

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership from its Actors' Perspective: The Countries of Southern Europe

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The Need to Manage the Achievements of 2005 in 2006

2005 was a “good year” for the Barcelona Process. Ten years on, and following the Summit held in November, our Partnership continues working with new plans for a common future in the Mediterranean region. Although the year 2006 developed amidst a general climate of difficulties, the balance for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is a positive one. Moreover, during 2006, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative took shape with clear outlines and the Barcelona Process represents the regional realization of the methods and principles inspiring the Alliance of Civilizations.

The early days of 2006 can be regarded as a time for “decompression” following the submission of a first series of initiatives and documents, along with the input adopted in Barcelona in the context of the Partnership's tenth anniversary. The challenge for the Austrian and Finnish Presidencies was to adopt a “managerial” profile so as to develop the documents – essentially political – that were approved during the Summit.

The Barcelona Process in the Face of the Difficult Political Situation of 2006

The year began with grim expectations due to the regional political situation. In Syria the political situation was – and remains – an obstacle for the signing of the already negotiated Association Agreement;

Lebanon was going through times of extreme internal political instability (later aggravated by the Israeli intervention); in Palestine, a mounting feeling of uncertainty followed the election of Hamas; Egypt was facing discomfort due to the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood; Algeria showed growing scepticism with regard to the Barcelona Process due to its financial situation, which led to a gradual and strategic approach to the United States and Russia; not to mention the developments in Libya, in which some observers saw signs of a potential bilateral relationship outside the multilateral institutional framework. This complex situation represented a new challenge for our Partnership in terms of dealing and channelling those differences and aspirations, sometimes diverging.

In this context, the Barcelona Process was not at its best moment, but its strength and usefulness can be proved precisely in such circumstances: for its original conception and the maturity achieved through the continuous debate generated among the various institutions created in its framework.

Three Great Unexpected Challenges Met in 2006

It is worth remembering the three main issues that the Barcelona Process was faced with in 2006: firstly, the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections; secondly, the so-called “cartoons crisis”; and thirdly, the dramatic events that took place in Lebanon and put our Partnership to a test, not only concerning its normal functioning but its very survival.

Managing to sustain vital aid to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was the first and foremost challenge. Although a government had been democratically appointed, it was led by a party listed as a terrorist organization by the same EU, and it was

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not willing to accept the rules of the game, as set out in the Road Map, in order to further the peace process.

The second challenge came with the “cartoons crisis”, since the Barcelona Process could not turn its back to it; the resilience of the Process and its ability to absorb conflicts were then put to a test. At the end of February, on a Spanish initiative, the High Officials’ Committee held a meeting to deal – amidst great expectation – with the issue of how to improve the dialogue between cultures and civilizations in order to overcome such a sizeable crisis, eventually showing the uniqueness and usefulness of the Barcelona Process.

The third and most serious development that put to a test the ability of the Barcelona Process to redirect tensions was the dramatic events that took place in Lebanon, which threatened to destabilise the regional situation. If the “cartoons crisis” tested the social and cultural dimensions of the Barcelona Process, the crisis in Lebanon tested the resiliency of the political and security aspects of the only framework of political dialogue where Arabs and Israelis sit as partners.

A great deal of speculation went on during the summer concerning the ability of the Process to absorb the impact; for this reason, the monthly meeting was awaited with great expectation, given the high level of tension that characterized the end of the Committee meeting in July, which coincided with the announcement that Israeli military operations had begun in Lebanon.

The Finnish Presidency, counting on the efficient assistance given by the community coordinators, did not deem convenient to call for an extraordinary Euromed meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Eventually, the “ordinary” High Level Officials’ meeting, masterfully prepared and conducted, took place almost without incident. Some speeches were harsh and conclusive, but very focused and delivered by political representatives in the highest ranks. This event proved that the Barcelona Process is a resilient

and flexible one and that it can surmount the regional crises it has experienced since it was created 11 years ago, including the latest and most serious one.

On the other hand, as the crisis developed in Lebanon, the EU broke the old adage “the EU pays and the US plays” since the EU member countries actively participated – for the first time on the ground – in police and military operations in Gaza, the Rafah border crossing and in Southern Lebanon with the UN Interim Force (UNIFIL).

The Tampere Ministerial Conference and its Political Context

It is worth mentioning that the climax of the Euromed year was reached at the 8th Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Tampere in November. In the days preceding the event, the announcement of a truce between Palestinians and Israelis and the prospect of a national unity government in Palestine led to a rather cautious optimism that also made possible that, for the second time in the history of our Partnership, Conclusions were approved by consensus. This was regarded as a success in itself, but was further reinforced by the fact that it was put down on a single document, as was demanded by the Arab counterpart, with the aim of formulating the political and technical aspects in the same text.

2006: The Year of Technical Meeting at Ministerial Level

Whereas the Ministerial Meeting in Tampere was the political climax, a series of technical meetings at ministerial level were also held, particularly during the second semester.

The largest part of these meetings took place during the Finnish Presidency, which established a busy work agenda focused on aspects of the greatest

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**THE EIGHTH EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
TAMPERE, 27TH-28TH NOVEMBER 2006**

The Euro-Mediterranean cooperation process brought together 37 states to the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs within the framework of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and under the Presidency of Erkki Tuomioja, Foreign Minister of Finland.

The meeting culminated in the unanimous adoption of the "Tampere Conclusions," and it was only the second time that Foreign Ministers had been able to adopt conclusions unanimously.

Conclusions touched a wide range of issues such as:

- *Political and Security Dialogue*: Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the objective of achieving a common area of peace, stability and shared prosperity in the Mediterranean region. They also considered it paramount to achieve a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, encouraging the parties to continue on the path of direct dialogue and negotiation in the fulfilment of the vision of two states. They emphasised the importance of co-ownership and co-responsibility of the Process, agreeing on holding regular Meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the end of each year and considered the European Neighbourhood Policy as an important tool which contributes to reinforcing and complementing the Barcelona Process.

They stressed the importance of strengthening democracy, political pluralism, the role of women in society, enhancing the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, and finally, fostering the role of civil society.

- *Implementation of Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism*: Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the Code in order to enhance security through more effective counter terrorism policies while reiterating the rejection of attempts to associate any religion or culture with terrorism. They also focused on the role of the media in preventing incitement and ensuring human rights.

- *Free Trade and Investment*: Ministers reiterated their commitment to achieving a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010. In this context the 2007 agenda will focus on the progressive liberalisation of trade in services and the right of establishment, as well as progressive liberalisation in agriculture and processed agricultural and fisheries products. Ministers noted also that FEMIP has been instrumental in channelling substantial amounts of funding to the region and underlined the importance of strengthening FEMIP's support to the private sector.

- *Energy*: the scheduling of a Ministerial conference on energy was welcomed by Ministers. Ministers emphasised the need to further reinforce co-operation in securing energy supplies in the Euromed region. To this end, Ministers emphasised the importance of examining means aiming at the diversification of energy resources, including

renewable energy.

- *Environment and Tourism*: Ministers welcomed the adoption of the timetable which sets out the steps for implementing Horizon 2020. In 2007, implementation will start on the Horizon 2020 initiative for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean. Ministers also underlined the importance of the contribution of tourism in the economies of the Euromed Partners.

- *Education*: Ministers reiterated their commitment to increase funding devoted to education in the Mediterranean region and welcomed the proposal made by Egypt to host a Euromed Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research. The objective will be to reinforce the efforts of all countries in the region to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the areas of education, taking into account the complementarity between education, scientific research, innovation and industry.

- *Strengthening the role of women in society*: Ministers endorsed the Ministerial Conclusions adopted during the Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Istanbul on November 2006. They urged its full implementation with a view to promoting the full participation of women in economic, political, civil, social and cultural life in the Euromed region. Ministers also took note of the Marrakech Civil Forum on gender equality.

- *Dialogue between Cultures*: Ministers underlined the need to further strengthen intercultural dialogue, including through the Euro-Mediterranean Anna Lindh Foundation and the development of the Cultural Heritage programme. They agreed to intensify efforts to combat discrimination, racism and xenophobia and undertook to promote the culture of dialogue ensuring a better mutual understanding, freedom and respect for all religions, beliefs and cultures among Euromed people. The Alf was invited to contribute to the preparation of the '2008 EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue'. Ministers took note of the designation of Algiers as the capital of Arab culture in 2007.

- *Migration*: Ministers underlined the need to strengthen the management of migratory flows in a comprehensive and balanced manner while respecting migrants' rights and fighting against trafficking in human beings. A ministerial meeting on migration due to take place in 2007 aims at agreeing on a series of further measures to promote cooperation on all issues pertinent to migration.

For further information:

Tampere Conclusions: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/2006_tampere_conclusions.pdf

interest. Among others, the Euromed Trade Ministerial Conference (June 2006) in Marrakech (during the Austrian Presidency); the Euromed Conference of Ministers for Industry (Rhodes, September 2006); the Euromed Ministerial Conference on the Environment (Cairo, November 2006), which marked the beginning of the implementation of the Horizon 2020 initiative to de-pollute the Mediterranean Sea; the Euro-Mediterranean Energy Forum (Brussels,

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September 2006) and, most especially, the First Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in Society (Istanbul, November 2006).

The Importance of the Educational Dimension and Human Contacts

Following the Euromed Universities Rectors Conference held in Tampere in October 2006, the ground for building a Euromed education community is being laid, along with the project to establish a Euromed Permanent University Forum. In this respect, the major achievement in 2006 was the Commission's launching of a scholarship programme for university students; a kind of "Erasmus" programme, which initially was conceived for the Euromed exclusively but will eventually apply to all countries in the Neighbourhood area.

The issue of the sound management of migratory flows is also high on the Euromed agenda, particularly in the light of the upcoming Ministerial Conference on immigration to be held in 2007 and which will receive the positive inputs of the Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migrations and Development held in Rabat (July, 2006) and the EU-Africa Conference on Migrations and Development held in Tripoli (November, 2006).

Incorporating the Barcelona Process in the European Neighbourhood Policy

Throughout 2006, a great deal of work was done – particularly within the Commission– to shape and conduct existing complementarities between the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and their respective instruments (particularly, the National Action Plans that are a part of the existing Association Agreements). In fact, the ENP should help to strengthen relationships with our Mediterranean partners in order to further our common agenda of commitments

regarding gradual political and economic reforms, which should always keep to the principles that inspired Barcelona: regional actors' appropriation; association procedures (and refusing any kind of imposition); and keeping the Mediterranean region as a frame of reference.

Conclusions: A Positive Year in a Difficult Context

Huge political difficulties had to be dealt with throughout 2006. However, the flexibility of the Barcelona Process enabled it to overcome both the chronic and structural obstacle of the region as well as other obstacles resulting from added international tensions, allowing it to get over the conflicts by

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absorbing them.

In spite of the bad winds that blow in the region, Europe and its Southern Mediterranean partners prevented their common initiative from failing, thus proving wrong the announcements made by the prophets of doom. Moreover, they faced the existing difficulties at the multilateral level with great realism, a will to understand and a vision of the future through regular High Officials' meetings, ministerial meetings, APEM meetings and meetings with social agents in the framework of the Civil Platform and the Anna Lindh Foundation, among others.