14. The profile and content of international politics and the international order are changing and most countries are focusing nowadays in their foreign policies on retaining their sovereignty, part of which was lost in the zeal of globalization that was mostly based on the American political path. This also applies to some extent on the Arab regional order that has to keep abreast of these changes and transformations by restructuring its organizations, mechanisms, policies, and inter-state, regional and international interactions.

Chapter 3: Reforming the LAS System

The past four decades have seen several attempts to reform the system of the League of Arab States, the latest of which were the recommendations put forward by an independent committee presided by Lakhdar Brahimi, and set in place by the League as per an official Arab resolution in 2011. However, at the end, these recommendations and the report were “put in the drawers”, even though some of them are feasible. Hence, the following recommendations did not come out of nowhere but they are the fruit of a considerable treasure of studies, seminars and meetings with political leaders, senior practitioners of joint Arab action, and academics specialized in Arab affairs, international affairs and regional systems.

Recommendation (1)

Any reform of the Arab regional order should: start with an incremental restructuring of the League; look into its systems, regulations, specialized organizations, and charter; provide it with sufficient and sustainable financial resources, as well as competencies and modern technology; and have a modern vision and the right to put forward initiatives that promote integration, joint action and its priorities, within the framework of respect to the sovereignty of member states and their political choices.

Recommendation (2)

Develop a 5-year or 10-year plan for the priorities of the joint Arab action in order to overcome the current complex crisis and prepare for the post-chaos phase and ensure the commitment of member states to fulfill their pledges and devise a system of collective accountability to oversee implementation.

Recommendation (3)

Ratify the principle/ clause of depriving the member state that does not pay its full annual financial dues to the League from its voting right in ministerial councils, specialized institutions and bodies, and joint cooperative projects. Such ratification takes place either through an amendment to the charter or in a special annex.

Recommendation (4)

Reengineer and activate the role of the Arab Peace and Security Council and its membership rules and voting mechanism, as well as its role in the prevention and resolution of Arab conflicts, which leads to maintaining peace in the region in order to reach a system of Arab collective security (the experience of the African Union could be beneficial in this case) and to re-propose and develop the idea of a joint Arab military force.

Recommendation (5)

Establish the Arab Justice Tribune as the League’s main judicial body. The Tribune would comprise independent judges and legislators recognized for their competence and integrity, so that only the member state of the League is brought before the court after it would have officially agreed to join it, provided that the membership of the Tribune shall remain open to states wishing to accede thereafter.

Recommendation (6)

Adopt and put into action the principle of “varying speeds in the field of cooperation and integration”, which is a principle adopted by a number of regional blocs as well as some of the League’s member states in different eras and under particular conditions. It is important that this principle does not become a political bloc that hinders joint Arab action.

Recommendation (7)

Adopt and institutionalize the principle of “segregating vital areas of joint Arab work from political conflicts”, and have it stipulated in the League’s charter, in a special annex or in an agreement concluded by member states within the framework of the League.

Recommendation (8)

Build and activate institutionalized connections between the League of Arab States and Arab nations, especially with the youth and civil society sector, and

the independent cultural, social and research institutes. This would contribute to public participation in the League, formulate a public opinion, and form a popular pressure force with the purpose of stimulating and strengthening the official political will related to joint Arab action.

Recommendation (9)

Reinforce the culture of cooperation and group work, and spread it in the working environment of the League and its institutes, as well as in Arab societies, especially in education curricula and traditional and modern means of communication.

Reinforcing the culture of cooperation, including the gradual and accumulative forms of it, serves the higher Arab interests; especially if this culture implies a positive perspective that overtakes the negative pessimistic view which characterizes the Arab cooperation relations, and if it also implicates the deepening of this culture (i.e. that everybody wins from cooperation and integration).

Recommendation (10)

Reanimate and revive the idea of "political Arabism" with its cultural, humanitarian and developmental dimensions, and cultural and scientific reconditioning, in the discourse of the League and its entities. Moreover, reinforce the "nation state and communal peace" concepts, and initiate the principle of equal citizenship in Arab societies, especially in multi-identity ones.

Recommendation (11)

The reform process could head, even if temporarily, for reformulating and activating the Arab momentum for joint action, at the heart of which is Egypt after it regains its national health, in cooperation with Saudi Arabia and its new modernizing vision, along other active and stable Arab countries. Destination would be defusing crises in the Arab world, making initial changes in the institutions of Arab joint action, revitalizing Arab summits and ministerial councils, providing the financials sufficient for the operations of the League, and raising the levels of permanent Arab representation in the LAS.

Recommendation (12)

Change the mechanism of compliance in force at the LAS when making decisions, which has been allowing any member country to disrupt any joint Arab action it does not want; and adopt instead the voting mechanism.

Recommendation (13)

At present, emphasis can be placed on new cooperation projects, on developing other old non-problematic ones (cultural, industrial, environmental, agricultural, renewable energy, etc.), on providing financial resources and scientific competencies in order to revitalize them, on following up on their implementation, on assessing their impact, and on addressing constraints from difficulties to similar competitive country-specific projects.

The advisory committee has foreseen a number of expected scenarios, and they are as follows:

First: The Scenario where the Arab League Continues to Exist without Reformation

In the light of this scenario, member countries would continue to regard the League as a symbol of the Arab World and its regional order, without subjecting it to radical change or reform. These countries would still need the League as a moral reference and a legitimate cover/ support for the decisions they wish to issue, especially those dealing with their in-country crises, and their disputes with third parties.

The League would maintain its current organizational structure, with the possibility of carrying out limited internal administrative and organizational improvements. The financial crisis would remain, along with the shortcomings in staff efficiency and training, the absence of transparency standards in employments and the interventions of countries in the appointment of top employees (political nepotism). Member countries would continue to fulfill their commitments selectively and the ceremonial traditional forms of meetings and decision-making processes would carry on. The predominance of considerations of courtesy in meetings would persist, along with the reluctance of the League due to its current status and its secretary general - perhaps limiting him from undertaking concrete and effective initiatives and its frail relation with Arab nations and significant civil society organizations.

This scenario also forecasts that the weak mutual trust among the joint action parties would continue, especially if the repercussions of the so-called Arab Spring protract, the internalization of Arab affairs, and the foreign penetration of national security intensify. In this case, the League would continue to be a hat stand for Arab countries to hang the failure of integration and the official Arab impotence in preventing internal and

external risks. Hence, the continuation of the League remains a necessity to absorb popular anger and for the LAS to act as a regional cover, an Arab platform, and a flag to keep fluttering in international fora and Arab dialogues with other political blocs.

Moreover, the formation of Arab regional sub-blocs or of wider regional councils, assemblies or frameworks does not and has not scrapped the League of Arab States; neither has it halted the operations of its organizations and Arab cooperation projects. The League would continue to work based on the traditional vision despite the changing circumstances, unless its members had a strong Arab political will to develop the League in an ambitious manner that keeps abreast with changes in the region and the world.

Second: The Scenario of Building Other Regional Frameworks

In light of other possible scenarios, such as forming regional bodies or councils that are limited in their purposes and parties, or that are expanded (whether they were political, economic, security-related, etc., or altogether), the official institution of the Arab regional order remains. It can either remain in its current structure and traditional goals with which it has lived and coexisted for more than seventy years, or in an improved and optimized form, depending on the future circumstances and status of the Arab World.

In the past decades, a number of powerful regional and international forces, as well as reputable Western research centers, have launched a number of initiatives and alternative or parallel approaches to the Arab regional order, which is the system shut away in its membership, nature, traditions and Arab identity.

Within this framework which enjoys a global promotion that intensifies at times, and wanes at others, depending on the pitch of political crises and wars in the region, the following scenarios are plausible:

1. Scenario of the Grand Middle East System

The term "Middle East" is still an ambiguous and broad term that expands sometimes to include Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel and Iran, and narrows at other times to leave out Iran and Afghanistan, depending on the orientation and the goals of the users of the term. In other instances, the term is coined as "Middle East and North Africa". Those behind this scenario usually justify their projection by saying that the current Arab regional order is an old formulation that does not match with the international transformations and does not serve peace, security, and development in the Middle East. However, it is not expected, at least on the short term, that this scenario would not materialize in view of chronic crises in the region such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the differences among political systems, the ethnic, doctrinal and military conflicts in a number of countries, and the uncommon wills among them.

In all cases, the Arab world will remain at the heart of this term, whether it is narrowed or expanded. Moreover, this scenario is a hotbed for political sensitivity and should be approached in a different manner than the prevailing one.

2. Scenario of the Middle East Strategic Coalition

This is a coalition that enjoys a military and security nature, and targets related to the fight against terrorism and extremism. It includes, to date, Arab Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan, as well as the United States. It also seems, according to published stories on the coalition's recent meetings, that Qatar has joined it.

The likelihood of this scenario is high, especially that its presence neither negates nor disables the Arab regional order.

3. Scenario of a Cooperative Confederation

Research circles put forward this scenario based on particular political references and on the impact of present interests or conglomerates that enjoy doctrine-based identities. This scenario comprises a cooperative framework among ruling regimes in Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey, and perhaps Qatar, in case it leaves the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The prospects for such a scenario seem weak in light of the political instability in Syria, the delicate situations in Iraq and Iran, the internal problems in these countries, the competitive wills, and the conflicts of interest between Iran and Turkey. Nonetheless, it should be recalled that the two regimes in Tehran and Ankara enjoy high political pragmatism.

4. Scenario of Geographical Proximity and the Arab Regional Order

This scenario will take a good share of discussion and debate in the near future. It is related to the search for a realistic formula for the dialogue platform between the Arab regional order and neighboring countries, especially Turkey and Iran, and maybe Ethiopia as well, among others. The suggested formulas include accepting the participation of neighboring countries as observers in the League of Arab States. Perhaps, this could evolve to cooperative forms in light of the prevalence of stability in the region, diffusion of conflicts, and the establishment of solid confidence-building measures among its countries. One form of cooperation in this scenario is concluding treaties for a common regional security system, cooperative programs in the fields of environment, security, culture, energy, and trade, etc.; like a system or bloc (e.g. Union of the Mediterranean) that is yet distant from politics.





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