

Birth of the Union for the Mediterranean: A New Euro-Mediterranean Paradigm?

Keys

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recalibration to imbue a renewed sense of endeavour. The Union for the Mediterranean will provide that impetus.

Med. 2009

New Paradigm or Continuum?

The Union for the Mediterranean. A new Euro-Mediterranean paradigm? No! A new departure for regional cooperation with our Mediterranean partners? Yes! A rethinking and revamping of the institutional and cooperation links that bond us? Yes! A continuum of Euro-Mediterranean relations from Barcelona 2005 through to Paris 2008 and beyond? Yes! But a new paradigm? No, because the same philosophies and principles that gave birth to our relationship, and guided and inspired it, still exist. I will, therefore, try to show in this article that the body of work and accumulated achievements of the Barcelona Process can act as both an important link in the chain of continuum and be used as a foundation for future developments. What the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) offers, I will also underline, is continuity and innovation in our relations with Mediterranean partners. We have arrived at a critical juncture in our partnership, so allow me, therefore, to set my stall out from the beginning.

The Barcelona Process has served us –Europe and our Mediterranean partners– well in our 13-year Partnership. It has helped navigate a course through the troubled waters of regional conflict in the direction of our shared joint destination of peace, prosperity and security for the region. The journey has been tortuous at times, but our vision, determination and stamina remain undiluted. What is needed now, and this we have known for a while, is a gear change, a new driving force to add vigour to our efforts. Our partnership needs revitalisation and

Europe and the Mediterranean: Regional Partners in a Global Framework

The European Union (EU) is recognised as one of the leading players on the global stage. With a population of almost 500 million, the third largest after China and India, its size and impact in economic, commercial and financial terms are factors that demand it play a major role as an important international power. Reflecting and reacting to this status, the EU has established many regional cooperation agreements on the global stage. The EU acts out of enlightened self-interest, as much as global solidarity. The Mediterranean basin –the nexus of our neighbourhood and the confluence of three continents– has been intrinsically linked with Europe for centuries. Just like Europe, which thrives on its diverse constituents, the Mediterranean region is also a region of contrasts. In Braudel's language it is a place where contradictions converge and diverge. It is a region of rich physical and cultural heritage. A region that houses three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam); a region governed by three forms of government (monarchies, presidential republics and democracies); a region with close historical, geographical and cultural ties to Europe.

These relations, let me underline, do not exist in a political vacuum. There are global as well as regional imperatives for revamping the ties that bind us. This has become increasingly evident as we enter uncertain times in our joint challenges –security, environmental protection and climate change, the secured supply of sustainable energy resources, respect of human rights and democratic governance, the fight

against terrorism, the positive governance of immigration, the insidious spread of organised crime and the global financial and economic crises.

Many of these problems are, of course, not new, and nor is our common desire, articulated in the Barcelona Declaration in 1995 and reiterated in the Paris Summit Declaration launching the Union for the Mediterranean, to build an area of peace, prosperity and security. It is also a question of mutual interests. In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, Europe cannot assure its own stability, security and prosperity without helping our neighbours achieve similar and relative levels. This provided the inspiration and motivation to the signatories of the Declaration. The Barcelona Process, with its accumulated acquis, structures and goals –along with the European Neighbourhood Policy– still remains the bedrock of our relations.

Barcelona and the Middle East: Decoupling the Processes

While the fundamental aspirations and articulations of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership have always espoused peace and security for the region, strenuous efforts have been made to decouple the two processes, the Barcelona Process from the Middle East peace process, to not allow advances in one to be hampered by reverses in the other. Sadly, this has not been the experience, and we have seen what should have been the natural progression of our partnership taken hostage by the spill over of events in the region's conflicts. Europe's position on the peace process has been constant and clear: the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for us. The EU's objective is a two-state solution, with an independent, viable Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours. Europe will continue, with its international partners, to contribute, by all means at its disposal, towards this end. But we must also be resolute in trying to ensure that our cooperation agreements, our partnerships, are not undermined and held hostage by the political challenges.

Barcelona's Track Record: Steady Progress Despite the Impediments

The Barcelona Process has known good days and bad and has its champions and critics. The European

Commission (EC) has always been a staunch supporter of the Partnership, and has underlined this support with the provision of over nine billion euros in grants since its launch in 1995. Our joint achievements have not been insignificant. Over the past 14 years we have seen this unique relationship help in maintaining dialogue and enjoy successes in the respective political, economic and social sectors. Substantial progress has been made in a number of areas, such as moves towards a Euromed free trade area and advances in economic reforms. Mediterranean countries have registered a remarkable reduction in inflation over the past decade. We have also witnessed the establishment of new institutions and networks. The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly was established in 2004 and is now an Assembly that is welcomed both as a contribution to democracy and as evidence of the successful implementation of the policy of joint ownership. The Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP) was set up in 2002 within the European Investment Bank and is providing over two billion euros in loans to Mediterranean Partners.

Euro-Mediterranean networks have been created and are operational in areas such as institutes of economic research (FEMISE), political science institutes (EuroMeSCo), investment promotion agencies (ANIMA), transport, energy, environment, and local water management (EMWIS) and media (Euromed and the Media). Exchange programmes are functioning between youth and universities under the Tempus scheme. There are numerous regional civil society programmes in culture and youth as well as significant advances in civil protection cooperation.

Human development indicators continue to display encouraging signs. Health conditions have broadly improved in the region, particularly in the sectors of child health and overall life expectancy.

Matching Past Achievements with Future Aspirations

However, if we recognise that much has been achieved in our 14 years of Partnership, we are also very much aware that much remains to be done if achievements are to match our high aspirations and the expectations of our respective populations.

We recognise that certain shortcomings might have distanced it from a wider popular acceptance. A gulf between expectations and achievements has become

evident. Despite the tempering of ambitions –and achievements– by the continuing conflicts in the region, there is a tangible political and popular will to make efforts towards a closer relationship. The birth of the Union for the Mediterranean will allow us to capitalise on that will by enhancing the joint governance of our partnership through an emphasis on practical, manageable projects and by increasing the visibility and viability of our actions.

At its launching at the Paris Summit in July 2008, the UfM extended membership to include the Balkan states and Monaco, with the Arab League also included in a Partnership that now includes 43 countries: the 27 Member States of the European Union and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, Croatia, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

Governance by Partnership and Consent

The UfM oversees the upgrading of the political level of the EU's relationship with its Mediterranean partners. The planned hosting of biennial summits underlines the increased political commitment while co-ownership of our multilateral relations will be further enhanced by a system of co-presidency (one from the EU and one from the Mediterranean partner side –currently Egypt). The setting up of a north-south project-oriented Secretariat and the establishment of a Joint Permanent Committee based in Brussels add up to a more evenly balanced construct.

This shared governance provides for collaboration, deliberation and accountability that can foster cooperative interaction. It should also be a self-correcting and self-monitoring process.

Projects: Crucial Mosaics in the Fresco

The heartbeat of the Union for the Mediterranean is projects. The concentration on major infrastructure enterprises, environmental initiatives, civil protection, education and research initiatives and assistance for micro, small and medium-sized businesses will not only make our partnership more tangible but also significantly contributes to improving and enhancing the lives and livelihoods of its citizens. The Summit of Euro-Mediterranean Heads of State and Government that met in Paris in July 2008 endorsed a series

of projects that can radically transform the landscape of the Mediterranean and provide engines for its sustainable growth and development. The list below certainly does not lack in ambition:

De-pollution of the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean is resonant with culture and history. But it is much more than a symbol or an icon for the region. It also provides employment and pleasure for its people. However, its environmental quality has suffered serious degradation in recent times. A United Nations study has found that more than half of urban areas with a population of over 100,000 on the Mediterranean do not have wastewater treatment plants and 60% of their wastewater is directly discharged into the sea. This threatens the health of the 143 million people living on its shores and jeopardises the long-term development of key economic sectors such as fishing and tourism. Building on the Horizon 2020 programme, the de-pollution of the Mediterranean, including coastal and protected marine areas, particularly in the water and waste sector, will therefore be of major benefit for the lives and livelihoods of its people.

Maritime and Land Highways

The Mediterranean is a sea that joins, not separates, its people. It is also a highway for commerce and a bridge between three continents. Its historic role as a major maritime highway for trade continues unabated into the 21st century. Maritime traffic is expected to increase overall by 18% in the next decade, and much of the Mediterranean traffic goes through Northern European or other ports. The Mediterranean Sea is also a vital global energy route. Easy and safe access and flow of goods and people, on land and sea, are essential for maintaining relations and enhancing regional trade. The development of motorways of the sea, including the connection of ports, throughout the entire Mediterranean Basin as well as the creation of coastal motorways and the modernisation of the trans-Maghreb train network, will increase the flow and freedom of the movement of people and goods. As has been sadly witnessed in other waters, where piracy has plagued the safe transit of goods and people, particular attention should be devoted to cooperation in the field of maritime security and safety, in a perspective of global integration in the Mediterranean region.

The global landscape is littered with examples of the devastation caused by man-made and natural disasters. From disappearing rainforests, tsunamis and earthquakes to intensifying desertification, the effects of climate change are evident for all. While advances in science and technology have increased the capacity to predict and prevent such disasters, there is also a parallel tendency for such occurrences to increase because –inter alia– of intense urbanisation and mass pollution. The Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable and exposed to three types of natural disasters: earthquakes, forest fires and floods. A joint Civil Protection programme on prevention, preparation and response to disasters, linking the region more closely to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, is, therefore, one of the main priorities for the region.

Alternative Energies: Mediterranean Solar Plan

The strategic importance of energy markets in terms of supply, demand and transit confirms the need to focus on alternative energy sources. Problems of climate change and the associated causes such as greenhouse gases need to be addressed. Market deployment as well as research and development of all alternative sources of energy are therefore major priorities in efforts towards assuring sustainable development. Recent events underscore the importance of diversifying energy imports in terms of energy mix, origin and transport routes. It is clear that this energy diversification strategy must include a significant shift to renewable energies and in particular solar energy. The Mediterranean Solar Plan is just one strand –but a vital new one– in our wider strategy for enhancing energy security.

Higher Education and Research, Euro-Mediterranean University

A Euro-Mediterranean University (with its seat in Slovenia) will contribute to understanding among people and encourage cooperation in higher education, following up on the objectives of the Catania Process and of the First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research (Cairo, June 2007). Through a cooperation network of partner institutions and existing universities from the Euromed region, the Euro-Mediterranean University

will develop postgraduate and research programmes and thus contribute to the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education, Science and Research Area. Partner countries will be encouraged to make full use of possibilities offered by existing higher education cooperation programmes such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus, including the External Cooperation Window. Particular attention will be paid to enhancing quality and to ensuring the relevance of vocational training to labour market needs.

The Mediterranean Business Development Initiative

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form more than 90% of the Euro-Mediterranean companies, but at the same time, they are the ones facing more difficulties and suffering from a higher mortality rate. Yet SMEs are the engines of economic growth in the region. This initiative is aimed at assisting the existing entities in partner countries operating in support of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises by assessing the needs of these enterprises, defining policy solutions and providing these entities with resources in the form of technical assistance and financial instruments. It will be based on the principle of co-ownership and its activities are expected to be complementary to those of the existing entities working in the field. Contributions by countries from both rims of the Mediterranean will be done on a voluntary basis.

Visibility: From the Elite to the Street

My travels on the international stage have made me acutely aware that the image of Europe does not reflect its input and investment in global affairs. This always surprises and dismays me. Europe is, after all, the largest global donor of development and humanitarian aid and more than punches its weight in trade and environment; it is a leading player in the promotion of human rights and its global education and exchange programmes are renowned worldwide. In the last ten years we have seen the introduction of the euro and its progress through murky financial waters to become the world's second reserve currency; the union has expanded to 27 countries and trade, aid and cooperation agreements have been signed with most countries/regions in the world, including the Mediterranean region.

The message is certainly strong but perhaps the messenger has been off target, particularly with our southern partners. The EU needs to address its communication and credibility problem, which results from the plethora and confusing complexity of its different Mediterranean policies. Europe also needs to move from the elite to the street in its communication activities. George Bernard Shaw said, "The single most important problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished," and we need to be more dynamic and more inclusive and engage people more in our political, economic, social and communication strategies. Rather than impose our opinions we have to inform, to explain, and to share our thinking. We need to debate our decisions and account for our actions. This, after all, is the very ethos of communication. We should be careful and aware of the distorting use of language and, for example, move from idioms such as processes and policies to a more user-friendly partnership.

A Partnership for the People, with the People

There are perceptions that our Partnership is no more than an inter-governmental arrangement, and this needs to be corrected. We have a vibrant, thriving civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean. The creation of the Civil Forum and Civil Society Platform has helped to structure the activities of civil society and provide a better interface with the official activities of the Partnership. There has been increased networking among civil societies, both north-south and south-south; exchanges of people have increased, particularly among youth; and cooperation has developed among NGOs from north and south.

The establishment of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures is the first Euromed common institution financed by all partners and the European Commission. It now has over 2,000 civil society organisations in its network covering all Partnership countries and is actively and imaginatively working towards diminishing the perceived cultural divide and taking preventive action against the potential polarisation of communities in the wake of cultural crises.

Bilateral vs. Multilateral: Much Ado About Something

I am aware that there are academic arguments that blur the frontiers between our multilateral and bilateral approaches to Euro-Mediterranean relations. Let me therefore reiterate that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) remains untouched by this new regional departure.

The Union for the Mediterranean is complementary to EU bilateral relations with these countries of the region, which will continue under existing policy frameworks such as the Association Agreements, the ENP action plans, and, in the case of Mauritania, the African Caribbean Pacific framework.

The ENP is the political framework within which the EU can establish bilateral relations with its immediate neighbours and intensify the work of action plans based on bilateral agreements. However, intra- and interregional integration will get a timely boost by the new structures and management offered by the Union for the Mediterranean, while also complementing the bilateral efforts

Shared Challenges: An Optimistic Journey

In conclusion, let me say that the Barcelona Process has overseen the formative years of our Partnership while the Union for the Mediterranean responds to the current need for an upgrading of those same Mediterranean multilateral relations. The challenges remain the same, but with the enhanced governance and ownership, and the associated shared responsibility that follows, we are better equipped to deal with those challenges.

This is an ambitious undertaking. However, with our cooperation underpinned by political will, shared governance and the new institutional architecture, I am certain we can succeed. Together we can close the gap between ambition and achievement and place people at the epicentre of our efforts by charting out this confident future.

We do so in partnership, in friendship. Together. As Albert Camus, our great French/Algerian author and thinker said, "Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend."