

SOME COMMENTS ON THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICY

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The purpose of this article is to examine briefly the two most important aspects of the EU's Mediterranean policy: the Barcelona process or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the EU's role in resolution of the Middle East conflict.^[1] Towards the end of this article some ideas to reinforce those policies are presented, since – it is here submitted – adequate instruments for implementing a valid European policy on the Mediterranean region already exist, but more determination is needed to carry them through.

1. The Barcelona process: mixed results

The 1995 Barcelona process and the Middle East peace process launched in Madrid, in 1991, are complementary, but their relationship is not symmetrical. The multilateral political dimension of the former was made possible by the existence of a peace process. The Barcelona process in turn helped create a positive atmosphere in the region, *inter alia* enhancing the prospects of a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet this idealistic vision came up against many difficulties. The Barcelona process had to confront two types of problems: difficulties that were inherent in the process itself, on the one hand, and on the other, political problems imported from the Arab-Israeli conflict. The internal difficulties were above all associated with the asymmetry between the participants – the EU having a great capacity to take initiatives and its member states being accustomed to talk to one another, whereas there was no coordination among its Mediterranean partners.^[2] The 'imported' problems made it impossible to progress in the multilateral dialogue on policy and security issues at the rate most countries would have wished; they also prevented adoption of a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability, at the Marseilles conference in November 2000, and resulted in the absence of Libya and Syria from the Valencia conference in April, 2002. Even though it was decided at Valencia to take practical steps on cooperation

in the fight against terrorism and organised crime, these measures were only negotiated during the following months, thanks to imaginative solutions concerning dialogue within three geographical groups: the Maghreb, the Mashraq and a third group composed of Cyprus, Israel, Malta and Turkey.

Despite these difficulties, since 1995 progress on the Barcelona process has been possible in its three areas (political and security, economic and financial, and social, cultural and human), and in both its dimensions (bilateral and multilateral). The results are neither entirely positive nor completely negative, but the very existence of the process already constitutes an important contribution by the EU to stability and prosperity in the zone, as well as building up a region in the political sense where it only existed in a geographical one. The newness of the experience made it necessary for partner countries as well as European states and the Union itself to learn 'on the job'.

Two major beneficial effects of the partnership must be emphasised before looking at possible reforms: the economic impact and the creation of regional awareness. First, the shared desire to arrange Association Agreements and the emphasis that multilateral activities have given to questions such as trade, industry and energy have resulted in predominance of the financial and economic aspect of the Barcelona process. The MEDA II financial aid programme was adopted after the Commission's communication 'Reinvigorating the Barcelona Process' of 6 September 2000. From 1995 to 1999, MEDA I had involved over €3.4 billion; on top of that, loans of €4.8 billion from the European Investment Bank (EIB) were made to the Mediterranean region. In the period 2000 to 2006, the estimated corresponding figures are €5.35 billion for MEDA II and €7.4 loans from the EIB.^[3] There are several specific cooperative projects associated with Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli relations, for example regional infrastructure improvement programmes, tourism, electricity distribution networks, the fight against desertification and development of the Taba-Eilat-Aqaba region. At the same time, Association Agreements have been completed: there are such agreements with the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. (agreements with Algeria and Egypt have been signed but have yet to be ratified.)

Second, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has contributed not only to the Union's visibility in the south and east of the Mediterranean but also to awareness of the region throughout the EU, especially in countries that are not riparian or do not historically have links with the region. Since 1995, there have been many ministerial conferences on

Mediterranean issues, with participation from the 15 EU member countries plus the 12 partners, as well as others at expert level in the fields of, for example, culture, trade, energy, environment and industry. These would not have taken place had there been no Barcelona process.

Nevertheless, the Barcelona process is today facing very serious challenges that call for a complete rethink of the EU's multilateral efforts. Just as, in 1995, the Union put forward a wide-ranging project for the Mediterranean region, it is now time (possibly under Italy's presidency in 2003 and continuing till 2005, the tenth anniversary of the EMP) to relaunch the project and create a new Mediterranean dimension. That does not imply either that specific reforms must be made or that this experiment should be ended and another begun, but rather that the process must be reinvigorated, with determination and political drive on the part of the Europeans, so as to attain the objectives that have been set.

Political and security issues need greater attention. First, it is time to acknowledge that the original, intentional, separation of the Barcelona process and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an artificial one. At the latest Euro-Mediterranean conferences (Marseilles, Valencia and the informal meeting on Crete in May 2003) the situation was reviewed on each occasion and presidency conclusions included lengthy analyses of the crisis. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership should therefore not abandon its efforts to deal with what is the most important political problem in the region in a multilateral way. On the contrary, the partnership should be exploited as an ideal forum for discussing the conflict (and, when the time comes, the peace) in a regional framework. Second, there is a systematic failure to give substance to the political dialogue because one of the most important aspects of the dialogue, the significance of democracy in the regional context, is being ignored. Both bilateral Association Agreements between the EU and each country and multilateral documents attach great importance to progress on democracy and human rights, yet in practice the EU has not shown any determination to see that such undertakings are respected: for example, it has not applied 'conditionality' clauses. The EU should review its attitude to this and become more involved, as laxness in this respect may be a policy that gives results in the short term but will in the longer term be a recipe for instability or even terrorism in some cases. The Commission's communication on the Union's neighborhood policy, and the communication on human rights and democracy of 21 May 2003,^[4] emphasise the need to make progress on this. The third requirement regarding political and security issues is for new areas for dialogue

and cooperation to be developed. For example, the conclusions of the Marseilles conference mentioned international cooperation at sea, but that possibility has not so far been explored. Since the Valencia conference in April 2002, however, new dialogues on terrorism and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) have been started with the EU's Mediterranean partners.^[5] These are two areas where specific measures should be introduced.^[6]

Economic aspects need to be revisited. The EU's laxness on political issues has not been accompanied by economic growth, Association Agreements have not led to palpable development (on the contrary, the immediate effects have been negative), considerable administrative difficulties have arisen in implementation of the MEDA programme and foreign direct investment has not reached the region. The EU should therefore look again at the economic chapter of the Barcelona process. If the Europeans really want to prevent economic collapse in their partner countries to the south, they will have to consider more determined measures, for example by opening up to agricultural exports or planning major infrastructure projects such as road or rail communications financed by Europe. It is somewhat surprising, to say the least, that trade with the partner countries has increased in recent years but that the Union continues to gain the most from this trade (Algeria is an exception). The Union gives economic assistance to Mediterranean countries through the MEDA programme but its trade balance with them continues to be very advantageous, which is rather paradoxical. In round figures, the EU plans to give aid amounting to €13 billion to its Mediterranean partners in the period 2000-06 (MEDA II plus loans from the EIB), whereas its trade surplus with the same countries in 2000 was €23 billion.^[7] At the beginning of the Barcelona process, the Europeans were at pains to point out that the scheme was not intended to be a sort of Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean. Eight years on, it is perhaps time to reconsider that view.^[8]

The future of Euro-Mediterranean relations will hinge on economic aspects, and the question is political rather than technical. The communication from the Commission on 'Wider Europe – a new neighborhood', dated 11 March 2003, includes some new instruments and others that are only so in appearance, for example preferential trade relations and the opening of markets. Before considering whether it will be possible to make more progress than in the past towards these ambitious objectives, two questions remain unanswered: will the resistance from some EU member states to liberalisation of trade in

agricultural products now be eased, and will a 25-country Union devote greater funds to the Mediterranean than the 15 did in the past? One of the central issues to be resolved when it comes to reforming EU policy on the Mediterranean will be the conflict between the need to help the economic development of new members and the requirement to halt the descent of the Mediterranean partners into poverty and despair, which leads to insecurity.

True dialogue among societies has to be built up. The third aspect of the Barcelona process – human, social and cultural dialogue – has not yielded satisfactory results.^[9] The European countries' two major concerns, illegal immigration and terrorism, have tainted and weakened this dialogue. Solutions have to be found so that there is real a dialogue in other significant areas that does not affect the security agenda. Moreover, the Euro-Mediterranean partnership lacks an easily identifiable 'trade mark' in both Europe and the partner countries, so the partnership must spend money on improving its own public image.

Unless the Union clearly sets out its policy on the Mediterranean as a whole, and shows that it intends to implement it, it will lack any credible presence in the region. It must demonstrate that it is serious in advocating and creating a zone of peace, dialogue and prosperity throughout the Mediterranean region. The EU's contribution to solving the Middle East conflict and its role in the Barcelona process are complementary, but the latter is a longer-term affair. In the end, the Barcelona process (reformed as necessary) constitutes the EU's long-term framework for its relationship with the region, whereas the measures required for resolution of the conflict will in principle be of limited duration. Ideally, resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will give the Barcelona process a central role in the region.

2. The peace process and the logic of war

The EU confirmed its gradual involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict during the 1990s. Despite the difficulties stemming from a certain amount of disagreement among member states and limited resources, the Union is continuing to make that involvement one of the main elements of its Mediterranean policy. Since the creation of the CFSP in the Maastricht Treaty (which came into effect in 1993) and the strengthening of that policy in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, including nomination of a High Representative in the person of Javier Solana, the Union has supported or participated in all international efforts to resolve the

dispute between Israelis and Palestinians, even when the peace process turned into a crisis beginning in summer 2000 and then open conflict and even a war of attrition.

Indeed, the conflict in the Middle East since summer 2000 has been a difficult test for Europe's doctrine of crisis prevention and management. The policy that the Union had built up over the years had to be combined with its crisis management capability, which was itself still in its infancy. As a result, the Union's involvement was certainly creditable yet could not systematically maintain the European position of principle. What exactly did the Union do, given the attitude of the parties in conflict since the beginning of the *intifada* in September 2000, which meant the end of the peace process and seriously challenged the EU's vision of resolution of the conflict? Four periods can be distinguished that can be termed:

- 'desperate negotiation', from August 2000 to February 2001;
- 'the search for a cease-fire', February to December 2001;
- 'paroxysm of violence', January to September 2002;
- 'a new mediation', since September 2002.

The first period extends from Arafat's refusal to agree to the Clinton plan in July 2000 until Ariel Sharon's election as Prime Minister of Israel in February 2001. This was a time of intense diplomatic activity in which, by modifying and refining the plan discussed at Camp David, an attempt was made to reach agreement before Bill Clinton was replaced as President of the United States. To do this both the US administration, and the Israelis and Palestinians, agreed to the participation in the mediation process of Egypt, Jordan, the United Nations and the European Union. Violence had only just begun and, given the relative calm of the preceding years, it was met with international pressure to find a negotiated solution. During this period, where a definitive agreement was almost reached at Sharm el-Sheikh and at Taba between October 2000 and January 2001, the personal intervention and good offices of the EU's High Representative (HR) Javier Solana and its special envoy, Miguel Angel Moratinos, played a very important role.

Conversely, the second period, from February to the end of 2001, saw a gradual increase in violence and the exclusion of any mediators. President George W. Bush did not wish to become involved in the substance of negotiations and adopted a laissez-faire policy. US involvement was limited to publication of the independent Mitchell Commission's report (in which Javier Solana participated) in May 2001 and the Tenet cease-fire plan (August 2001), and the sporadic presence on the ground of the Secretary of State and envoys Anthony Zinni and William Burns. The EU's policy was to condemn violence from whichever side it emanated, repeating that it advocated the resumption of negotiation. To establish the necessary conditions for that, it supported the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan. A cease-fire was, however, impossible to achieve, since at the time neither party wished to end the violence: on the contrary, each preferred to see how far violence could be used to obtain advantages for its cause.

During the period from the end of 2001 to autumn 2002 the crisis was at its height. In the face of an escalation of violence US intervention was very limited, since the idea that the fight against terrorism had to be pursued following 11 September, exploited by the Israeli government, had an undoubted effect on President George W. Bush.^[10] The Europeans redoubled their efforts during this period. On the one hand, from 2001, member states individually attempted to play a role aimed at reducing the violence and renewing dialogue. The foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany and many other countries visited in succession but failed to obtain any tangible results. On the other, the EU as such (particularly through the Council's statements and actions by the presidency, the HR and the special envoy) always tried to maintain open dialogue and reduce the effects of the violence. Yet despite the occupation of Palestinian towns that were under the exclusive administration of the Palestinian Authority, the siege of Arafat in his headquarters and open fighting in several areas, EU intervention was restricted to damage limitation and humanitarian issues.

The fourth period began in September 2002. The Quartet had been set up the previous April, and a second meeting held in July, but it was not until September that its members arrived at an agreement, which was to be refined in December. The Quartet is led by the United States, but it is clear from the text of the 'road map' that EU participation has been crucial. Most of the Europeans would have wanted the 'road map' to be published before the military intervention in Iraq in March 2003, but the US government preferred to delay publication until the end of the war there. Indeed, the end of the war heralded a new period of

hope following the summit in Aqaba on 4 June 2003 attended by President Bush, Ariel Sharon and Abu Mazen, the new head of the Palestinian government. Yet in summer 2003 it seemed clear that, given the misgivings on both sides, the 'road map' would hardly be workable.

This brief historical overview brings out three lessons on the EU's role in management of the Middle East crisis in respect of the recent past, and four lessons for the future. Regarding the past, for a number of years the Union has taken part in efforts to solve the conflict in at least three different ways. First, the EU has taken a clear, coherent position on resolution of the conflict, based on principles accepted by the international community, principles that have been established throughout the peace process beginning with the Madrid Conference in 1991: the acceptance by Israel's neighbors of its right to live in peace and security and the creation of a Palestinian state, which would allow the two countries to coexist within stable borders, and negotiation between the parties – on the basis of 'land for peace' – as essential elements of a solution to all aspects of the problem. EU member states have endeavored to reach a shared viewpoint, allowing the Union to maintain a common position, which has been spelt out in important statements, notably in those annexed to each European Council since Berlin in March 1999. The Union has done everything in its power to ensure that this common position is balanced, condemning violence by both parties and repeatedly calling for a resumption of negotiations.

Second, direct action by the EU has been possible through the presence of the High Representative and the Union's special envoy. Their intervention was constructive in all four phases of the crisis: during negotiations at Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba in winter 2001-02, in the Mitchell commission's efforts to obtain a cease-fire, in the security dialogue and humanitarian action during the worst stage of the conflict in spring 2002 (which was particularly effective in bringing an end to the siege of the basilica in Bethlehem), and in the active participation of the Quartet since its creation in April 2002, leading to the 'road map'. The presence of Javier Solana as representative of the Union rather than any particular member state is an initiative that has contributed to the visibility of European policy on the conflict.

Thirdly, the Union has clearly understood that the violence on the ground has extremely damaging economic and social consequences for both parties. It has therefore done its best to minimise, or at least not aggravate, the negative consequences of what has proved

to be a war of attrition. The Union has therefore given emergency assistance to the Palestinian Authority (to prevent its collapse, which would lead to even greater violence) and has ruled out the imposition of economic sanctions against either party. The Commission has ensured that economic and trade relations are not harmed by the crisis and, like the Council, has emphasised the need to halt the violence.

For the future, there are other lessons to be drawn that are also meaningful regarding the EU's role in crisis management in general. Possibly the most important of these is that the violence in which both the Israelis and Palestinians engaged from summer 2000 ran counter to the European policy of ending the violence and finding a solution to the dispute mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The principles upheld by the Union were abandoned when the two parties decided to end the peace process and embark on a new round of violence. The Union's principles and values, together with its security and that of its member states, were challenged by the crisis. The parties to the conflict suffered enormous losses and the chances of finding a peaceful solution at some future date were damaged due to the psychological effects and harm caused to the confidence of both sides. The European Union should understand that in future a speedier, more determined response could be of benefit to the parties concerned, the Union and international order.

The second lesson is that the EU tried to manage the crisis using a wide range of actors and means (the Council and its declarations, successive EU presidencies, the High Representative and special envoy, the Commission and individual member states) but that the right synergy was never achieved, and consequently the outcome has been unsatisfactory for European citizens, for member countries, the Union and for the parties in conflict. Member states tried to intervene at various points in the crisis but their initiatives, despite their good intentions, merely demonstrated their powerlessness. The Union was unable to play a more important role because of lack of agreement among member states over how its declared principles should be applied. If European external action in conflicts of vital importance to Europe is in future managed in the same manner, the efforts of both the Union and member states will be doomed to failure.

Thirdly, the Union did not exploit its potential fully. The Union has a range of political and economic instruments that could be used in support of its foreign policy. Yet it preferred not to employ them, as for example when it ruled out economic sanctions even though the

European Parliament had suggested their use against both parties in its resolution of 10 April 2002.

The last lesson concerns the EU's relationship with the US . Granted, when the US takes the lead the Union can play a very useful accompanying role, but if the former decides not to become involved (as happened at the height of the violence in spring 2002) the Union is incapable of acting alone to find a political solution. Since September 2002, the US and the European Union have found that the Quartet is an adequate framework for cooperation. Nevertheless, just as publication of the 'road map' was a combined effort by the Quartet, all of the mediators must monitor its implementation closely. It must be stressed that only *objective* mediation, in which the Union will always have an important role, is likely to guarantee the success of the peace plan in the long term.

3. Conclusion: the Union's Mediterranean policy must be strengthened

The Union's strategy on its new neighborhood, which the Commission has just finished drawing up, includes a number of elements that concern the Mediterranean, in particular a restatement of the idea that 'in return for concrete progress demonstrating shared values and effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, including in aligning legislation with the *acquis*, the EU's neighborhood should benefit from the prospect of closer economic integration with the EU.'^[11] Yet the Union had some time previously established a very detailed Mediterranean policy based on the principles of partnership and the creation of a zone of prosperity and stability that is still valid. The new 'differentiated, progressive and benchmarked' approach may complement and to some extent correct the Union's 'traditional' policy but does not transform it. Similarly, the new neighborhood policy does not add much to the EU's policy on pacification of the Middle East crisis, which is a fundamental part of its Mediterranean policy.

Since 1995 the Union has looked forward to close cooperation with the countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean. The Barcelona process is still the appropriate framework in which to organise relations within the region as a whole by virtue of its three basic characteristics.

- *Regional construction.* The partnership makes it possible to deal with regional questions collectively. The Union has therefore contributed to the definition of a neighboring region and by the same token promoted regional awareness in Europe and the Mediterranean.
- *Diverse relationships.* Having both bilateral and multilateral dimensions, the partnership allows for a special relationship with the countries bordering the Union collectively but also permits a nuanced relationship with them individually through Association Agreements.
- *Comprehensive dialogue.* The partnership is all-embracing, covering as it does all possible areas of dialogue between states, including political and security (even military), economic, and social and cultural.

However, the partnership cannot attain all its declared objectives in a completely satisfactory way, because it faces two major difficulties: EU member states are not prepared to take the steps required to support wholeheartedly and put into practice the principles on which the partnership is based; and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created political conditions that hamper progress. EU member states should reaffirm their involvement in the partnership, because applying its principles and pursuing its objectives today calls for greater determination on their part. While specific measures adopted recently (for instance individualised relationships as recommended in the Commission's document on a wider Europe, or the emphasis on cooperation in the fight against terrorism and on dialogue on ESDP) are useful, they constitute an incomplete approach to regional problems. The EU needs to take a more ambitious approach and consider longer-term actions if it really wants to help overcome the political and economic paralysis in the region. It must accordingly strengthen the political dialogue and be more insistent on the introduction of democracy and the peaceful, negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Lasting economic development must also be achieved through close EU involvement in the region, *inter alia* by opening its markets to agricultural products and by giving greater financial help. Lastly, human and cultural exchanges must be increased.

In 1995, Europe introduced an innovative project for the region that included an impartial point of view on the conflict in the Middle East. What the EU must now do is not to introduce rival regional policies on its neighbours to the east but rather to concentrate on the

objectives of its Mediterranean policy. There is nevertheless a problem over whether the members of an enlarged Union will have the required sensitivity concerning Europe's Mediterranean neighbourhood. Enlargement will probably lead to much attention being paid to the consequences of admitting new members, and to their borders. And yet it will be in the Union's economic, security and also moral interests not to overlook the Mediterranean.

Finally, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is having a negative effect on the Euro-Mediterranean partnership as well as on the political atmosphere in the region as a whole. The persistence of the conflict is preventing regional rapprochement, spreading mistrust and frustration, holding back economic growth and heightening the terrorist threat. The EU should therefore play a greater role in the search for a peaceful solution to that conflict. Admittedly, since the end of the war in Iraq the Quartet's 'road map' has been published. The EU attaches much importance to this new hope for a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, in the absence of a clear desire for peace on both sides, the role of external mediators will become more important. The Union should be aware of this and use all instruments at its disposal to assert the principles to which it and its member states subscribe.

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^[1] An expanded version of this article has been published in Chaillot Paper n. 64, October 2003, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris (www.iss-eu.org).

^[2] The Commission's management of the process within the EU encountered problems during the early years, but these were resolved or compromises found. See the very frank Commission document 'Reinvigorating the Barcelona Process', COM (2000) 497, 6 September 2000.

^[3] Commissioner Chris Patten played a very active role in developing the economic partnership, in particular insisting on the need for 'South-South' regional cooperation. See Commission documents 'Euro-Med Regional Strategy Paper 2000-2006' at

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/rsp/rsp02_06.pdf and 'Euromed Information Notes', June 2002 at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/med/regional/infonotes_200206-en.pdf.

^[4] See Commission Communication 'Reinvigorating EU actions on human rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners', COM(2003) 294, 21 May 2003.

^[5] The Italian presidency of the EU and the EUISS organised a seminar on 'ESDP and the Mediterranean' in Brussels in September 2003, the report of which is available at the Institute's website: www.iss-eu.org. See also the very interesting paper by Fred Tanner, 'Security Governance. The difficult task of security democratisation in the Mediterranean', *EuroMeSCo Briefs*, May 2003.

^[6] See some proposals along these lines in Alvaro de Vasconcelos, 'Priorities for the EU's Mediterranean security policy', in *A European Strategic Concept for the Mediterranean* (Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Estrategicos e Internacionais, 2002).

^[7] See Stéphane Quefelec, 'EU-15 and the 12 Mediterranean partners: solid trade links', in *Statistics in focus*, External Trade Theme 6-7/2001 (Brussels: Eurostat, July 2001). See also Paolo Passerini and Luis Biedma, 'EU trade and investment with Mediterranean partner countries', in *Statistics in focus*, Economy and Finance Theme 13/2002 (Brussels: Eurostat, February 2002).

^[8] On the economic aspects of the Barcelona process, see publications from the FEMISE Euro-Mediterranean network of economic institutes: www.femise.net.

^[9] See Euromed Information Note quoted in note 6.

^[10] A detailed examination of the crisis from summer 2000 to summer 2002 can be found in May Chartouny-Dubarry, 'L'après-Oslo: paix avortée ou guerre annoncée?', *Politique étrangère*, juillet-septembre 2002.

^[11] Communication from the Commission on a wider Europe, 11 March 2003, p. 4.