

# 2005 – The Year of the Mediterranean

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Overwhelmed and inspired by that great body of water that lies between Europe and its partners to the south, the English writer Thomas Hardy exclaimed of the Mediterranean “Oh epic-famed, god-haunted central sea!” The history, moods, myths and legends of the Mediterranean Sea that inspired Hardy are a testament to the ancient bonds between Europe and its neighbours to the south and east.

Recent years have seen those ancient bonds formalised. Ten years ago, twenty-seven countries from Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean met in Spain to adopt the Barcelona Declaration, marking the beginning of a new era of regional co-operation.

Reflecting for a moment on what the Euro-Mediterranean partnership has achieved. We have seen European financial cooperation increase significantly, with nearly € 3 billion worth of loans and grants supporting our relationship. Through increased trade and investment, we have developed economic links between Europe and Mediterranean partners that are stronger than ever. Political relations between all countries of the partnership are solidly established and based on the principles of dialogue and long-term partnership.

These results are impressive, but much remains to be done and our attention is now focused on the future,

beginning with the 10th Anniversary Summit in Barcelona in November. We must ensure that this extraordinary meeting is more than a commemoration. It must be a spring board, bringing new impetus and political energy to a partnership which is strengthening prosperity, dialogue and stability throughout our region.

It is in this forward-looking spirit that the Commission recently published a communication in preparation for the Summit in November. Our approach prioritises EU support for democracy and human rights, stronger regional economic integration (including integration between the countries of the Southern Mediterranean) and reinforced co-operation particularly in the field of education. It includes new and innovative proposals, such as the target for depollution of the Mediterranean Sea, and others that aim to add new momentum to areas where progress thus far has been slow, for example in the area of trade liberalisation.

In Barcelona this November, political leaders from now thirty-five countries, representing more than 700 million citizens from the Baltic Sea to the Red Sea will come together to look at what 10 years of the Barcelona Process have achieved and what remains to be done. The message that I will bring to the table is of the tremendous potential that I see for this Partnership to be a force for change and a force for good, and the proposals I bring will be firmly focused on realising that potential.