

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or Euro-Arab Partnership?

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In 1995, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership first got off the ground in Barcelona. Nine years later, the project is not up there where it should be. An Englishman might say: "It took off, but it's flying too low," and this is exactly what has happened. However, when it comes to making a final assessment, there are conflicting points of view. It is the classic story of the glass that is either half empty or half full. The assessment differs depending on who is making it. The European Commission generally considers that a good job has been done: Association Agreements have been signed with the Southern countries (except Syria), sometimes only after considerable difficulties; there has been relatively successful macro-economic stabilisation of the Southern Mediterranean Countries; inflation has been kept under control; the MEDA programme has been improved; there have been regular meetings at all levels; there has been a build-up of financial aid, and greater participation from the EIB. Of course, the Commission does recognise the delays in ratifying the Agreements signed; the choking administrative bottlenecks; the negative effect exercised on the whole Barcelona Process by the aggravation of the situation in Palestine and in Iraq; the consequences of the aftermath of September 11 on the expected exchanges, and the possible effects of Enlargement on

the Mediterranean economies. The Commission has also, since 2000, undertaken to re-define some of the project's objectives so as to silence the critics:

1. by introducing MEDA II (Support Measures), and providing it with a budget of 5.3 billion euros by committing the EIB to allocate 6.4 billion euros for the Euromed programme.
2. by putting forward the Valencia Plan (April 2002) to "revitalise" the Euro-Mediterranean Process.
3. by creating, at the time of the Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the Euromed ministers at Heraklion (Crete, 26th-27th May 2003) under the Greek presidency, the FEMIP, an idea put forward at the time of the Barcelona meeting (October 2002).
4. by deciding at the time of the Naples Conference (December 2003) to set up a new Parliamentary Assembly to replace the Euromed Parliamentary Forum, and a Foundation for Cultural Dialogue.
5. by publishing an important communication on the "Wider Europe" (COM 104 final, 11-3-2003) to defuse the fears of the Mediterranean countries in the face of the Enlargement planned for May 2004.
6. by proposing a deepening of overall relations without, however, going as far as admission. In brief, everything but institutions, as Romano Prodi used to like to remind us, an idea developed in the Commission's communication entitled "Laying the Basis for a New Neighbourhood instrument" (COM, 393 final, 1-7-2003) and in the guideline document "European Neighbourhood Policy" (COM 373 final, 2004).

Alongside the Commission's activities, the European Presidency had set up a "High-Level Advisory Group" on the subject of "Dialogue between Peoples and Cultures in the Mediterranean," whose report was published in 2004, and whose global proposal – the setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Cultural Dialogue – has just been finally confirmed, with its headquarters to be in Alexandria.

In view of these developments, it appears that the Barcelona Process is still on track, and that the Commission is keeping constant watch to make sure that it gets to the first stop on the line: 2010. There remains a snag: although the route is marked out, it is still full of pitfalls. In fact, although all European and Mediterranean countries agree about the opportunity provided by the project (a joint voyage towards a reconciled, prosperous Mediterranean), many of them express doubts about the adequacy of the means and the suitability of the method. Some go so far as objecting to the whole underlying ideology, and do not hesitate to show their mistrust of the project's stated objectives.

Let us first take the case of the EU member states. It is clear that for most of them – and this is even clearer after the last Enlargement – the Mediterranean is not considered in its own terms, but as a source of new instabilities to be checked. While the Northern countries pay absent-minded attention to it, the Southern European countries see the Partnership through the prism of their own strategies and priorities.

As for European public opinion, except for the closed inner circles of experts and specialist organisations, the tone is one of complete indifference. The

Partnership can hardly keep the attention of the media, concerned as they are with issues that are more burning (Iraq), more immediate (terrorism), or more stirring (Islamic headscarves or illegal immigration). How many in the media have taken any notice of the High-Level Advisory Group's report about dialogue between peoples and cultures? It is clear that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and its allied themes, the Wider Europe and the Neighbourhood Policy, have never attracted great media coverage in the same way that the American "Greater Middle East" project has.

The Southern Mediterranean states are also caught up in a paradox. They signed the Barcelona Declaration and they are therefore supposed to know the rules of the game – that is, by accepting their share of responsibility for the success of the project. However, they fall behind in applying enterprise measures, delay improvements to attractiveness criteria and, although they have recorded some progress in the macro-economic situation, growth rates are not sufficient to meet the needs of an ever-increasing workforce. And instead of cleaning up their own back yards (by fighting administrative slowness, creating an "investment-friendly" environment, putting an end to corruption, pay-offs and speculation, or improving the workings of their institutions) they tend to blame the EU for the slowness and incoherence of the Barcelona Process. Of course, excessive trade dependence (80% of Tunisia's trade is with the EU), the inequality of the balance of power (the EU is 15 times richer than all the Mediterranean countries put together), the imbalance inherent in the demands for the opening up of commercial markets, and the potential effects of enlargement all constitute serious challenges to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and create a general distortion of conditions. But being surprised at this is just being naïve, and regretting it is pointless. The Partnership's role is not about fighting to get a subsidy in the form of MEDA finance, but about acting collectively to promote sub-regional integration, removing the abscesses of prejudice which prevent people from acting together, protecting human rights, and giving women the place they deserve.

As for the intellectuals of the Southern Mediterranean, they are pulled in different directions by contradictory feelings, and belong to several different schools of thought. Firstly, there are those who believe that the Partnership stems from a neo-colonialist approach which is looking to transform the Mediterranean into a kind of backyard – an annex to the EU. By contrast, there are those who see it as a historic opportunity to be seized, all other historic experiments carried out alone having lamentably failed. Then there are those who, without idealising the project too much, think that it is an essential step in order to be able to transform economies and, perhaps, gradually and peacefully change the political elites.

Evidence shows that the Partnership does not arouse the enthusiasm of the masses, but no partner state fundamentally objects to it or has withdrawn from it. There is even the possibility of including Libya, if not Iraq. This is undoubtedly the surprising side of the process: managing to produce something lasting in a general climate of inertia.

But the aim of Barcelona is not that the process should be perpetuated but that it should achieve peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean, declared objectives of the 1995 Declaration. Without this, it will resemble the Israeli-Arab Peace Process, where there is a lot of process and not much peace. So, the EU must follow a more innovative and perhaps more courageous policy and draw conclusions from recent developments.

Transformation of the Geopolitical Environment

Firstly, the world geopolitical environment of 2004 is not that of 1995. At that time we were in a phase of euphoria: the USSR had been defeated without a fight, the European economy was coming out of the doldrums, the Israeli-Arab Peace Process had just been launched and it seemed that it was being pursued. Today, the context has deteriorated: the Middle East Peace Process has been aborted, international terrorism has monopolised public atten-

tion and the war in Iraq and its sequels continue to occupy the limelight.

In addition, the enlargement of the EU with 10 new members brings Malta and Cyprus out of the TMC (Third Mediterranean Countries) group. At the same time, the award of 'candidate' country status to Turkey gives it distinctive treatment. So, today, we are faced with two sides that are more unequal than ever: 25 + 10, of which 8 Arab countries, Israel (which does not need the Partnership, given its level of economic and political development and the fact that it already benefits from free trade and participates in EU research programmes), and Turkey (which has already signed a Customs Union and is a candidate country).

Towards a Euro-Arab Partnership

The EU must take account of these developments, and commit itself in a new direction by contributing to the emergence of an Arab political and economic body supported by a sense of belonging, by inter-Arab trade and by the urgent need to tackle common challenges. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a Mediterranean identity, but there is clearly an Arab one. The arbitrary spatial cut-off points – Western Mediterranean, Near East, Middle East, Greater Middle East – dilute the collective Arab identity. They may be operational in terms of intervention policies, but they are not always relevant in sociological, cultural or even geopolitical terms. Of course, the EU cannot impose economic integration (and still less political integration) on the Arab world by force. This is initially the primary responsibility of Arab governments. But, through a sort of general indication of the direction to be followed, through repeated encouragement, through attempts to create positive circumstances, through clear messages and through a future vision based on solidarity, the EU can contribute to breaking the status quo and to setting the desired transformations in motion.

Why a European Arab Policy?

Today, Europe has a population of 450 million inhabitants, soon to be 500

THE BARCELONA PROCESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GCC-EU DIALOGUE

Ten years after its commencement, a lively debate has ensued looking at the successes and shortcomings of the Barcelona Process. Closely linked to this discussion is to what extent the experiences of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership have also impacted on other regional policies of the EU. Given the fact that the Mediterranean region represents a significant section of the Arab world, it is natural to look at the possible relationship between the Barcelona Process and the dialogue that has been in place between the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and the European Union. In terms of GCC-EU ties, a Co-operation Agreement has been in place since 1989, although there has been little substantive progress in relations since then. The Barcelona Process, which played on the historical ties between Europe and the Mediterranean region to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, aimed at turning the Euro-Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and co-operation to guarantee peace, stability and prosperity. On the surface, the results have been disappointing. Association Agreements were only completed after painstaking negotiations, the prospects of a Mediterranean Free Trade Area remain uncertain and such ideas as establishing a Charter for Mediterranean Security have been completely abandoned. In terms of promoting reform, reports released over the past year indicated that the links between economic and political liberalization are for the most part non-existent. From such a perspective, the outcome of the Barcelona Process and the GCC-EU dialogue appears very similar concerning the fact that the potential for closer relations has not been realized.

The shortcomings of the Barcelona Process, however, are far less significant than its overall contribution to the idea of regionalism. Although the Partnership may have failed to produce the liberal democracies it sought, it has put forth the concept of the 'neighbourhood' to the international relations arena. By developing its economic and political relations with those countries with whom the EU states have had historic political and commercial ties, i.e. the Mediterranean states, the European Union has acknowledged that although it is a community in itself, it is part of a larger neigh-

bourhood of states. From such a point of departure, the Mediterranean states, while not being properly a part of the EU, have also been acknowledged as being vital in terms of the future security of the Union.

It is therefore not possible to analyze the EU policy towards the GCC outside of the context of the Union's other regional policies and initiatives. What is important to understand is the fact that the Barcelona Process as such does not represent an end in itself but rather has been a framework through which the policy of the Union towards its neighbouring region has evolved and defined itself. In that sense, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has above all been a learning process. More recent initiatives such as the broader concept of Europe's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East are a direct result of the shortcomings of the Barcelona Process and the realization that a more differentiated approach is required. Not only does the EU's strategic partnership policy now cover the region from Morocco to Iran, there is also an inherent recognition that there are significant sub-regional differences that need to be recognized and reflected within policy initiatives.

There are thus two concrete aspects to consider. On the one hand, while the GCC is far from the cohesive unit the EU has become, the idea of a 'neighbourhood' can easily and effectively be applied to the Gulf region. Indeed, the Gulf is not lacking in historical partners: the six GCC states have had commercial and cultural ties to Iraq, Iran, Yemen, East Africa, the Subcontinent and beyond for hundreds of years. The considerable amount of commercial activity between the Gulf and the Indian Ocean region has been maintained, thus making the aforementioned states ideal candidates for membership in the larger Gulf 'neighbourhood.' More importantly, by informally expanding, the GCC would essentially be strengthening the relations among its core states, and thus the common forums that the GCC would share with the members of its neighbourhood would enhance the regional stability that would be brought about by the improved and institutionalized economic ties. The current debate taking place with regard to expanding the GCC to include Yemen, because of the latter's strong ties and simi-

lar interests with the GCC States, is a case in point. Up to this stage, consideration of Yemen's accession has been continually postponed because of a lack of desire on the part of some GCC States to see Yemen included in GCC institutions. In this respect, emulating the EU's "Neighbourhood" Policy provides a healthy compromise; Yemen and other states would be able to enjoy the economic benefits of GCC membership without formally participating in GCC decision-making.

On the other hand, there is also the implicit recognition that the dialogue between the EU and the GCC on items such as political and social issues is qualitatively different than the original Barcelona Process. For one, the GCC States are not dependent on financial support from the EU, with the result that the kind of reciprocity in place with regard to the Mediterranean states does not exist. Second, the Gulf region as a whole also presents a different type of security challenge to Europe itself where larger issues such as regional instability and the role of the transatlantic relationship with the United States are the determining factors rather than the kind of immigration pressure that exists from the Mediterranean to Europe. Thus, Barcelona does not only illustrate lessons for the EU's other regional policies but the GCC-EU dialogue is beginning to have a similar impact on the wider neighbourhood approach by the EU.

As the world continues in its path of integration, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the GCC to live and work in relative isolation. Indeed, it is far easier and more effective to embrace the historical commercial and cultural ties that exist between the Gulf region and its neighbours and use the shared histories to fuel a sense of increased co-operation in the present and for the future. The question that remains on the table is whether the experiences of Barcelona will ultimately allow for a more flexible EU strategy towards the Arab world as a whole, but one that at the same time, maintains a regional framework. The evolving debate over the past year gives us hope for optimism.

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million with the forthcoming enlargements planned for 2007. On the other hand, there are, today, 325 million Arabs and there will soon (2025) be close to 500 million Arabs. This represents a considerable demographic potential (1 billion), equivalent to that of India, only slightly less than that of China (1,300 million) and more than double that of the member countries of NAFTA (United States, Canada and Mexico).

Integrated (in the same way that the EU is), enlivened by common visions, backed by a single language and enjoying common institutions and instruments ensuring policies of convergence between its different parts, the Arab world could become, instead of a backyard, a reliable, equal, democratic and prosperous partner. The reverse of this would be to see it crumble into rival political entities pursuing individual strategies without any guarantee of being able to meet all the challenges in this limited context and with dramatic consequences *inside the Arab world*, in terms of the aggravation of unemployment, the worsening of the situation and multiple instabilities. At the same time, *in Europe*, we would be confronted by the development of Mafia-style illegal immigration channels, the spilling over of the Arab world's internal problems into expatriate communities, with social agitation, or even international terrorism.

If long ago the policy of European states consisted of fomenting Arab division, today, with the modification of the geo-strategic situation, the EU's interest impels it to favour Arab regional integration. The current breakdown of the Arab world and the classification of Arab states into friendly states, partners, "rogue" or "failed" states, leads Europeans to wonder if the Arab world really exists as such, and even has any sense of belonging to the concept of "Arabness." In the past, the unity of the Arab world was seen through a "Nasserist" prism as a challenge to European strategies, or through the Israeli prism, as a threat, or even through the Huntingtonian prism as characterised by "irreconcilable otherness." This view prevented the perception of the potential for stability and prosperity that would be induced for Europe by having Arab neighbours to the South of it confident

in their future, reconciled with their past and offering prospects other than chronic unemployment, martyrdom or exile to their young people.

In fact, the Arab world really does exist, although, having learned their lesson from the repeated failure of aborted unions, the Arab populations of today are resigned to feelings of doubt concerning the possible adaptation of the existing Arab situation to any future demands for unification.

Beyond a shared history, the constraints of geography, and a common language, the Arab world faces common challenges and, despite the strategies of corrupt kleptomaniac regimes, the concept continues to have a real meaning for the Arab population, as the solidarity movements with the peoples of Iraq and Palestine show every day. Certainly, every day, this world offers the sad spectacle of division and dispersal, but its divisions are no worse than those that characterised the European space 60 years ago, and they are a long way from having caused the bloodbaths of the First and Second World Wars in Europe. In the past, for a time, the oil crises established gaps in income per capita of population and, for a time, displaced political centres of gravity. But, today, apart from a few minuscule Emirates, the economic disparities are disappearing: oil countries, like Saudi Arabia, despite the transitory slight improvement of 2004 due to the surge in oil prices, are dogged, like the others, by the nagging problem of unemployment. Meanwhile, countries characterised by a strong leadership, like Egypt (for so long eclipsed in the past), are now regaining influence.

I am not saying this in order to bring a sentimental, rather old-fashioned Arab nationalism up to date, but rather to say that, in 20 years time, the enlarged Europe will have half a billion Arabs as its immediate neighbours, and that this world is and will become an ever more important consideration for its foreign policy. Today, the sub-assemblies (Europe-GCC and Euro-Mediterranean) are held hostage: the first because of the oil issue and exported fundamentalism, and the second because of the Arab-Israeli conflict. So, a European action on the Israeli-Arab conflict is ineffective, either by

default or by obstruction: in fact, European action on the Israeli-Arab conflict is ineffective because of Israeli obstruction and because of indecision by the European states, while any opening towards the Gulf meets the opposition of the United States. Only a European Arab policy can be effective in generating support among both Arab and European opinion at the same time. In addition, this will have the advantage of calming the immigrant Arab communities and facilitating their integration. Because not only is the Arab world a sort of outlying suburb of Europe, it also exists within the cities and suburbs of Europe.

This call is not against Euromed, it is in fact favourable to it, because it helps it to escape from its "constructive" ambiguity, its conceptual impasses and from its virtual anonymity outside certain circles. Firstly, Euromed is merely an instrument. It is not a vision of a shared future, or of a trade area where the four freedoms are respected (including freedom of movement for all people). It is diverse (8 Arab countries, Israel and a candidate country, Turkey). Its management is bureaucratic and inegalitarian, and it generates permanent frustrations for good or bad reasons.

An EU-Arab World strategy is based on another perspective:

1. it will work for and stimulate inter-Arab trade rather than trade with the EU (there will be more than enough of that)
2. it will look to the stability and prosperity of the Arab World through internal growth and State and social reforms. The growth of the Arab World is perceived as an end in itself, not only a means of stabilising young people and reducing migratory pressure
3. it will take into account any positive circumstances, and will act as a differentiating factor for the various countries who rapidly commit themselves to reforms, and which will become the leading countries, gradually to be joined by others
4. it will not be bound by the presence of Israel, but its objective will not be to align the EU against Israel. We are not in the context of the '70s, at the launch of the Euro-Arab dia-

logue. On the contrary, a European action in favour of the democratisation and integration of the Arab World must act as a spur to Israel to defeat its tendency to impose itself by force and to seek a peaceful solution to a stubborn problem that is poisoning the Mediterranean conflict and is one of the deep roots of the resentment Arabs feel towards the West

5. it will no longer seek to damage the United States or to align the Euro-Arab pole against the United States. It is even possible, and moreover desirable, that the Partnership will be supported by the United States,

with the US giving up its projects of "muscular" democratisation and shock therapy, which have no future, and the chimera of the "Greater Middle East," and recognising the need for a great regional plan based on the concept of "Region Building" – the only one likely to reverse the perverse current dynamics and pacify relations between the Arabs and the European and American West.

In Conclusion

Before my students in November 2002, Romano Prodi launched the slogan

"Everything but institutions" in his address to Arab countries. Since then, we have had communiqués on "Wider Europe" and a "Neighbourhood Policy." The message is clear: Europe will not be extended southwards. But it will extend its policy to integrate the Arab South in terms of the structural dimension of its foreign policy, because Europe cannot be an important player on the world stage if it remains a subordinate agent in the area nearest to it: the Arab World.