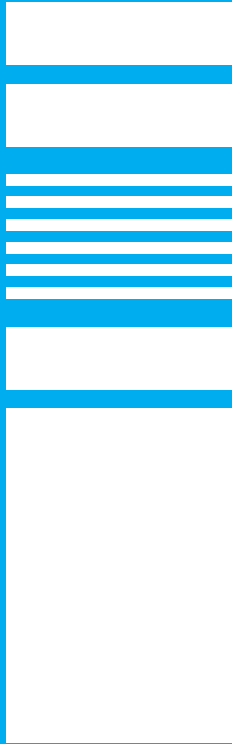


Perspectives



Towards a Space of Dialogue, Fellowship and Prosperity

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To speak of the Mediterranean is, above all, to speak of rich, complex and permanent relations on both sides of its shores. The Mediterranean Yearbook, published by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and the Fundació CIDOB, reminds us year after year what these relations are and how intensive they are, and above all it takes the pulse of the necessary interdependences between Europe and its neighbours. These relations make this region a privileged space of encounter and neighbourhood between peoples.

The analysis of the Mediterranean situation also implies the acknowledgment of the difficulties that exist. These are due, in large part, to the fact that the Mediterranean continues to be a space of unequal development and the scene of different lines of fracture: a frontier zone between the leading monotheist religions, between former colonisers and their colonies, between north and south. Certainly, when we undertake a rigorous study of the Euro-Mediterranean region we also need to be aware that we are dealing with a region that holds the keys to the current international conflicts.

On this point, the essential element is to be found in the objectives set by the Barcelona Process initiated by Spain in 1995. Hence the need becomes obvious to take fuller and better advantage of the instruments and policies available to us, so that we can advance towards achieving the shared peace

envisaged by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In 2007 the Mediterranean has continued to focus the world's attention, to a large extent owing to the continuing conflicts and tragedies in the region. The situation in Lebanon, the scourge of international terrorism and the conflict between Israel and Palestine, with the still pending solution of the Saharan conflict, are important elements which have darkened the Euro-Mediterranean year.

Faced with these challenges of the first magnitude, the implication of Spanish and European policy in the Mediterranean could not be a more decided one. We are keenly convinced of the possibility of a space of peace and prosperity. The political effort of Spain is directed to contributing actively to finding means of dialogue that will enable us to continue with the peace process in the Middle East. An example of this is Spain's commitment to the United Nations mission in Lebanon, which is a key factor for a future of greater security, greater stability and greater peace in the Middle East.

The shadows will not succeed in weakening the determination to continue working for the Mediterranean. Nothing that happens in this region is irrelevant to Spain and we will not cease to support the initiatives that make for reinforcement of co-operation in the region. Spain has upheld that commitment since 1995, when it made clear its will to become a principal actor in the construction of the area of shared progress that the Euro-Mediterranean region ought to be. Europe, for its part, will continue to contribute untiringly to this process, including the actors of civil socie-

ty giving prominence to the role of change and to the promotion of an area of freedom and democracy.

The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean has shown the determination to continue to promote with renewed energy the special instruments that Europe possesses in this context. The Barcelona Process is the natural framework for directing European policy towards the Mediterranean, and in accordance with that premise Spain's strategic aim has always been to act as a true nerve-centre of Euro-Mediterranean relations. The new stage in Euro-Mediterranean politics that is now opening will be one of institutionalising and consolidating the Barcelona Process. The proposals that emerged from the Paris Summit of July 2008 will help us move towards that objective through new and more powerful institutional mechanisms and new projects in co-ordination with the European Neighbourhood and Euro-Mediterranean policies under way. The ambition of the European Union needs to be ever greater and needs to treat the countries on the other shore as equals. That is in the interest of all of us.

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In this context it becomes necessary to take fuller and better advantage of the instruments and policies at our disposal. The governments of the states of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, especially those of the North, must make a firm commitment for the adoption of joint decisions in strategic areas such as the political sphere, economic cooperation and the integration of immigrant populations through a renewed social pact. Ambitious objectives call for ambitious policies.

In the Mediterranean, economic and social cohesion constitute a fundamental element for the development of the region, which also needs to be promoted through cooperation in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Overcoming economic and social inequalities is a necessary condition for the creation of an area of shared prosperity. It is beyond doubt that the different initiatives that have emerged from the Paris Summit in the fields of financial, business or university cooperation, among others, are elements favouring that development. The promotion of the Spanish-Italian initiative for the Agency for Business Development is a good token of Spain's interest in that objective. In addition, we may stress the advances in cooperation on migration management through different actions, such as the implementation of agreements with countries of origin, the improvement of Community instruments, or the regional and multilateral conferences such as the Euro-African Summit on Migration and Development, known as the Rabat Process.

It is beyond doubt that, by our proximity, our close ties and the intensity of our relations, the Mediterranean constitutes a primary target area of Spanish foreign policy. From the regional point of view, Spain is acting, through the various existing multilateral and thematic forums (Barcelona Process, Dialogue 5+5, Mediterranean Forum etc.), as an engine for the promotion of interest in the Mediterranean within the EU. Our objective is to work for the Mediterranean to overcome its conflicts and tensions and to promote the development of the region. Sceptics will see that as an impossible or distant aim. Nevertheless the only way to reach a solution is to work to achieve it. The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean can also rely on outstanding instruments for dialogue and cooperation such as the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Inter-cultural Dialogue and the Alliance of Civilisations, both of them tools that show a clear Spanish impulsion.

Together we can ensure that the Mediterranean becomes a space of dialogue, fellowship and prosperity. The fifth edition of the Mediterranean Yearbook, Med. 2008, is a good example of what this common effort means.