

Challenges and Opportunities of the Working Programme from the Algerian Point of View

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During the Euromed summit in Barcelona, Algeria circulated a document evaluating ten years of dialogue and cooperation. This document reflected the current mood prevailing in civil society and among the leading players in the political and economic spheres. This in fact represented a very necessary exercise of self-assessment which in order to better underline the relevance of the Barcelona I strategy.

It may well be the case that too much had been expected of a process of rapprochement that has found it difficult to develop its true potential. It is also undoubtedly true that we had overestimated politicians' ability to forge a spirit of trust between the two shores of the Mediterranean, to generate development, growth, stability, democracy, security, and closer ties between civil societies, all of which constituted a very wide range of objectives to be achieved against a geopolitical background of potential breakage.

The northward shift in the EU's centre of gravity together with its successive phases of enlargement, the constant deterioration of the situation in the Middle East, and the differing perceptions held by the South relating to Europe, are all factors which have led to the modification of the original vision and have sent off-course the overall strategy that emerged from the fragile consensus achieved at Barcelona II.

Suddenly, however, a new, more globalized approach has entered the debate surrounding the Barcelona Process, with the aim of moving towards the full integration of the partners into the Single Market over an unspecified period of time. This represents a proposal to reinforce ties between countries that is in theory much more ambitious than the proposal first drawn up in 1995.

All this constitutes a real mood change in the Barcelona

programme. US strategies towards the Arab world are of course not unrelated to the changes that have taken place. Given the balance of power that could be perceived at the Barcelona summit, in November 2005, it was only to be expected that this new agenda of cooperation should arouse a certain number of suspicions within Arab public opinion, which had already been asked to accept the European impotence in the face of Israel's devastating recourse to unilateral action.

Future perceptions of cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean framework will inevitably differ from one country to another. Is it necessary to try to consolidate what has been achieved so far – for things have indeed been achieved – by reinforcing existing structures and by further regionalizing the cooperation process? Is it better to make the effort of developing to develop an agenda for political and cooperation-related questions while relying on the strengths of the structures for multilateral cooperation already in place, according to the widely-accepted principle of highlighting differentiating factors?

It was then necessary to assimilate the lessons of the past, both in relation to the method and to the real consequences of a cooperation which inevitably comes to be seen in terms of national challenges to be met in an atmosphere that is more and more competitive, both in political and economic terms, and in terms of the national model and image to be projected.

A new parameter appeared in December 2005, when it became necessary to evaluate the compatibility of the multiple poles of reciprocal interest existing between Euro-Mediterranean partners. The tendency among the Southern countries to give importance to the praise received by partners in the framework of political reforms, or for the degree of liberalization or of dynamism of civil society, has now been taken over by a desire to ensure that governments and public opinion in the Southern countries share common,

coherent goals, and that the wishes expressed by public opinion, whether they be expressed indirectly or in very clear terms, reach the ears of government. While it may well be true that the European partners consult public opinion in their countries about the key stages of the European construction process (and even so, not always), one of the advantages of the Barcelona Process, which is moreover easily overlooked because only too frequently overshadowed by the counter-productive militancy of both institutional and individual participants, is that it reflects this growing importance of public opinion. If this message has not been correctly interpreted in Barcelona, it becomes even more important to continue along the path of mutual understanding.

From this perspective, the normal inception of the Association Agreement between Algeria and the EU, rather than being an early or rushed start (according to viewpoint), would be seen as being anti-democratic and clearly anti-constitutional on the Algerian side, whilst being perfectly legal on the communitarian side thanks to the separation of powers between the Commission and the member States. Since this accelerated procedure consists of bringing into force only the commercial chapter of the agreement, before this has even been examined and debated in Parliament, it could apparently be considered as having infringed the general principle of respect for the rule of law endorsed in the text of the agreement itself. It

is also claimed that in commercial terms the benefits of the agreement are not equally distributed on both sides.

The ratification of the Agreement, which came into force on September 1st 2005, has likewise been much talked of on both sides. In fact, for practical reasons it was preferred that the Mediterranean partner should ratify first and as soon as possible in order to "give a signal". On the European side, the passage of the text through all the national, federal and often regional parliamentary institutions would take a much longer time. This ratification can however trigger off an internal political debate or be a cause of controversy in the European Parliament. In either case, the EU's partner country suffers the consequences. It is often also reduced to lobbying in order to accelerate the ratification process and emerge from the situation while limiting the damage as much as possible, including in relation to its own public opinion.

Following a certain number of precedents, the coming into force of the association agreement between Algeria and the EU went through the normal political and institutional channels, with the result that at the Commission's request, the member States accelerated their internal procedures, enabling the agreement to come into force on 1st September, i.e., within the normal time period and in a spirit of mutual respect and common interests.

BARCELONA+10

The Tenth Anniversary of the Barcelona Process has strengthened the "spirit of Barcelona", i.e. an emphasis on dialogue, stability and development in the Mediterranean region, as well as an example of our political will to tackle new challenges together. There has been a renewed commitment, with practical and operational objectives, to breathe new life into the Euro-Mediterranean Association.

Ten years on since it was set up, the Euro-Med Partnership has put the Mediterranean on the world geostrategic map, and has become an unrivalled instrument of dialogue and cooperation in the region.

During 2005, which the European Council declared the "Year of the Mediterranean," several events were organised, not only by official or government circles, but also by civil society itself. This proves that the Partnership is alive among civil society and that the latter is an extremely important driving force for its application. The Euro-Mediterranean Association is a project that integrates both official authorities and populations on both shores, which all follow the same spirit of dialogue and cooperation and pursue common objectives of peace and stability. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the most notable events and documents that were organised or approved during the "Year of the Mediterranean."

Official Events and Texts by Institutions and countries:

- Spanish document to prepare the Tenth Anniversary of the Barcelona Process (7th January 2005).
- Resolution passed by the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly on the assessment of the Barcelona Process on the eve of its tenth anniversary (15th March 2005). www.iemed.org/documents/resolutionb10ang.pdf
- Communication from the European Commission regarding the Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Association (April 2005). http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euomed/barcelona_10/docs/10th_comm_en.pdf
- 7th Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Luxembourg, 30th-31st May 2005): Conclusions. http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euomed/conf/lux/euomed.pdf
- Document by the Arab member states of the Barcelona Process: "Arab vision of cooperation priorities" (6th September 2005).
- Plenary Session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Rabat, 21st November 2005): Declaration of the Presidency and Resolution on the future of the Barcelona Process.

- Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils (Amman, 20th-21st November 2005). Final Declaration. http://eesc.europa.eu/sections/rex/euromed/events/docs/amman_2005_en.doc
- 5th Euro-Mediterranean Speakers Conference (25th-26th November 2005): Presidency Conclusions. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/empa/other_euromed_documents/5th_speakers_conference_en.pdf
- Euro-Mediterranean Barcelona Summit (27th-28th November 2005):
 - Chairman's Statement. www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Euromed_ChairmanStatement.pdf
 - Five Year Work Programme. www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Euromed_5Year.pdf
 - Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism. www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Euromed_CodeConduct.pdf

Contributions from civil society and local and regional bodies:

- Seminar on European-Mediterranean Cooperation and Regional Development (Mediterranean Charter, European Commission and the Foundation of the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean, May-November 2005): Proposals for a road map to stimulate investment in the Mediterranean.
- Euro-Mediterranean Universities: Tarragona Declaration (October 2005). www.unimedforum.net
- Seminar on the Appraisals on and Prospects for Decentralised Cooperation among Euro-Mediterranean Local Governments: Declaration (14th-16th September 2005). www.euromediterrania2005.org
- Euro-Med Non-Governmental Platform: Conclusions from the Málaga meeting to evaluate ten years of the Euro-Mediterranean Association (30th September-2nd October 2005). www.euromedforum.org
- Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network: Declaration for the Euro-Mediterranean Heads of State and Government regarding the promotion and protection of human rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region (November 2005). www.euromedrights.net
- Euro-Med Trade Union Forum in Palermo: Final declaration (18th-19th November 2005).
- 3rd General Assembly of the Euromed Trade Union Forum "Towards peace, democracy, economic progress and social justice": Final de-

- claration (Barcelona, 6th-7th November 2005). <http://www.etic.org/IMG/pdf/DeclaracionBCNInglesFinal-revised-2.pdf>
- Euro-Mediterranean Social Economy Network: Declaration for the Barcelona Summit (16th November 2005). http://recipies.cepes.es/i_index.cfm
- Amnesty International: Document "Ten years of Euromed" www.amnesty-eu.org/static/documents/2005/Barcelona_10_final.pdf
- Culture in the Euro-Mediterranean Space: International Conference (Barcelona, 22nd and 23rd November 2005). http://www.interarts.net/eng/5.3_novetat.php?newId=45
- Euro-Mediterranean Economic Leader Summit (ASCAME): Declaration (22nd November 2005). <http://www.euromedtds.org/documents/Barcelona%20Declaration%202005.pdf>
- 6th Euro-Mediterranean Economic Summit (Valencia, 23rd November 2005): Final declaration and conclusions from working sessions.
- Euro-Mediterranean Women's Summit (24th-25th November 2005): Conclusions. <http://www.iemed.org/documents/concludonesang.pdf>
- Euro-Mediterranean Regions and Cities Conference: Declaration (26th November 2005). <http://www.iemed.org/documents/declaracioANG.pdf>
- Joint Declaration by the national Coordinators of the 35 national Anna Lindh Foundation networks for Intercultural Dialogue (27th November 2005). www.euromedalex.org
- Barcelona Process: results of a Decade of the Euro-Mediterranean Association (FRIDE/Elcano Royal Institute, November 2005). <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/849.asp>
- Survey: Ten years of the Barcelona Process. Civil society opinions: results, priorities and scenarios (IEMed, Barcelona, November 2005). www.iemed.org
- "Euromed and the Media" Seminar (Amman, Marseilles, Barcelona, autumn 2005). <http://www.iemed.org/euromed/activitats/amedia.php>
- Mediterranean Music Concert (Barcelona Music Palace, 26th November 2005).
- Football match "For Peace", between a European team and an Arab-Israeli team (Barcelona, 29th November 2005).

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The postponement of the holding of the first Association Council meeting which was originally planned for last March, following an Algerian request, is evidence of a desire to build a partnership in a spirit of mutual respect, the basic principle enshrined in the Barcelona Declaration and in the agreement itself. For under the constant pressure of events and the proliferation of EU deadlines, the importance of the first Council, which undoubtedly conserves a certain political symbolism, nevertheless tends to suffer from the phenomenal demands of the calendar. The distance taken in this way will no doubt be beneficial.

This will be especially true as far as Algeria is concerned, since the principles and priorities within which the strengthening of dialogue and cooperation should

take place had been jointly agreed. When Mrs Benita Ferrero-Waldner made her first visit to Algeria in June 2005, the first made by a European Commissioner since 1996, she agreed with Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui to give priority to the setting up of the agreement, to agree on the 2007-2009 levels of cooperation for the economic and social assistance foreseen in the agreement, and that an effort should be made to recover lost time. On this occasion, the minister of State and minister for Foreign Affairs handed the European commissioner a programme of action indicating these priorities.

The aim was to consolidate the stage just passed through by setting an agenda concentrating especially on the country's national priorities, including the following areas: the impact of the gradual ope-

ning up of the national market; better access for Algerian products to the European market; aiding the free circulation of individuals; cooperation in the scientific sphere; and reviewing the conditions of work and of residence of Algerian citizens in Europe. In order to give a framework to this process of cooperation, it has been proposed to the European partner the setting up of seven working sub-committees, including the political dialogue and terrorism, human rights and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

This Algerian perspective has again been explained to the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Durao Barroso, by the Head of the Government, Mr. Ahmed Ouyahia, who also explained the Algerian partner's desire to develop the energy question as part of the process of high-level dialogue.

Basing its request on the principle of differentiation, the Algerian government has likewise informed the Commission that it would like both parties to respect the calendar for renegotiation of the agricultural basket, fishing and service areas as foreseen in the association agreement, since the new target dates established in the context of the Barcelona 2005 action programme were of such an anticipatory nature that they could easily penalize domestic producers. The parliamentary aspect has also been given a new boost. Mr. Josep Borell Fontelles has in fact recently completed the first visit by a president of the European Parliament to Algeria, which demonstrates the serenity of bilateral relations, and indicates the importance acquired by parliamentary diplomacy in the laborious process of building trust on a Euromediterranean level.