

A Year of Debates and Clarifications

Fidel Sendagorta

Ambassador Extraordinary for Mediterranean Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain

The Mediterranean has reappeared on the European agenda with the background of the debates produced by the initiative of President Sarkozy of a Union for the Mediterranean. There have been three fundamental debates around which the discussions of recent months have developed: the debate over the institutional architecture of cooperation in the Mediterranean; the debate over the external relations of the European Union (EU); and the debate over the very substance of the economic, social and political challenges in the Mediterranean region and the relations between its two shores.

The debate over the institutional architecture has become inevitable with the tabling of a third initiative, that of the Union for the Mediterranean, which joins the already existing ones of the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The latter was born as a European response to the need for an alternative policy to enlargement in order to establish a framework of relations with neighbouring countries not destined to be members of the EU (at least in the middle term). Although initially it was only intended for the East, Spain supported its application to the south of the Mediterranean, with a view to strengthening the bilateral dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, allowing the countries that wished it to deepen and extend their relations with the EU. Some member states however thought that the ENP was designed to replace *de facto* the Barcelona Process, condemning it to irrelevance. The weak point of that view was in the heterogeneity of the different regions to which the Neighbourhood Policy is directed: Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the Mediterranean. One thing, in fact, was

the bilateral relations of each country with the EU, which thanks to the Neighbourhood Policy could be promoted and developed with new instruments of finance and cooperation. Yet it was very difficult to create a single multilateral coverage for these three regions, so different in many ways, and therefore with such diverse agendas in their approach to association with the European Union. In particular, it was becoming clear that the Mediterranean had a cultural, economic and political identity of its own which needed to maintain its specificity as an area of cooperation with the EU.

The problem of the Union for the Mediterranean, as initially envisaged, is that it preserved this specificity for the Mediterranean but with a reductionist vision, limited exclusively to the countries which geographically have a coastline on that sea. This implied the exclusion of member states of the European Union which though lacking such a coastline considered that they had relevant interests in this region, whether related to immigration, to energy or to security against a terrorism that strikes indiscriminately at both sides of the Mediterranean. The Spanish government, which had received very favourably the initiative of President Sarkozy because of its capacity to focus European attention on this region, could not support the exclusion of any European country wishing to bring its own contribution to cooperation in this area. For their part, the countries on the south side of the Mediterranean preferred in general to maintain relations with the European Union as a whole than to replace it with another union, limited to the countries with a coastline on the Mediterranean.

After the agreement in principle of President Sarkozy with Chancellor Merkel on 3rd March 2008, these dilemmas were finally resolved in the European Council of 13th and 14th March this year. At the dinner on 13th March the Heads of Government put forward the Union for the Mediterranean as a new stage in the development of the Barcelona Process.

The second great debate opened by President Sarkozy's initiative concerns the external relations of the European Union. In reality, the differences between France and Germany about the Union for the Mediterranean concerned more a question of principle than the Mediterranean policy itself. For the French government it was admissible that a group of specially interested countries should advance more rapidly than the rest of the EU and carry out more ambitious actions than those which the twenty-seven were already undertaking. On the other side, the German government pointed to the risk of fragmentation of the EU's external relations if policy towards the surrounding countries ended up being made by a closed group of countries, thus breaking the criterion of solidarity that has ruled hitherto. Yet the mechanism of reinforced cooperation, which constitutes one of the novelties of the Lisbon Treaty, has never been seriously invoked as a possible way to permit a group of countries to increase its cooperation with a particular region - in this case the Mediterranean. In effect, this mechanism lays down that in principle the financing of new activities will be undertaken by participating countries. Against that, access to the funds of the European budget seemed to be a fundamental premise for any new initiative, since it was not realistic to think that the European coastal countries could contribute larger means than those that the EU as a whole already contributes. The solution finally adopted by the European Council represents a return to the classic approach of the EU's external relations, although the idea of projects of variable geometry permits a greater involvement to countries that desire it.

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The third of the great debates refers to the very substance of the cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Let us remember that the pact founding the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was based on the premise that the European Union would

accompany the process of economic, social and perhaps political reforms in the south of the Mediterranean, favouring access to the European market and providing financial help and technical support. The reality is that the southern countries have made significant advances in modernising their economic structures, promoting an opening to the outside world and reforming their fiscal systems by introducing a value added tax which replaces the old regime of revenue based on tariff collection. Nevertheless these measures, combined with those taken to ensure macro-economic stability, have not achieved the result hoped for of promoting a substantial increase in European investment towards the region, which remains stagnant at figures around 5% of the total investment in the world of the EU member states. Now, the paradox is that this economic modernisation largely promoted by Euro-Mediterranean agreements and the progressive entry of those countries into the world economy have increased their attractiveness for investment from other quarters, for examples the Gulf countries, the United States, China and even India. From Europe this development is seen with ambivalence, for the interest of other major international players in the region will tend to its economic strengthening, which in its turn is positive for Europe. On the other hand the impression is left that these other players perhaps have greater faith in the region than its own European neighbours.

These considerations may not have been absent from the reflections that led the French President to launch his initiative of a Union for the Mediterranean. In reality the approach now proposed does not contradict in fundamentals the one adopted by the Barcelona Process; rather it seeks to add to it a supplementary engine in the form of large projects for regional vertebration. What is true is that in the Euro-Mediterranean framework around 80/90% of financing is devoted to bilateral programmes between the European Union and each of the countries singly, and this distribution reflected the wishes of our Mediterranean partners. The ENP reinforced even further this bilateral dimension and left open the possibility that the Partnership would pay greater attention to projects of regional structuring that would contribute to a greater connection and interdependence among the countries of the South and between these ones and the EU. And that deficiency is precisely what the new initiative seeks to address. Nobody is unaware of the existence of grave political obstacles that will in some cases put a brake on the realisation of these region-

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT: A STEP TOWARDS BUILDING A STRONG ASSOCIATION

Barcelona 1995 marked the beginning of a new partnership between European states and their southern and eastern Mediterranean neighbors. What has happened since? What are the expectations of young people from Sweden to Morocco regarding the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership? What do young people think of this Partnership?

During the German Presidency of the EU, the German Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and the Heinz Schwarzkopf Foundation, in cooperation with the European Commission and the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures organized the first Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament (EMYP) which took place in Berlin between 26th May and 3rd June while the parliamentary meeting took place on 1st and 2nd June in the Berlin House of Representatives. The organizers invited more than 100 participants from the 27 European countries plus Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Mauritania, although it has an observer status in the Barcelona Process.

Unlike the many youth events organized throughout the 12 years of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, EMYP was applauded by many organizations which joined the initiative as partners, such as the European Youth Forum, SALTO, the Euromed Youth Platform and the League of Arab States Youth Forum.

In March 2007, the participants from the eleven Mediterranean countries were invited to a preparatory meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, in order to get together and practice for the general assembly that took place in Berlin. The idea was applauded since European participants were involved in the European Youth Parliament, which has existed for more than 20 years now. The selection of Mediterranean partners was carried out by the Goethe Institute in coordination with the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures. The European participants, who make up the other half of the delegates, were chosen and prepared by the Heinz Schwarzkopf Foundation and the European Youth Forum.

The goal of the event was to practice parliamentary forms of discussion and to discuss future topics beyond cultural and geographic borders.

The program contained team-forming seminars, workshops and expert presentations. The most crucial part was the discussion on the topics chosen by the youth moderators in coordination with the organizers. The rich topics included some focal questions that the youths had to discuss, explore and resolve. The topics were focused on migration, the role of the media, globalization, arts and culture, energy, youth and politics and so on. The resolutions discussed and produced within the group as well as exemplary solutions approached in the form of project suggestions were presented and discussed in the context of the Youth Parliament. The project aimed at forming multipliers for the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Thus, many projects saw the light during the open space market and were supported by the organizers. We can mention among the initiatives launched the creation of the Euromed Academy for Young Journalists (EMAJ) or the MEDA Youth Parliament (MYP), which was launched officially in Beirut in Lebanon only 3 months after the end of the EMYP. It only shows how the youths are active and ready to help to strengthen the association.

The level of the discussion during the EMYP general assembly was applauded by the many personalities who insisted on being present. The resolutions voted on were presented to the stakeholders and sent to the institutions that have a say in this partnership.

The stakeholders of the EMYP later met in Berlin in order to discuss the continuity of the event which everyone focused on in their resolutions. Thus a steering committee was established which will look into all the proposals for hosting the next meeting, and make sure that the concept stays in the hands of the young and for the young.

Morocco will be hosting the 2nd EMYP, which is to take place during 2008.

Wadia Ait Hamza

Delegate and member of the Steering Committee

Morocco

al projects. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to seek combinations of countries with a greater readiness to advance and also areas in which cooperation may be more viable, such as the decontamination of the Mediterranean Sea, transport, energy and the knowledge society, among other sectors.

The political drive at the highest level, through the institutionalisation of Summits of Heads of State and of Government, and this focusing on the major projects of regional vertebration, are the two basic elements for Europe to involve itself again in a region which, on the one hand, is vital to its interests, but on the other had lost weight in its international agenda, with a certain fatigue becoming noticeable affecting equally both shores of the Mediterranean. The lack of a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will continue to act as a fundamental brake to entry into a new stage of regional cooperation, but in spite of the low starting expectations, the process

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born in Annapolis opens a window of opportunity for confirming by results the viability of the option of negotiations. But whatever happens in this question, which is of such central importance, many countries of the region cannot afford to wait for a peace

agreement to be reached to give serious attention to the prime challenge they face in the next twenty years: the creation of employment and in short the generation of a climate of hope for the millions of young people who will arrive in the labour market in those years. This will be the key question for our associates in the South, and consequently for the Partnership as a whole.

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Does this mean that our agenda needs to be basically an economic one, giving an absolute priority to growth above political change towards greater democratisation? This debate is far from being closed either in Europe or among our Southern neighbours. For some it is imperative to concentrate now on the challenges of economic growth and the creation of employment, leaving for a later stage the design of political changes which at present would create an unwanted distraction. Other analysts however maintain that only a search for political reforms and the over-

hauling of the elites currently in power can achieve the creation of a favourable setting for economic take-off. The truth is that the outside pressure in favour of the latter path has lessened considerably in recent years, following the silent U-turn in US foreign policy, whose strategy of rapid promotion of democracy in the region has yielded to a more long-term vision of the political changes that are judged desirable. In Europe too this seems to be the most visible tendency, as is shown by the significant absence of democracy and human rights from the initial proposals of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Union for the Mediterranean now becomes one more stage in the development of the Barcelona Process implies that its values continue to be relevant for the future and that the principles of the Barcelona Declaration, including development of democracy and respect for human rights, continue to be a fundamental point of reference in the Partnership, even if each country needs to find its own way to achieve the objectives set out. In conclusion, our agenda for the coming years will be a predominantly economic one, but always seeking to incorporate this dimension in an overall vision which includes those of a political, cultural social and security nature which together make up the full meaning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.