

The European Project in the Mediterranean: Barcelona Plus

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2007: A Year of Upheaval and Clarification

Following the dramatic events of 2006, a year in which there were so many challenges to be faced by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, relaunched at the Barcelona Summit of November 2005, few expected that such an upheaval concerning the Mediterranean was going to emerge at the heart of the EU during 2007.

In the first half of the year, the German Presidency progressed peaceably and Berlin devoted itself, with efficiency and dedication, to administering the annual action programme approved at Tampere at the end of the Finnish Presidency. But very soon, in the thick of the French electoral campaign, the first blow was struck by the then presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy in a speech at Toulon on 7th February against the theretofore excessively conformist *status quo*.

The announcement by the erstwhile candidate and now President of the Republic, seeking to launch – successfully so – a new initiative in the Mediterranean, in the form of a “Mediterranean Union,” provoked a huge commotion in Brussels and all manner of reactions both among European members and among our associates in the South. This was the point that marked the beginning of an upheaval that still persists in mid-2008, as we wait to discover what will result from an initiative that caused such reverberations.

During the second half of 2007, under an admirable Portuguese Presidency, Euro-Mediterranean activity was intense as we witnessed what I would describe as a period of clarification of positions on the part of the various protagonists. This was accompanied by a

certain process of North-South verticalisation taking shape at the Lisbon Euro-African Summit and the subsequent 2008 EU-Arab League meeting in Malta that added new and necessary channels for dialogue with the remaining Arab countries, in the current context of growing interdependence and globalisation.

The Euromed Programme Marches On

Setting aside the criticisms and shocks, 2007 saw a firm-footed advance in the Barcelona Process, which continued developing its sector-based agenda, possibly with an excessive absence of glamour, in accordance with the ambitious five-year action plan approved at the 2005 Summit. That plan had for the first time included – as is well known – a fourth chapter dedicated to the issue of migration and the related facets of justice and social integration, as well as the new code of conduct against terrorism. Among the many Euromed events and achievements during 2007, it is worth highlighting the following as being especially significant:

- The first ministerial meeting on education that took place in Cairo and represents a new milestone in expanding the scope of our co-operation. That meeting was preceded by another in Alexandria by the Euro-Mediterranean University Forum – in which the Rovira i Virgili University of Tarragona is playing such an important and decisive role – for the creation of a regional network that will nurture a better understanding among the chief universities in the region and a harmonisation of curricula that will permit a successful achievement of Euro-Mediterranean exchanges in the image of the Erasmus programme that has produced such positive results within the body of the EU.
- The admirable German initiative of assembling for the first time the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parlia-

ment in Berlin, which promises to be consolidated into a new regular event, with a fresh sitting already arranged in Morocco between 26th May and 2nd June 2008. This initiative, as with the ambitious scholarship programme launched by the Commission within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), is doubtless a most important step forward towards the necessary “rejuvenation” of our Partnership, not just because young people are being accorded the importance they deserve but because it represents a new and more dynamic vision of society’s involvement in our great regional common project. All this, together with the restructuring in the governance of the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Civil Platform, should contribute to a greater boost to the process, in areas that are not strictly economic, removed from political tensions, such as the Barcelona “third basket.”

- The first Euromed ministerial meeting on migration, which took place under the Portuguese Presidency in La Albufeira on 19th November, was a manifestation of the new chapter IV of our Euro-Mediterranean Action Plan being set in motion. That meeting, together with the conferences on migration and development held in Rabat and Tripoli outside the Euromed aegis, is a true exponent of the verticalisation of our Partnership, adding a new and deeper North-South vision of Africa to the traditional Mediterranean horizontal vision. All this bears witness to the desire on the part of all the Euro-Mediterranean associates to co-manage these matters and extend multi- and bi-lateral contacts with the countries of origin that produce the new and intense migratory movement taking place via the Maghreb towards Europe from the sub-Saharan regions.
- The incorporation, promoted in particular by Spain, of two new non-ENP countries into the Euromed Partnership (Albania and Mauritania) is a significant milestone that will contribute not just to round off the Euromed Partnership’s regional structure but also to maintain the individuality of its own identity, both within the ENP context and within that of the new regional initiatives and even that of already extant sub-regional ones. It is worth remembering that, if the gradual new accessions to the EU have always demonstrated the vitality and attractiveness of the Union, the fact that at this stage two new countries have insisted on participating in the Barcelona Process without receiving any kind of economic assistance in exchange is also

proof of the vitality and interest that it arouses in a regional context.

Albania’s presence in our Partnership will also allow a new voice to be heard in our debates, while giving the Tirana government the opportunity to adapt progressively to Community procedures with a view to future membership of the EU. This presence will furthermore no doubt grant the Balkan country a more significant presence on the international scene from which it has been absent for too long, having in recent times frequently been unjustly considered more as the end object, rather than the subject of the major events that have been played out in the region.

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Mauritania’s participation, for its part, once the country had regained its democratic credentials, can be seen as the culmination of an old aspiration of the Maghreb to see all members of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) included in the Barcelona Process, since, while Libya has not yet decided to join fully, it has been participating as an observer at all meetings not just at ministerial level but also those of senior officials and of the Euromed Committee held monthly in Brussels. Under current circumstances it appeared truly incongruous that Mauritania could not be present when Libya was.

The Barcelona Process, Nerve Centre of the Euro-Mediterranean Relationship

Everything that developed in 2007, crammed with important meetings at all levels, as well as the large-scale interweaving of relations, contacts, projects and programmes financed by a Community budget (including a new fund for governance), constituting an unquestionable *acquis*, as well as the intense trading relations within the framework of progressive free exchange that is advancing in line with what was foreseen in the Association Agreements, very clearly demonstrates that the Barcelona Process is today wholly consolidated and continues to be – notwithstanding any criticisms and shortcomings – the nerve

centre of the geopolitical, cultural and economic relationship between the EU and our neighbours and associates in the South, whatever new initiatives may be brought forward. That was never more clearly seen than precisely when the new proposal by President Sarkozy arrived on the scene, at the same time as the European Commission was attempting to better shape and move forward the new ENP, which has come to take root in the old regional Partnership with our southern neighbours, contributing a new bilateral catalyst to relations with those that seek it and are prepared to progress in the direction of better governance.

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It is true to say that the initial French attempt to leave “the Mediterranean to the Mediterraneans” and sell Turkey this new vision as an alternative to its accession to the EU, resulted from the very first moment not just in sounding the inevitable warning in Europe regarding the importance everyone attaches nowadays to the EU’s “southern flank” but also, and above all, in a resurgence of enthusiasm by many European countries outside the Mediterranean area for the Barcelona Process. An enthusiasm that, as in the German case, may have surprised those who were not closely following the Process given the fact that Berlin had at no time failed to participate in it sincerely and actively, including within the framework of the ENP, in which it has striven to maintain the appropriate North-South balance. It should be remembered at this stage that the German instance is highly characteristic of what have traditionally been the internal commitments at the heart of the Union as it was specifically one of them, advanced by the then Prime Minister Felipe González and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, that opened up the way – precisely during a French Presidency of the Union – for the Barcelona Conference to be held, with great success, in November 1995, propelling the present Euro-Mediterranean relationship.

Recalling these origins, it should come as no surprise that Germany should not have felt either comfortable or content with an initiative which, despite all its cosmetic changes, has seemed from the beginning to be not just a unilateral and self-interested attempt to torpedo the Barcelona Process (as many of us who participated in the Great Mediterranean Week in Marseilles between 19th and 24th November last year were able to glean from the speeches that were heard there). It seemed also to be an attempt by France to take back the European baton in the Mediterranean, at a time when the Euromed relationship is already plainly identified as something that is co-managed on the basis of equality between the EU on the one hand and the associated nations of the South on the other.

The Sarkozy Initiative

Despite the fact that there were many of us wishing to revitalise the Barcelona Process and had even launched proposals to that effect (cf. the speech delivered by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Miguel Ángel Moratinos on 4th May, on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate at Malta University), it is no surprise to observe how it was from Paris that the official broadside to Barcelona and the expected “Mediterranean shake-up” came, since France was never wholly comfortable with an excessively “communitarian” process that it had never regarded as its “own baby” and was coming at it from a deeply embedded bilateralist position with the intention of effectively disrupting it (Prat, 2006).

To those who have experienced the Process from close up, it was clear that the wish from the Quai d’Orsay, where the French Foreign Ministry is located, had from some time back been to regain positions – inexplicably abandoned in the past – in a region where France has, understandably so, always maintained a strong political, cultural and economic presence (Schmid, 2007).

However, even while admitting that a fresh impetus was required and that its advent has been positive (even if it came from the Elysée Palace and not the Quai), the fundamentals and principles that inspired the launch of the robust Euro-Mediterranean relationship should not be forgotten, not only because they are unquestionable but, above all else, because they now involve the whole of the EU in equal measure,

¹ See: “The Rome call for a Union for the Mediterranean by France, Spain and Italy” of 20th December 2007.

as was seen at the latest Barcelona Summit, which had a massive presence of European leaders. In reality, the Sarkozy initiative that started off so controversially, gradually evolved, from its February launch in Toulon and passing through a first unilateral *mise au point* in Tangier (23rd October), to arrive at an enforced attempt at better definition following the Rome tripartite meeting among the three French, Italian and Spanish Presidents, on 20th December¹ that culminated in the Franco-German proposal underwritten by the European Council of 13th March 2008.

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In effect what arose out of the Rome meeting was a new concept which was no longer that apparently highly ambitious and rather wishful Mediterranean Union but rather a plain “Union for the Mediterranean” which shed much of the highly charged political implications that had given the impression of being proposed as an alternative to the EU. Finally, post-Rome and, most significantly, following German pressure by then into the current 2008, everything appears to have been shifted towards a more pragmatic focus, leaning towards the “development of specific projects,” within the Euro-Mediterranean framework. In fact, the Barcelona Process is then granted its legal charter, the term having never been official previously, with the subtitle “Union for the Mediterranean” added and an attempt made to endow it with new structures which, even while “light touch” in nature, it will be hard to have adopted consensually.

It was clear that the idea of a “Mediterranean Union,” doubtless harboured in everyone’s heart as an eventual “consummation devoutly to be wished” and which the EuroMeSCo network had already proposed in its excellent evaluation of the ten years of the Barcelona Process (EuroMeSCo, 2005) and which the late professor Emilio Fontela had coined and presented, indeed with very specific details, in a recent publication by the National Defence Higher Education Centre (CESEDEN) under my direction (Fontela, 2007), has not yet found sufficiently fertile ground, nor was the

political environment sufficiently calm in 2007 to attempt to turn it into reality. How could it be if only two years previously in Barcelona our southern associates were not even willing to accept agreement – under a British Presidency – on a Declaration that purely sought to present a common vision? How was the concept to be “sold” by the leaders of the Arab countries of the southern Mediterranean to the most radical sections of their population of a “Union” of some of them (only those bordering the sea) when their old colonial cities, the recurring “cartoons crisis” so recent in their memories and the Iraq invasion and its disastrous results were still at the forefront of their minds? And what were they to say to the rest of the extended Arab family that was to be excluded from that Union?

It was because of that, as I understand, that an attempt was made, as early as December in Rome, to alter course to some extent while a way was sought to identify jointly “priority cooperation sectors” to be developed in common, “without aiming to replace existing procedures for cooperation and dialogue that are already shared by Mediterranean countries, but rather simply to give them added impetus in a spirit of complementing all the institutions that are in place.”

Thus the initial idea of a “Mediterranean Union” was abandoned in favour of a “Union *for the* Mediterranean” but acceptance has not yet been gained for the Spanish-Italian idea of a Union that in all events should be “Euro-Mediterranean” something that in the end was agreed, with German support, at the aforementioned European Council in the spring of 2008.

In the event, that “grand idea” to launch something new as an alternative to all the “failed attempts so far” that was announced in Toulon, will end up reduced to a bid, that can be perfectly acceptable to all, to “render more efficient” the existing Partnership (the idea put forward by the Quai d’Orsay from the start) and contribute to steering the Barcelona Process towards a safe haven (an idea that is dear to our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation) (Moratinos, 2007), emphasising regional programmes and projects running parallel, and complementary, to the bilateralisation that the new ENP represents.

But it is yet to be seen whether it can be thus, given that the regional circumstances which have so far prevented the Barcelona Process from advancing not only persist but even appear to continue deteriorating. Meanwhile, what is clear is the need for a greater collective awareness to be developed both South and North of the Mediterranean and for an enhanced political involvement by all

to be achieved with regard to resolving the region's problems and to our Euro-Mediterranean relationship, framed within the current Partnership which, under current circumstances, is probably the most appropriate multilateral political structure (and maybe the only one possible), taking into account the region's political reality.

In the present climate, the decision promoted by Spain to change the statutes of the Anna Lindh Foundation for Intercultural Dialogue so as to give it a greater visibility and efficacy, together with other specific initiatives that might arise at the initiative of others, are examples that can contribute to the collective effort with the aim that has awakened such expectation of revitalising Mediterranean relations. This revitalisation is today all the more necessary insofar as, due to globalisation, there are new external and at times distant protagonists who are showing themselves to be taking an interest in the region but whose world vision is very different from ours, as is their agenda in terms of the values that underpin our endeavours.

Governance at the Heart of the Debate

It is interesting to note that, while the new ENP places a particular emphasis on governance, which the EU even promotes by means of a special fund, the Sarkozy initiative makes absolutely no mention of any aspect linked to the promotion of those values that we jointly decided to defend through common action in Barcelona in 1995 and ratified in 2005. That is probably due to attention having been centred from the start on regional themes, specifically leaving the bilateral relationship to be managed under the ENP. That dictum of Bismarck comes to mind here: it says that politicians think about the next elections while statesmen think of the next generations. The maxim was quoted in Barcelona last 28th September by European Commission Director General Eneko Landaburu when together we closed the Seminar on Mediterranean governance and policy organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed).

Indeed in 1995 thoughts were on the long term, setting the framework for a future relationship based on respect for human rights and the rule of law as the means to securing welfare and progress for all the states bordering the Mediterranean.

For that reason it is today clear that, notwithstanding all the economic support that may be given to regional projects, without democracy and without respect for certain values, development and progress are not possible. Democracy is today a commonly held as-

piration and therefore it is on that which the Commission places the greatest emphasis in its new ENP. As things stand, whatever the development applied to the Barcelona Process, it will not be possible to merely reinforce it on the basis of specific projects or financial contributions from the private sector and there will continue to be a need for a substantial boost to governance so as to progressively counter the shortfall in democratic legitimacy that remains more widespread than is desirable across southern Mediterranean countries, despite the praiseworthy efforts to narrow the gap being exhibited by many of those who govern them and by new political forces.

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Political Problems in the Region Persist

As a final issue, it needs to be remembered that during 2007, the latent problems in the southern Mediterranean region remain unresolved: serious regional confrontations persist, hampering a healthy relationship among all concerned, as also the achievement of our objectives for peace, stability and progress; there is still the lack of a unified approach and greater harmony among the "brotherhood" of southern nations; there is yet no sign of any initiatives originating from these countries towards improving the Partnership. From the EU side, the prospect is little better. There are too many countries that only "participate" in the Process, attending meetings and intervening periodically to defend some national interest, but what is missing is a stronger feeling of "belonging" to the very distinct type of Association that is the Euro-Mediterranean one, which, notwithstanding all its criticisms and shortcomings, by now has accumulated a significant *acquis* that, even while being little known among the wider public, is nevertheless truly admirable. Faced with this lack of enthusiasm and of initiatives that might go further than the action programmes regu-

larly set at ministerial meetings, however one looked at it, it was clear that some form of lighting the touchpaper was needed, some shake-up that would oblige both sides to “get their skates on” and clarify their positions as to what we are really seeking to achieve through our Euromed Partnership, which is not merely – by a long chalk – the “unique arena for dialogue” which some of its apparently well-meaning defenders intend. That shake-up was attempted in the past by the Spanish government when it proposed to the British Presidency during the last half of 2005 that a commemorative Summit should be called, but there was a lack of will on the part of many and – most importantly – the circumstances of the moment (internal political crisis in Israel provoked by Ariel Sharon, a serious terror attack some days earlier in Jordan, troubled elections in Egypt, a sudden illness suffered by the Algerian President, etc.) did not allow it to blossom into the media celebration that many of us were hoping for. Nevertheless, a little-discussed success of that Summit was not only the approval of an important and original programme for action that is applicable even today but also, and most especially, the massive presence of heads of state and government from the newly-enlarged EU at a meeting exclusively devoted to the Mediterranean: it was the birth of the so-called “Barcelona + 10” that it is now to be hoped will be revived with fresh vigour.

Conclusion

Having seen the back of that year of upheaval and clarification that convulsed the Euro-Mediterranean As-

sociation with the launch of the “Sarkozy initiative” and has culminated, once into 2008, in the welcome decision to consolidate the Barcelona Process, adopting the subtitle of “Union for the Mediterranean”, our hope is that, after such a commotion, we may see concrete results. This will always depend on some progress being made in establishing a peace in the region that is as much wished for as it is necessary and made too in our southern neighbours joining in the initiative with a renewed willingness to take it forward, advancing further their internal reform and modernisation processes. Actions will speak louder than words.

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