

# A Fascinating, Challenging, Unpredictable Year

**Andreu Bassols**

Director General

European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed),  
Barcelona

It has been a fascinating year for observers of the Mediterranean reality. After more than fifty years of stability in the Arab countries, interrupted only by the Algerian and Arab-Israeli conflicts, the region has been rocked by profound and unexpected changes. The year 2011 will be remembered as the year of Arab revolutions, the year of the uprising (*intifada*), of the awakening (*sahwa*) or even of the renaissance (*nahda*), for these are the terms used by the media of the countries that have suddenly found themselves immersed in a spiritual renewal in a political and cultural arena that had, to date, been stubbornly refractory to modernisation. Nobody can say what the outcome of this transnational wave that has swept the countries of the Arab world in both the Mediterranean region and the so-called sixth continent of the Arabian Peninsula will be. What we do know, or intuit, is that nothing will ever be the same. Decolonisation and nationalism altered the Arab geopolitical landscape in the 1950s; Islamism became increasingly influential in the 1970s and has been a key factor and actor ever since. Today, the current democratic movement, despite its hesitant and uncertain beginnings, is likewise inaugurating a new era.

For Europe, the first consequence of this new era is that we are obliged seriously to consider what is happening in the countries of the Southern Mediterranean. There is no longer room for excuses. It is no longer acceptable, no matter what happens, for everything to remain the same. This time, the changes are real and of historic proportions. The second consequence is that it will be necessary to conceive of, negotiate and implement a policy specifically for the region, a policy designed for a region in transition.

To address this new stage, and the challenges posed by an evolving region, consideration must be given to at least two priorities: the need for greater coherence among the existing policy frameworks and the need to adapt the priorities of EU policies. That is, it is necessary both to adapt the instruments and to modify their content.

With regard to the first point, the three most important European initiatives of the last 15 years have been the Barcelona Process of 1995, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 2003 and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) of 2008. The EU has always considered the Mediterranean a priority. However, its policies for the region have often been deemed ineffective. The paralysis in many countries, the lack of substantial changes and the embrace of gradualism as a principle of action have all come under fire. This criticism has been levied at both the states and EU institutions; both actors have sought to bring off initiatives and proposals.

The 1995 Barcelona Process offered a good balance between Community and national initiative. The ENP is markedly Euro-centric, placing clear emphasis on the role to be played by the EU's institutions. Meanwhile, the UfM is openly based on a national initiative. All three initiatives have led to major achievements. However, all three could have done more, and sooner. The goal going forward is to leverage what has already been achieved and to table new proposals in the two areas of action of EU policy: bilateral relations and multilateral or regional relations.

Bilateral relations are based on the Association Agreements that arose as a result of the Barcelona Conference in 1995. Beginning in 2005, these agreements were supplemented by the ENP's Action Plans, which added a new methodological feature: the negotiation of similar convergence objectives to those of the candidate countries for accession to the EU. The idea was to incorporate work processes similar to the acces-

sion process, even though Southern Mediterranean countries are not candidates for EU membership. Multilateral relations should be conducted based on the foundations laid down at the Paris Summit in July 2008 that created the UfM. At the Summit, two institutional innovations were agreed with regard to the organisation's predecessor, the Barcelona Process: the co-presidency shared by the EU and the South and the joint Secretariat, headquartered at the Palace of Pedralbes in Barcelona.

## **It is no longer acceptable, no matter what happens, for everything to remain the same. This time, the changes are real and of historic proportions**

Thus, on the one hand, there is the ENP – so profoundly European as to be included in the Treaty of Lisbon – specifically designed to meet the needs of a post-2004-enlargement Europe and to take into consideration the fact that, as a result of this enlargement, the EU has new neighbours. On the other hand, there is a regional framework for cooperation based on the Barcelona Conference, which, with the launching of the UfM, has become more multilateral.

In short, what, within the framework of the Barcelona Conference, had been a single integrated Mediterranean policy with two interdependent components – the bilateral Association Agreements and the multilateral Barcelona Process – became, in 2005, two relatively separate policies: the ENP, which is not specific to Mediterranean countries and also covers Eastern Europe, and the Barcelona Process, which became the UfM.

And this is perhaps one of the main objectives and one of the primary needs: to try to reintegrate the two processes, the ENP and the UfM, by endowing them with greater coherence and synergy. This can be achieved by granting the ENP, which today is exclusively bilateral, a regional dimension within the framework of the UfM and by tasking the Barcelona Secretariat with coordinating this dimension, in full coordination with the EU institutions.

The second issue meriting in-depth consideration is the need to adapt the content of the EU's policies to the new regional reality. Today, in light of the revolutions and evolutions of the last few months, it is necessary to reassess what the priorities should be. And

the top one is, without a doubt, to implement cooperation policies to assist with the transitions in the Arab Mediterranean countries.

The UfM was conceived of as a policy of stability and support for stability. The Barcelona Process, through the conclusion and implementation of free trade agreements, managed to initiate and provide support for economic transitions. This was the crowning achievement of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in Barcelona in 1995. The ENP's Action Plans follow in the same vein, aiming to incentivise regulatory changes and modernise the legislative framework of the partner countries in order to bring it into line with EU law.

However, it is now necessary to move beyond the economy and support political transitions. This will be a wide-ranging task requiring the application of two, often controversial principles: the principle of differentiation and the principle of conditionality. The first requires the establishment of differentiated cooperation programmes and goals, depending on the degree of commitment and ambition of the authorities in the Southern countries. The second entails making this cooperation conditional on progress and advances on reforms. This is the general thrust of the latest communications from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and from the Commission: to do more for those who do more, a 'more for more' policy already contained in the first documents to define the ENP, but which, following the changes in the region, today can finally be applied. The Mediterranean is home to major interests; a significant part of our security and economic future are at stake there. At the same time, it is in the Mediterranean where we want to project our values, our way of understanding international relations and of organising societies democratically. Energy, immigration, terrorism, trade and investment are some of the factors in the equation of these interests. Democracy, human rights, the rights of women or the rights of ethnic and religious minorities are some of the values we want to promote and defend. To do both things at once, preserve interests and promote values, has been a diplomatically difficult task in a region in which three conflicts, including one of major international prominence, namely, the Middle East conflict, have dominated the political scene for some time now. The challenge is to define a policy based on a more complex and subtle balance between interests and values; between the weight of the relations with each country and the need to safeguard a regional framework for cooperation; between the urgency of supporting democratic changes and the need to maintain stability and peace.