

The Greek Presidency of the EU

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A) At the end of the year 2002, observers in the European Union were predicting that the forthcoming year 2003 would be a difficult and decisive one. The enlargement of Europe, scheduled for April 2003, was bringing with it problems that are inherent to every political and socio-economic change.

Nevertheless, the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and the cloud of war over Iraq were creating an unprecedented and complicated political situation.

Against this political background, Greece inaugurated its presidency of the European Union with the ambition to work not only for the preservation of the status quo, but also for reinvigorating the Barcelona Process. In our eyes, this was the most delicate issue, as it dealt with facilitating direct contact between parties geographically close to and politically involved in the areas of conflict. It was important to preserve the *acquis* and to move forward.

B) The basic idea of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was always to maintain a balance between its three pillars, denominated «chapters or baskets». Under the circumstances, from the beginning the most complicated and difficult by far was the political chapter, and in March 2003, this chapter was converted into a serious problem.

The Greek presidency made every effort to give the political dialogue the importance it deserved within the framework of the Barcelona Process. The motto was business as usual, although it would have been impossible to ignore the reality. It is highly important that all parties have equal opportunity to express their points of view. Even when it gives rise to what may seem a confrontation or a juxtaposition of monologues, this unique Forum, in which an exchange of argument is permitted to take place, is very constructive. In fact the Barcelona Process is the only Forum where all parties are present and general dialogue really takes place.

Although the general political situation was in the focus of interest, many themes were part of the problematic.

Among the main problems addressed was the chapter dedicated to security. In spite of the fact that some items were not fully prepared for in-depth discussion, an important progress has nevertheless been registered, and specific areas have been identified where opinions are able to converge. Furthermore, in the field of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), where some ambiguity still existed, a more thorough consultation was initiated in order to give more transparency to the situation. Mr Solana, the High Representative and General Secretary, personally addressed the Senior Officials on these issues. The Council of Ministers adopted a text, on the presidency's initiative, that was aimed at the inauguration of regular cooperation between Europe and the Mediterranean partners on such related issues.

Another important issue addressed was the Euro-Mediterranean Parlia-

mentary Assembly, of which the creation was decided by the Ministers in Valencia. The mid-term Ministerial Meeting in Crete (held on 26th and 27th May 2003) concluded that once the existing Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum made the decision, the organisation would be included in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The ministerial meeting in Naples, in December 2003, is expected to register its effective establishment.

C) The general problematic resulting from the Enlargement was also a centre of interest. The Commission presented an important document entitled *Wider Europe - Neighbourhood*, which has been discussed by the Council of Ministers. The Presidency encouraged this discussion and many Mediterranean partners offered their responses at different stages, as well as during the Senior Officials Meeting and the mid-term Ministerial Conference in Crete. No final conclusion has yet been drawn but this important issue will receive careful attention in future meetings. More specifically, items of the second chapter were also addressed. A mid-term review of the Meda Programmes was carried out in Crete and a preliminary assessment of the Bank Facility also gave many partners the opportunity to express their wishes to see progress in this area.

D) The Greek presidency paid particular attention to the third chapter, which was a difficult but necessary task. The dialogue between cultures and civilisations was a top priority and the Crete Declaration on the Guiding Principles, adopted by the Ministers, will be a kind of a constitution for this aim.

The creation of a foundation for the dialogue also made substantial progress. The Ministers concluded discussions on the objectives, activities and so forth in the Crete meetings. It was expected that in Naples the remaining issues would be resolved, so that the Foundation could become operational in 2004.

Needless to say that the importance and necessity that had already been given to this effort within the framework of the Barcelona Process, was ranted even more urgency under the present political circumstances.

Finally, the Ministerial Meeting in Crete brought an innovation: the direct presentation to the Ministers of the conclusions of the Civil Forum. The Greek presidency considered the involvement of the civil society in the works of the Barcelona Process to be particularly enriching, and a statement on the role of women within this context completed the picture.

On the subject of human rights, the long-awaited document of the Commission was presented during the Ministerial meeting, to which the preliminary reactions were heard. On such an

important issue, the debate must continue. There were no surprises and no early conclusions. The contribution of all partners was an essential effort.

In conclusion we could say that in the shadow of a particularly difficult political situation, the continuation of the Process in the agenda of Barcelona and Valencia is in itself an achievement.

Furthermore, substantial progress was made on other important issues, as is stated in the Crete Conclusions. Naples, we all hoped, would be the starting point of even bigger achievements.

EuroMeSCo ACTIVITIES (June 2002 - June 2003)

EuroMeSCo is a network of independent research institutes and academic centres specialising in foreign policy analysis and research into security issues. The members of the network are drawn from the twenty-seven member-countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (the EMP), in the European Union's comprehensive policy for its relations with the Southern Mediterranean region.

Between June 2002 and June 2003, EuroMeSCo organised several activities that included meetings with EMP Senior Officials, seminars and workshops organised by the working groups in the framework of its research programme, and the network's annual conference and general assembly, which took place in Malta on 1st and 2nd February 2003.

During the second semester of 2002, a meeting of EMP Senior Officials was held in Barcelona. Within its framework some joint meetings, entitled *Building Confidence in the Euro-Mediterranean region: the Security Dimension*, took place with EuroMesco representatives, under the auspices of Fundació

CIDOB and IEMed. In this meeting, EuroMeSCo's working groups presented their first research year findings and discussed issues such as the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the Mediterranean, as well as the common culture of security in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

On 18th November 2002, the Danish Institute of International Affairs (DUPI) hosted a seminar with EMP Senior Officials and EuroMeSCo on *Security in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: Building a Comprehensive Concept*, in which the discussions concluded with several recommendations on political and security issues. The meeting was organised at the request of the Danish Presidency of the European Union.

During 2002 and 2003, the five working groups in the current research programme, which covered the topics headed: *The Euro-Mediterranean Charter: searching for a common ground*, *Interlinkages within the EMP*, *The ESDP: Impact on the EMP*, *Sub-regional co-operation within the EMP*, and *Good Governance*, organised several meetings

and seminars in different EMP countries, involving the participation of member and observer institutions of the network, as well as invited academics, and produced working papers on the issues discussed. The EuroMeSCo Secretariat in Lisbon also arranged for their publication where appropriate.

One of EuroMeSCo's most important activities is the Annual Conference. The meeting in Malta was devoted to *The Impact of European Union Enlargement on the EMP*, and the conference was honoured by the participation of the Maltese president, Guido de Marco, as well as the participation of researchers both from Mediterranean and Eastern European institutions. The Southern countries' perceptions of EU enlargement and its consequences for the Barcelona Process were discussed, as were the expectations of the Accession states.

The results of the EuroMeSCo research programme, as well as all activities and relevant information about the network can be consulted on the network's website at:

www.euromesco.net