

# The Euro-Mediterranean Non-discourse on Political Participation of “Mediterranean immigrants” in the EU

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As the European Union declared, 2005 was the “Year of the Mediterranean”, which also coincided with the tenth Anniversary of the Barcelona Process. Now it is time to take stock and make plans for the future. Our argument is that the Euro-Mediterranean framework has been characterised by an absence of discourse regarding the political participation of foreign residents. An absence which, in our opinion, is due to the unidirectionality of the process, which only looks towards the Mediterranean South – with economic aid for economic, political and social development of the region – without considering that these countries are present in the EU through residents originating from the South. *Mediterranean immigrants* of the EU are largely forgotten within the process. Apart from Turkey, which as we know, already has the status of candidate country for access to the EU, according to data from the Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) the rea-

lity fluctuates between 5,192,537 immigrants counted through statistics in the countries of origin and 3,133,610 according to sources of destination countries. According to data collected by the annual Report on asylum and migration (2001) in 2001, five million people originating from southern Mediterranean countries, members of the partnership, were living legally in European territory.

In accordance with the accepted definition in the field of political science, we understand as political participation a group of participation activities and channels, such as the right to vote, the right to protest and freedom of association, the right to take part to associations, interest groups or immigration forums, among others, that enable full development of the individual within society and whereby he or she can actively or passively participate in public affairs and various processes of political decision.

Beyond this definition, political participation, in our own context, can be understood from two different focal points. The first focuses on the presence of immigrants’ political participation in EU discourse; and the second focuses on seeing immigrants present in the construction of the Barcelona Process through participation channels of civil society.

In this article we are only dealing with the former, since available information on the second focal point is limited. As we already know, at present, the main channel for participation of civil society at a Euro-Mediterranean level is the Non-Governmental Platform Euro-Med, for-

med by associations and networks of social actors from both shores of the Mediterranean.

Just as the European Commission defines in its Communication on *immigration, integration and employment* (2003), we start from the premise that political participation forms part of the integration process of nationals from third countries in the hosting society and that this is a key element for their recognition and equality with nationals from member States.<sup>1</sup>

We will take a look at documents during this period, paying special attention to the outcome of the first decade of the Barcelona Process and the proposals adopted for the coming years. Our objective is to identify the initiatives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in relation to the guarantee of political participation of foreign residents in the EU.

Firstly, we will review the documents issued in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Process with regard to social integration of immigrants and their rights in the hosting societies. We will deal with the idea of social integration of immigrants in a wide sense, in which political rights and political participation of foreign residents can be found. In many cases, social integration is linked with acknowledgement of political rights and political participation of immigrants. Secondly, we will analyse the main EU documents on political participation of resident immigrants as a complement to the works appearing in the first section. Finally, we will take stock of the situation and set out certain proposals for the future.

<sup>1</sup> The text says “integration must be understood as a bidirectional process based on corresponding mutual rights and obligations of legal citizens from third-countries and from the accepting society, that allows *full participation of immigrants*” (italics added).

## The Euro-Mediterranean Process, Immigration and Political Participation

The contribution of documents issued in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership regarding political participation of foreign residents in the EU is practically non-existent. Our first argument is that discourse on political rights of immigrants is completely ignored within the Euro-Mediterranean Process.

A quick reading of the key documents of the Barcelona Process shows us that the efforts of the partnership are aimed at economically promoting the Southern Mediterranean region, leaving aside other matters of particular importance such as the social and political dimension of immigrants originating from the Southern Mediterranean region who live legally in the EU. The fact that the Barcelona Process is being carried out without considering the integration of foreign residents in the EU who come from the South of the Mediterranean (the *Mediterranean immigrants*) is very significant. For the first 10 years of the Partnership, the question of the right to vote and political participation has not formed part of the political agenda of the process. Not even in terms of declarations and speeches, as it occurs with so many other matters within the process.

Nevertheless, we will attempt to briefly go through the documents which have established the start of the process and those evaluating it at the same time of the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Conference.

In the *Barcelona Declaration*, on November 27th and 28th, 1995, we can only see a weak reference, which acknowledges that immigrants play an important role, through relations between the society of origin and the hosting society. The States of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – and among them, the EU countries – “Are committed to guarantee the protection of all rights that current legislation acknowledges for emigrants living legally in their respective territories” (page 9). Thus, we can see that the rights of immigrants are left to the discretion of States, without a common focus and even less Regional, which started, as we know, at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Confer-

ence in Valencia, in April 2002 (Zapata-Barrero: 2006). So, the Barcelona Declaration does not show any explicit commitment to the general recognition of a combination of rights; it has no will to transform reality. We cannot find any reference to member States and their existing legislation, nor to the incoherence in their treatment of *Mediterranean immigrants*. All the demands for change are directed at South Mediterranean countries, without also dealing with the fact that in our European democracies the Barcelona Process could promote changes, especially as regards to the treatment given to *Mediterranean immigrants* and the lack of clear political rights. The Barcelona Process, as a deconstruction process, according to the focus proposed by P. Balta (2005), should also affect EU countries on this matter.

The rights of immigrants are mentioned by the European Commissioner of External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, in February 2005. During her appearance before the European Parliament, she stated that one of the objectives for the new stage of the Euro-Mediterranean process is to bring it closer to citizens. Beyond cooperation between governments, the Commission will explain, in the Communication on proposals for the future of the European Partnership, that involvement of society is necessary for improving the results in issues such as education, employment, gender equality, democracy, freedom to circulate and the rights of immigrants. Further on in this aspect, the Commissioner concludes that one of the four priorities for the coming months is centred on Immigration and Social Integration, and more specifically, on the integration of immigrants. This same stance is defended by Benita Ferrero-Waldner in her speech before the Political Committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (January 25th, 2005).

The Commission’s Communication on the *Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Association*, on April 12th, 2005, sets out the priorities of the working programme for the next 5 years. The document shows the particular importance of social integration of immigrants coming from members of the South Mediterranean and states that some Association Agreements have been useful

for making progress in this direction and for guaranteeing equal treatment (Section 2.4.). A Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs is planned for 2007, with the participation of local authorities, for the study of management of migratory flow and social integration. This would be a good opportunity for introducing the debate on political participation of residents from third-countries as an essential instrument for their integration.

The conclusions of the *VII Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of External Affairs* (May 30th-31st, 2005), prior to the Barcelona Summit held at the end of November 2005, state that efforts need to be concentrated on a group of activities that require a particular boost, as is the case of immigration and social integration of immigrants (Part three: Directions for the future). In the same way as the previously mentioned documents, they insist on the usefulness of Association Agreements in this area.

The Declaration of the Presidency of the Euro-Mediterranean Summit Barcelona+10 held in Barcelona (November 27th and 28th, 2005), and the heads of State and government, state their wish to create an area of mutual cooperation for immigration and social integration – together with justice and security – (section 8) and strengthen mutual management of legal migratory flow in the interests of both shores, guaranteeing the rights of immigrants.

Bilateral relations between Southern Mediterranean countries and the EU are also a good source of information for finding out whether there is Euro-Mediterranean discourse on the political participation of immigrants. Some of the key documents refer to the Association Agreements – the basis of bilateral relations – as a framework for dealing with immigrants’ rights, as well as their social integration in the hosting country. Here a similar point is made: absence of discourse on political participation and political rights of *Mediterranean immigrants* living in the EU. Most of the Association Agreements dedicate a specific section – Social and cultural cooperation – to the situation of nationals from South Mediterranean countries living in the EU. In these sections, equal treatment, non discrimination for reasons of nationality and social integration are defended as orien-

tating principles. But without any form of preciseness.

We will now look at how the EU itself approaches the subject of political rights.

### Brief Overview of EU Discourses

The situation of Euro-Mediterranean non-discourse regarding political participation rights of *Mediterranean immigrants*, obliges us to look more closely at the EU. This is not the place for presenting a comprehensive study of EU speeches but it is appropriate to pay attention to the important steps that have meant an innovation in the construction process of community discourse up to 2005 precisely.

The commitment of the EU to the recognition of foreign residents' rights (we are no longer referring solely to *Mediterranean immigrants*) in relation to political participation, is clearly evident through the concept of *Civic Citizenship*. The *Communication on a community migration policy* (2000), defines *Civic Citizenship* as "the collection of basic rights and obligations that immigrants progressively acquire over a period of several years, in such a way that they receive the same treatment as citizens of their accepting State, even though they have not been naturalised". In this same Communication, the Commission states – as is maintained thereafter in all community documents – that integration is a bidirectional process that affects both the hosting society as well as the immigrants, and that it entails the recognition of immigrants rights along with their acceptance of responsibilities. The Communication states that the concession of civic and political rights to resident migrants in the long term promotes integration. The European Social and Economic Committee states it likewise in its report on the Commission's text. What stands out here is the importance of the concession of the right to vote (Section 4.4.6), and even the concession of European citizenship to long-term residents (Section 4.4.7).

The Communication on immigration, integration and employment (2003) takes up the need for a holistic approach to the integration process, previously set out in previous communications [COM (2000)

757 and COM (2001) 387]. This approach is of particular interest when one considers the political participation of foreign residents because it means "applying a holistic approach that takes into account not only social and economic aspects of integration but also the problems related to cultural and religious diversity, citizenship, participation and political rights" (page 20). Out of all the integration global policies that the Commission is proposing, we are interested in that which refers to the need to facilitate political participation of *foreign residents*.

"Another important element of this concept [Civic Citizenship] is facilitating political participation. Various member States concede the right of local vote to all foreign residents under certain conditions. From the point of view of integration, it is obvious that the right of local vote should not be a result of nationality but of permanent residence. The Commission considers that, vis-à-vis the integration process, it would be valuable to concede political rights to long-term immigrant residents and the Treaty should constitute the basis for this" (page 25).

In this sense, several authors have defended civic citizenship as a *project of citizenship open to immigrants* (J. de Lucas, 2005) or as the starting point for the concession of European citizenship and as an instrument that acknowledges the immigrant as a political subject (Zapata-Barrero: 2005).

The allusion to the concession of the right to vote at a local level forces us to go back in time and look closely at another key document that we must consider when we discuss political participation. It is the *Agreement on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at a Local Level* (1992), which was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992 and came into effect in 1997. This Agreement has three main principles: i) to guarantee freedom of expression, meeting and association (Chapter A); ii) to facilitate the creation or, in the case that they already exist, the participation of immigrant residents in consultative bodies of representation at a local level (Chapter B); and iii) to concede the right to vote in local elections to those peo-

ple who have lived permanently in a municipality for 5 years prior to the elections (Chapter C).

More tentatively, the Council defends a similar stance in the *Basic Common Principles for the policy of integration of immigrants in the EU*. These principles aim to be a simple, non-binding guide to "contributing to the formulation of integration policies by member States". In this article, we are interested in principle 9 which states that "The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at a local level, favours their integration". Likewise, the Council's text explains that:

"Allowing immigrants to have a voice in the formulation of policies that affect them directly can lead to a more useful policy for immigrants that increases their sense of belonging. Whenever possible, immigrants must participate in all aspects of the democratic process." (page. 23).

In this manner, the Council defends, on the one hand, the need for a "structured dialogue" between immigrant groups and governments (the forums that the Council of Europe's Agreement proposed) as an instrument for immigrant participation and mutual understanding. On the other hand, and with greater discretion, it puts forward that, "if possible" it would be advisable to have participation in elections, concede the right to vote and the affiliation to political parties. However, one of the most committed documents is the Report on immigration, integration and the role of organised civil society, on the own initiative of the European Social and Economic Committee. This report states that non-concession of the right to vote to long-term resident nationals from third-countries implies that "in a certain way, [the immigrant] does not form part of this society, which hampers any approach towards social integration". Therefore, it states that the comparison of rights and social integration cannot be approached without including the right to vote to permanent residents.

After this brief review, we can see that, as opposed to the Euro-Mediterranean process, the EU is in the process of constructing discourse (*discourse-buil-*

ding) regarding the political participation of immigrants. The focus of this discourse does this through proposing a civic citizenship, understood as a legal category that guarantees a collection of rights to nationals from third-countries who live permanently in the EU, equivalent to those that European citizens already have. Now we will reflect on three documents approved during 2005 that contribute to the *discourse-building* of the EU with regard to our topic of interest.

Firstly, the Commission's Communication on the *Common Programme for Integration. Framework for the integration of third-country nationals in the EU* (2005). The text by the Commission proposes action measures on a national and community scale in relation to each of the Basic Common Principles approved by the Council. In the case of principle 9, which we referred to earlier on, the Commission proposes:

- On a national scale: to promote immigrants' active citizenship, to strengthen immigrants' participation in the democratic process, to reduce the obstacles in exercising the right to vote (for example, bureaucratic procedures or administrative taxes), to facilitate immigrant participation in general organisations or to create immigrants' associations to advise those who have recently arrived.
- On a community scale: the creation of associations for immigrants representing their interests at an EU level or the development of the concept of civic citizenship (we recall the Communication of 2000) "as a means for promoting integration of third-country nationals, including necessary rights and duties for giving immigrants a sense of participation in society".

Secondly, the Communication on the *European Fund for integration*, establishes specific measures for implementing the Basic Common Principles proposed by the Council. Some of the points worth emphasising are that the European Fund for integration assumes as one of its objectives, to increase ci-

vic and political participation of third-country nationals [1.3. Objectives of the Fund, 3 (basic common principle n° 7)] or the reference to the need for a greater participation of immigrants in the European Social Forum.

Thirdly, the *IV Report of the European Parliament on Union Citizenship* (A6-0411/2005) defends the concession of the right to vote to resident third-country nationals. The report (taken from self initiative) dedicates several sections to demanding greater inclusion in the formation process of political decisions of third-country nationals living in the Union (letter Q), calls for the concession of the right to vote in municipal elections (letter R and Sections 11 and 19), champions the acknowledgement of political rights of Union residents *without any type of discrimination linked to their nationality of origin* (Section 5), states that the concession of rights to extra-community residents facilitates their integration (Section 6) and bids for connecting citizenship with residency, overcoming the citizenship-nationality tie (Section 8).

In the framework of *discourse-building* regarding the political participation of immigrants, the community discourse of 2005 is characterised by a greater preciseness of the measures aimed at guaranteeing the political rights of immigrants and the need to recognise the category of citizen for third-country nationals who live permanently in the EU.

In the next phase, *discourse-building* should be characterised by a serious commitment of the Council, materialised in a directive that brings together all these aspects, connecting member States and summarising the proposals presented by the different community texts mentioned in this section.

### **Outcome/Balance Sheet and Proposals for the Future**

The outcome of the Euro-Mediterranean discourse on political participation of immigrants is very clear: *we are in a non-discourse situation*. The documents

analysed also confirm another parallel argument: The unidirectionality of the process. The initiatives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership seem to be solely directed towards South Mediterranean countries, without considering that their presence is increasingly wider on the European continent through nationals from these countries living legally in the EU. Without a change in the focus, and also demands for change to the consolidated democracies of the EU, it will be difficult to talk about a Euro-Mediterranean Region

In relation to EU discourse, it is clear that since 2000 – especially since the Commission's Communication on a *community migration policy* in which it presents the concept of Civic Citizenship – the process we refer to as *discourse-building* on political participation of foreign residents, has started. Since 2000, and within the framework of Tampere,<sup>2</sup> there has been an increase in the community institutions' initiatives aimed at adopting appropriate measures for social integration of long-term residents and at progressively equaling their rights with those of nationals from EU countries, including certain political rights. It is evident that the issue is being introduced onto the EU agenda.

The outcome of political participation of foreign residents in the EU can be set out in two ways. On the one hand, analysing it from the relationship between the Euro-Mediterranean Process and the process of European construction. In this sense, the progress made in terms of immigrants' political rights in the community sphere could be applied to the Euro-Mediterranean Process.

However, there is another possibility: to present the Euro-Mediterranean Process as an opportunity for innovation and claim towards EU consolidated democracies holding 5 million *Mediterranean immigrants* without political rights. Regarding the future, we recommend adopting the second interpretation, and taking advantage of the continuity that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has experienced during 2005 in order to get immigrants' political rights in their corresponding position on the political

<sup>2</sup> The Tampere Programme, adopted in October 1999 by the heads of State and Government in the heart of the EU Council, establishes the creation of an "Area of Freedom, Security and Justice". One of the pillars of this Area is the creation of a common policy of asylum and immigration.

agenda of both the Euro-Mediterranean and the EU agenda.

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs planned for 2007, announced by the Commission, would be an ideal occasion for introducing all these issues into the debate and for taking political participation of permanent residents of immigrant origins seriously. Without full participation of peoples within the public life of the society in which these residents live and work, it is not possible to talk about integration, let alone the feeling of belonging to a community. We are more in the terrain of political wills than of democratic evidence.

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