

New Visions of the Mediterranean: the New EU Members

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The enlargement of the European Union on 1st May 2004 will bring ten new members into the Union, and the process clearly represents an event of supreme importance for all the new member states and the European Union as a whole. The historic process of European integration has succeeded in bringing Europe out of times of war and division to create a region that is united and free, at peace within its own borders, and with its neighbours. The enlargement of 2004 will bring the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Cyprus and Malta, to Europe, and will also serve to strengthen the European Union as a global player in international relations.

Some of the new members are from the Mediterranean region itself; others have developed close relations with the countries of the region. The new member states entering Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are therefore not entering any new and unknown phenomenon, but rather are joining a club with which they are already very familiar. We hope that the fact that the Accession Treaty was signed on the shores of the Mediterranean will constitute a promising omen for the future.

Together with Cyprus and Malta, Slovenia is one of the three new Mediterranean members. As a nation, we endeavour to combine the Central European and Mediterranean components; the latter being an integral and strategic part of our foreign policy, which contributes significantly to the image we project. We are very proud of this Mediterranean heritage, of belonging to this dynamic, diverse, and yet common, space. Slovenian cultural, national and economic history is closely connected with the Adriatic and Mediterranean. And so, we believe, will our future.

There is a great diversity among the Mediterranean countries, which can be seen, for example, in the high number of linguistic groups living around the Mediterranean basin: Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Slavic, Turkish, and others. Over the years the sea has facilitated close cooperation and a rich history of strong ties among these varied nations, pre-dating the establishment of the European Union by many centuries, if not millennia. This affluent tradition, in bringing together cities and peoples across both short and long distances, inspires respect even today, and it is a privilege to continue the tradition by extending the spirit of closer political, economic and cultural cooperation.

Strengthening the Mediterranean partnership will indeed be a high priority for all new member states. We believe that the new member states, with their experience, priorities and activities, may bring additional impetus to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, and contribute to the efficient achievement of the objectives set in political, economic, cultural and social areas. The debates that we have witnessed within the European Union and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, following the signing of the Accession Treaty, have proven that the new member states are ready to actively participate in the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, as well as their willingness to assume their share of responsibility for its success.

We believe that the present enlargement is the commencement of a new era, both for the European Union and for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. To initiate this era we must redefine relations, take a step forward and reaffirm our commitments towards common interests in the Mediterranean. We have to make partnership a strategic choice. Slovenia is determined to play an active part in carrying out these endeavours.

Our Mediterranean associates therefore have no

need to fear that, following the enlargement, the centre of EU attention will shift towards the East. The Mediterranean region will retain a priority position on the EU agenda. Our mediterranean partners ought therefore to see the enlargement as an opportunity, and as additional strength for the partnership. The new member states will be able to help relaunch all three main areas of objectives of the Barcelona Process: political, economic and socio-cultural.

Peace and political stability in the Mediterranean area is crucial for collective and human security, well beyond the borders of the seas. The successful political and economic transition of the new member states into viable democracies, market economies, and systems guaranteeing human rights and liberties has strengthened the peace and security in Europe. The process of EU enlargement could serve as an example of stabilising the region, by uniting it through common values and a common future.

We are aware that there is no direct links between the Barcelona Process and the Middle East Peace Process. However, the stalemate in the first Process has had a direct and negative impact on the second. We could therefore conclude that advancement on the later process can influence the first, the Middle East peace Process. We sincerely hope and anticipate that progress made in the political, economic and social spheres of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership will in turn bring about positive effects, and help to create a better environment for the revitalisation of the peace efforts. We hope that the Barcelona Process is able to become one of the fora at which both sides may sit at the same table and endeavour to restore the much needed mutual trust and confidence, without which there can be no meaningful negotiations.

We strongly believe in the EU concept that it is not possible to eliminate violence and tensions without economic development. There can be no stability in poverty. Economic development and the provision of assistance is a win-win situation for both donors and recipients, in the creation of new employment, the development of new markets and the combined forces to strengthen individual countries and their economies on one side and prevent illegal migration and the spreading of instability on the other. The EU enlargement creates new opportunities for both the new member states and our Mediterranean partners, and the new member states will be able to share their experience after having undergone the economic transition. They can also provide positive

examples of successful economic reforms due to which they were able to join the European Union. It should be stressed that the new members will accede to the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, which will facilitate mutual access to markets, thus promoting trade between new members and their Mediterranean associates.

The new member states have high expectations in this field. Slovenia has actively invested in the Adriatic area and is ready to join forces with others in order to execute further joint projects in the future. The emerging donors, as the new member states are called, are preparing and shaping up their development assistance strategies and programmes. The Mediterranean basin should certainly be the area where our involvement would be expected, needed and appreciated.

The European Union and the Mediterranean, being world-class cultural powers, has the capacity to do much more in the exchange of cultural experiences between themselves and with other parts of the world. The Mediterranean has always served as a cradle for great world movements, and many of these movements emanate from the cultural creativity of its peoples, and its effects on the economy and politics. Diversity is enriching, and we can use it to shape political and economic development more directly aimed toward the needs and expectations of all the countries.

The Euro-Mediterranean cooperation presents a bridge that links cultural and other values between different worlds. It provides a suitable and sufficiently complex mechanism for open discussion on all outstanding issues, and an instrument through which various civilisations and religions may find a common language. The establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures therefore provides an excellent opportunity for closer cooperation between all members, in order to enhance and deepen their mutual understanding. It also promotes the exchange of values in all geographical directions, thus achieving a cultural diversity that will be capable of responding to the needs and expectations of the countries included in the Partnership, and diminishing mistrust, intolerance and ignorance.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has undoubtedly been instrumental in bringing together many countries with different cultures and histories. However, there is still much to be done. The progress made, to which we have been witness, is proof that

ENLARGEMENT: SELECTION OF INFORMATION SOURCES

Towards the Enlarged Union, strategy paper and report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries, Brussels, 9th October 2002 COM (2002) 700 final

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/strategy_en.pdf

Website of the European Union on the enlargement:

http://europa.eu.int/pol/enlarg/index_en.htm

European Commission, Enlargement:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html

European Parliament, Enlargement:

http://www.europarl.eu.int/enlargement/default_en.htm

Enlargement Eurobarometer:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/enlargement_en.htm

EU Observer, Enlargement section:

<http://www.euobserver.com/index.phtml?sid=15>

Situation of negotiations with Turkey:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/turkey/index.htm>

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is an excellent mechanism for promoting stability and understanding in the region. In this respect, the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly could create an appropriate forum to deal with issues of human rights and the promotion of democratisation in the region. Regular meetings, exchanges of views concerning the functioning of democratic systems in a modern states, as well as debates on topical issues such as the fight against terrorism and organised crime would definitely serve this purpose and would strengthen security and stability of the area of a wider Mediterranean basin.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership therefore offers plenty of challenges and a variety of opportunities for all countries, and the noble principles that guide the Barcelona Declaration are an excellent starting point for this work. The new member states are committed to the European Union's ring of allies, with whom the European Union will cooperate closely in both political and economic fields. The European Commission's Communication on the «Wider Europe» provides an excellent starting point for future debates

on the redefinition and revitalisation of EU relations with the Mediterranean partners. We are confident that in the coming years all EU members, whether Mediterranean countries or those that do not directly border the Mediterranean sea, will better utilise the existing resources for action and contribute actively to create new partnerships.

As a European Union member, Slovenia will strive to further the dialogue between the European Union and its Mediterranean partners, taking an active part in activities to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The enlarged European Union means a stronger Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and the latter provides an opportunity for a joint approach to common problems, from fighting any threats to security and stability in the twenty-first century, to the management of migratory movements, and the revival of economic development and prosperity throughout the whole region. Slovenia strongly believes that the vision of the Barcelona Process can be only fully and effectively implemented through joint and continual efforts based on common interests, shared values and solidarity.