

Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean

25 Years of the Barcelona Process

Sanae Kasmi¹

As initiated in 1995, the Barcelona Process presents itself as a necessary global policy for both Europe and the countries of the South.

A unique and ambitious initiative, this process is deep-seated in historical and political bonds and is resolutely turned towards a common future for the two shores of the Mediterranean. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's main objective - known as the Barcelona Process - is to build a common space of peace, security and prosperity. Despite significant progress and achievements, the results of this process have often been described as mitigated or even insufficient. From its inception, the process was based on an institutional framework capable of establishing a lasting partnership despite the complexity of the major geopolitical conflicts (e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and the conflict in the Sahara), economic inequalities and procrastinations in democratisation and human rights issues. The results therefore proved to be imperfect, hence the need to complete and consolidate the process launched several years ago.

Thus, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the "5+5" dialogue, the signing of the FTAA, the "6+6" dialogue, etc. are all structures and instruments that aim to re-launch and capitalise on the achievements of the Euromed partnership.

Today, the Barcelona Process is an important achievement and a privileged institutional framework for a regional dialogue with numerous institutions and a collection of various actions. However, a reinvigoration and strategic reorientations, focusing on the cultural and the human dimensions, are necessary to face new challenges, particularly those arising at the end of the "Arab Spring" and the COVID-19 crisis.

Thus, it is no longer an issue of the countries of the North helping the countries of the South, of defining priorities for the region, or proposing recipes to promote economic and human development; the question pertains rather to forging the principles of co-governance, industrial co-location and co-appropriation of an epistemic community and interests shared by all the peoples of the region.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on this process, rich in lessons learned in terms of cooperation, and to analyse its premises and outcomes, unveil its strengths, and limitations, its stakes and challenges, its actors and institutions, its origins and the perspectives of its evolution.

¹ Sanae Kasmi is a professor at the EUROMED University of Fes, Morocco.

I. THE BARCELONA PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT

With its ambitious objectives and honourable foundations, the Barcelona Process represents a genuine cooperation framework for the two shores of the Mediterranean. However, in spite of the progress made since its establishment, its evolution has been hampered by complex and multifaceted difficulties. The question now is how to reinvigorate the foundations of this partnership, build on its achievements and adapt them to the new regional and international circumstances, particularly the “Arab Spring” and the COVID-19 health crisis.

25 years have passed since the Foreign Ministers of the EU (of the 15 Member States)² and the 12 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean³ met in Barcelona to sign the agreement and launch the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Process. This process was designed to establish a new framework for a dialogue that would change the Mediterranean region into a common area of peace, stability, security, shared socio-economic progress and dialogue between peoples. Obviously, the idea was to create a broader framework for Euro-Mediterranean relations in a changing international and regional context.

Firstly, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union (1989) and the fall of the Berlin Wall marked essential geopolitical changes not only at the global level, but also at the European level. In place of an East-West confrontation, North-South cooperation was taking its hold.

These major upheavals have clearly exposed, in all its guises, the huge and deep North-South gap between the two sides of the Mediterranean, as one of the largest socio-economic gaps of the planet. The contrasts in development, stability, wealth and democracy are further aggravated by cultural disparities. In addition, demographic problems, namely migration from the South to the North and the rise of terrorism, placed the issue of security on the agenda of the Mediterranean region. However, beyond exacerbated inequalities between border countries, with their strong historical and geographical ties and converging economic interests, these have also led to a convergence of interests and gave them a momentum “to position themselves in the new world order by building a partnership strategy based on political dialogue, economic cooperation and exchange between cultures”⁴.

Then, the Maastricht Treaty negotiated in 1991 and entered into force in 1992 implemented a series of reforms.

Finally, the birth of the Barcelona Process was made possible thanks to another factor which has fostered cooperation amongst Mediterranean countries. The Oslo agreements, signed in 1993 thanks to the Norwegian mediation, put an end to the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and thus paved the way to a cooperative path towards peace and prosperity in the area. As a result, the Euromed partnership succeeded in bringing together, in an unprecedented way, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the other Arab neighbours in the same regional forum.

² France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Greece, Portugal, Austria, Luxembourg, Ireland and Denmark.

³ Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Libya has an observer status, while Mauritania and Albania will join the partnership in 2007.

⁴ Aicha Belarbi, “Le processus de Barcelone, les attentes du Sud”{The Barcelona Process: the expectations of the South}, Afkar/Idées, Autumn 2005.

II. THE IMPLEMENTED EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP (EMP) OBJECTIVES AND INSTRUMENTS

The Barcelona Process initiated in 1995 is the renewed expression of the historical, political and economic bonds between the two shores of the Mediterranean, and a global policy necessary for both Europe and the countries of the South.

The ultimate objective of this process is the establishment of an area of stability and peace respectful of human rights, to develop cultural exchanges, to foster dialogue and mutual understanding, and to promote economic and financial relations, in particular through the establishment of a free trade area by 2010.

The aim of the Euromed Partnership is to transform this region from a precarious area to an integrated, stable and prosperous common space. Its objectives revolve around three pillars: political and security cooperation, economic and financial cooperation and cultural and social cooperation. They are termed as follows:

1. The definition of a common space of peace and stability by consolidating political and security dialogue;
2. The construction of an area of shared prosperity based on an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free trade zone;
3. Bringing peoples closer within a social, cultural and human partnership to foster more understanding between cultures and exchange between civil societies;⁵
4. The vocation of each of these components is not exclusive and the effects induced by each, must reach out to the other.

The first component of the Partnership, which has a political and security purpose, sets common objectives namely respect for fundamental texts, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms and human rights. As regards the security field, the member States promise to commit themselves to the principles of non-interference, respect for territorial integrity, non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes, fighting organised crime and drugs, as well as compliance with disarmament treaties and the non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons⁶. This strand "examines the long-term possibility of establishing a Mediterranean pact or reaching an agreement on a future Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Security"⁷.

As for the economic and financial partnership, it aimed to establish a free trade area by 2010. In this respect, the European Commission opted for an increased financial aid on the basis that economic development, political liberalisation and democratisation are closely interrelated. Economic liberalisation and the reinforcement of trade interdependence between partners should in the long term remove the causes of inter-state conflicts. Thus, economy was perceived as the instrument of peace between states.

The third component of the EMP, which focuses on the human and cultural dimensions of dialogue, comes as an effective solution to resolve the conflicts and neutralise the crises tearing apart some parts of the Mediterranean. The strengthening of cultural cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean area would, in the long term, consolidate the fabric of relations between the cultures and civilisations of both shores, reduce the inequalities deepening the social divide and consolidate solidarity between peoples. They stated and asserted, through their representatives, that the neighbours within this space are committed to getting along,

⁵ See the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-méditerranéenne Conférence, 27-28 November 1995.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ José Luis Neila Hernández, "The Mediterranean Dialogue: Barcelona Process", http://www.cvce.eu/obj/le_dialogue_mediterraneen_processus_de_barcelonefr-2c8f7745-69f4-469e-8d5b-6ded200fec64.html

better knowing and understanding each other in order to form an epistemic community. That was a kind of concrete initiative intended to dispel or even discredit the trendy argument of the “clash of civilisations”.

The partnership in its social, cultural and human components covers human resource development through training and education, migration, the joint fight against drug trafficking, terrorism, international crime, judicial cooperation and anti-corruption⁸.

The originality of the EMP results from its global strategy and its “holistic”⁹ philosophy. It is a multifunctional political pact with different and ambitious objectives, hence its organisational and implementation ambiguities.

Several institutions were created to implement this complex agenda. A Political dialogue has since then been initiated at the Conference of Foreign Ministers, held every 18 months, and at the Meetings of Foreign Ministers. At a more technical level in thematic projects, decisions are taken at the quarterly meetings of Senior Officials and ad hoc meetings. Since 2004, the democratic dialogue has been initiated within the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) endowed with consultative and recommendation prerogatives.

To monitor the achievement of the Partnership objectives, the Euro-Mediterranean Committee of the Barcelona Process meets periodically to assess the progress made and to update it. Foreign Ministers of the EU Mediterranean partners also hold periodical meetings.

Important financial instruments are being put in place, namely the MEDA programme, through which the European Union is providing technical and financial assistance to its Mediterranean partners to ensure their economic and social adjustments and change. These were created at the Cannes European Council in June 1995 to replace bilateral financial protocols. Credits are subjected to the principle of conditionality; they are granted to projects based on a certain number of criteria, essentially agreements monitoring and internal reforms.

Thus, about €9 billion were engaged for the period 1995-2006. The amount of funds allocated for the period 1995-1999 was €3,435 million (MEDA I) and €5,350 million in 2000-2006 (MEDA II). The MEDA II programme was launched in order to cover MEDA I shortcomings, particularly in terms of procedures. Similarly, the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP), a subsidiary of the European Investment Bank was created in 2002.

In 2007, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) replaced the MEDA programme. This reform was intended to remedy certain dysfunctions by integrating the Mediterranean partners into the decision-making process and by getting closer to their local realities, opening decentralised offices, notably in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. The European Union was able, through this financial instrument, to release each year a total of almost 3 billion euros in loans and grants to the Mediterranean partners.

The execution of the partnership was based on a complex institutional framework in with dual mechanisms: bilateral - materialised by the conclusion of association agreements -, and multilateral. A network of Association Agreements was set up, providing for the gradual introduction, by 2010, of free trade between the European Union and its Mediterranean partners. These cover a wide range of areas: education, culture, and cooperation in justice, domestic affairs and research.

At the institutional level, a Euro-Mediterranean Conference, composed of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, met every year or every two years to ensure the decision-making follow-up to the Barcelona Declaration. A Euro-Mediterranean Committee (Euromed Committee), composed of representatives of the European Commission, the Member States and the Mediterranean countries at a senior official level, was responsible for the overall management

⁸ Barcelona Declaration, op. cit.

⁹ Olivier Morin, “ Le partenariat euro-méditerranéen à la recherche d'un nouveau souffle ”, Etudes-février 2005.

and follow-up of multilateral affairs. In addition, sectorial conferences were organised on a regular basis.

In 2004, the Partnership established a parliamentary branch, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. It comprised 240 members, equally divided between representatives of the two shores and replaced an informal Parliamentary Forum launched in 1998; it has a consultative role and could issue recommendations. The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, created in 2004, provides financial support to the Barcelona Process. Being responsible for the cultural and intercultural dimension, the Foundation concentrates its action on three areas: empowering the voice of young people, influencing political decision-makers; building a dynamic of dialogue and exchange in the face of mistrust and increased polarisation between societies.

In the same vein, forums bringing together NGOs and designed to bring civil society closer together have been set up. As an example, a non-governmental platform for the EuroMed Civil Forum, which brings together hundreds of organisations, was created in 2003.

III. EMP PHASES AND ACHIEVEMENTS: GRADUAL BUT NOT VERY VISIBLE RESULTS

The most high-profile political process and The EMP is notable with its threefold dimension: political and security, economic and financial, social and cultural; it has been set up gradually, given its manifold and overlapping objectives and the multiplicity of its protagonists.

Over these 25 years, hundreds of initiatives were adopted to make of this commitment a reality. Through transnational projects but also through local initiatives, a consolidated cooperation network steadily developed with a direct impact on the lives of millions of citizens around the Mediterranean.

The European Commission highlighted the implementation methodology and the importance of this partnership for the region by stating that “the Barcelona Process is the only forum in which all Mediterranean partners exchange views and engage in a constructive dialogue; a political dialogue is regularly put on the agenda of Euro-Mediterranean Ministers and Senior Officials meetings”¹⁰.

Ten years after the Barcelona Declaration, all the partners met in The Hague: it was the time to evaluate the deliverables. The results were mitigated. The EMP had indubitably enabled significant progress to be made in terms of cooperation with increasingly effective tools: The Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP), and the European Aid Funds (MEDA). While working to strengthen the Mediterranean dimension of its external policy, the EU has changed its strategy by requiring MTCs (Mediterranean Third Countries) to strengthen their own economic and trade relations and thus push towards regional integration groupings in order to create a sub-regional free trade zone. One of its greatest successes is undoubtedly the signing of the first South-South free trade agreement on 25 February 2004 in Agadir. Launched by Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, it institutes a phase of great significance, as it brings together the Maghreb and Mashreq countries and builds a new market of more than 100 million inhabitants. It is to be noted that the signatories are the most advanced partners in the association process for which Europe has engaged financial support (4 million euros in the framework of the MEDA programmes). That was the first concrete step of the future Euro-Mediterranean free trade area of 2010 created by and for the southern countries themselves.

¹⁰ The European Communities Commission “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”, 20/05/2008.

The EU has proposed a new external policy known as the neighbourhood policy, which includes opening up to European programmes such as cross-border cooperation, research, education, culture and the media.

Within a “give and take” logic, neighbours commit themselves to achieving concrete and verifiable progress in the political and economic fields by conforming to common values and referring to communitarian assets.

With its contractual vocation, the neighbourhood policy aims to reassure neighbours after the enlargement of the EU to 25 member States. This enlargement is consolidated by the stabilisation of all partners. It is thus based on two principles: co-ownership, which presupposes a policy jointly defined by all the countries concerned; and differentiation, which takes into account the specific situation of each member. At the institutional and European level, European policy interests and actions have focused on the Eastern European countries, with a view to an ensuing enlargement strategy in 2004.

In line with these actions, the “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” is intended to be an accelerator for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Created at the initiative of the French Presidency of the European Union in 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) aims to re-launch relations between the EU Member States and their Mediterranean partners. The aim is to make them more visible and concrete through the implementation of new regional and sub-regional projects that are of real interest to the people of the Mediterranean basin. These projects, which are concrete and consensual, cover several areas including economy, the environment, energy, health, migration and culture.

Six priorities were outlined:

- Cleaning up the Mediterranean;
- Developing maritime and land motorways linking ports and improving railway links to facilitate the movement of people and goods;
- Ensuring the civil security of populations;
- Developing a Mediterranean Solar Plan that explores the possibilities of developing alternative energy sources in the region.

IV. CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP (EMP)

It was quite obvious that the Barcelona Process alone would not be able to change the prevailing political, economic and socio-historical trends; yet these would have worsened without its momentum. Naturally, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership had the merit of addressing many strategic regional issues relating to security, economic relations through the exchange of goods, services and investment, energy supply, environmental protection, regulatory harmonisation, management of maritime resources, transport, migratory flows (origin and transit) and cultural and religious diversity and mutual understanding. The central role of the Mediterranean for all border countries, the multidimensionality of their links, the depth of their historical and cultural relations and the permanence of the common strategic challenges they face, deserve to be reviewed and should be given a higher political profile.

It goes without saying that the Mediterranean area condenses within itself all the challenges and the European Union is facing the challenges of globalisation and all the risks it entails. The political, development, security and political problems and the fragile economic, social and environmental balances that gave rise to the Barcelona Process remain entirely as relevant. The persistence of the crisis areas and the complicated situation in the Middle East in particular, further supports its relevance. Add to this, the wars in the Balkans, the civil war that ravaged Algeria, the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war on terrorism and the regional instability resulting from the “Arab Spring”. Other crucial events such as the

September 2001 attacks, those in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 have impacted the partners' relationships in both North and South, it induced a growing trust crisis and emerging signs of misunderstanding. Voices were raised in the Arab-Muslim world contesting Western cultural hegemonic attempts on the one hand; while on the other, European public opinion showed a growing concern about this kind of discourse and antagonisms.

Consequently, the achievement of the objectives set out in the Barcelona Declaration faced many limitations. Development gaps remained substantial; Mediterranean third countries continued to suffer from a low attractiveness of investors and political instability in most cases. Similarly, the southern States have not made enough effort to move closer together and overcome their rivalries. In the cultural domain, the initiatives undertaken have not prevented the stigmatisation of the Arab countries and Islam, following the attacks of September 2001.

The method adopted in the implementation of the Euromed Partnership has been criticised because of the small involvement of the populations and the absence of a permanent secretariat. Likewise, it has been developed in a sense from the centre (the EU) to the periphery (Southern countries).

Economically, the EMP's achievements fell short of the expectations of the partner States. The modest resources allocated to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership were coupled with the difficulty of implementing this aid (complex procedures for granting funding at the level of the European Commission) on the one hand, and on the other, with the lack of adoption of the reforms required at the level of the beneficiary partner countries. In addition, apart from the fact that the European Union adopted an essentially bilateral approach in its negotiations with its southern neighbours, bearing in mind that multilateralism reinforces integration, the delay in the entry into force of the Association Agreements was also noted due to the extremely slow ratification processes. The balance sheet of this partnership is encouraging but remains mitigated. In this regard, the European Commission reiterated, "The central importance of the Mediterranean must be reaffirmed in political terms on the political agenda of all participants. The apparent lack in the assumption of responsibility on the part of the Mediterranean partners is a source of shared concern. The lack of institutional balance between the EU, on the one hand, and the Mediterranean partners, on the other, is also a problem that needs to be addressed", adding that another shortcoming of the Barcelona Process is its low visibility and the feeling among citizens that little is being done to solve their daily problems and meet their real needs. Greater commitment and new catalysts are now needed to transform the objectives of the Barcelona Declaration into concrete realities"¹¹. Even though the appraisal of the Barcelona Process highlights insufficient achievements, it also shows that there is real potential for improvement.

V. PROSPECTS FOR A RENEWED AND INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIP

The ambitious objectives established within the framework of the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean, through the European Neighbourhood Policy, contrast with their modest results. This high-potential partnership is called upon to operate in a political and economic context constantly deteriorating, particularly in the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The partners are being led to reconfigure their strategy, taking into account the limits of the actions previously undertaken to achieve the various objectives set out in the Barcelona Declaration.

It is worth recalling that a necessary renewal of a Partnership inaugurated 25 years ago is necessary for the survival of the region, which remains a hotbed of conflict par excellence. The gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean is conspicuous, an area that is still

¹¹ Commission of the European Communities, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, op. cit.

marked by a patent asymmetry in exchanges and by a stark demographic, economic and political heterogeneity.

There is thus an urgent need to renew and engage in a frank and permanent dialogue between the countries of both shores, to overcome the inadequacies of the former practices by placing greater emphasis on the human, cultural and civilizational dimensions that have been overshadowed to the benefit of commercial and economic components. Similarly, a move of the centre of gravity of the partnership from Europe to the south of Mediterranean, or at least a rebalancing, is essential to construct an area of shared prosperity.

Furthermore, any re-launching of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership process cannot focus on economic and commercial aspects only. The three initial pillars of the Barcelona Process are closely intertwined and must necessarily evolve side by side. The objective of creating a free trade area and liberalising trade is not an end in itself. There is also a lack of South-South de-compartmentalisation, as South-South integration is a sine qua non condition for the success of Euro-Mediterranean regional integration. It would therefore be advisable to actuate the principles of participation, equitable partnership and consultation, which must take precedence in managing the accomplishments of cooperation. Such a stance will boost the southern partners' sense of ownership and legitimacy of this process. Thus, a clarification of the objectives of the ENP is necessary in order not to weaken the Barcelona Process by favouring bilateral approaches to the detriment of a regional multilateral approach.

In order to overcome the shortcomings of the Barcelona Process, the Mediterranean Union was conceived as a political union, based on parity between the adhering States within the framework of a co-decision process, and on the creation of a secretariat and the adoption of a bi-cephalous presidency shared by both countries of the North and the South. This formula should allow it to evolve from a cooperation system to an integration project and to involve the Mediterranean countries in concrete and consensual projects.

The Mediterranean is called upon to invent new modes of cooperation to achieve a more inclusive and serene growth. This desire for integration is inscribed in the chosen appellation of the process. From a partnership to a simple neighbourhood, the relationships between the two shores are consolidated to take the form of a "union". This semantic change translates a willingness to confirm relationships that have matured long enough over a long period of time to generate advantages from this cooperation.

Without any prejudice to the accomplishments of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since the 1995 Declaration, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean including the 5+5 dialogue and all partners, must stand to their responsibility and remain faithful to the spirit of Barcelona, whose objectives remain relevant in a context of growing uncertainty.

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About the author: Ms. Sanae KASMI is an Assistant Professor at the EUROMED University of Fes. She is also the Director of Studies at the EUROMED Institute of Legal and Political Sciences. She had a mission of assembly and educational engineering of this institute in which she currently teaches as a permanent professor. Ms. KASMI has taught the following courses: Introduction to Political Science, General Introduction to Law, International Business Law, Company Law, Competition and Consumer Law, Environmental Law, Social Science Methodology.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Thomas Volk
Director
Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean
European and International Cooperation
www.kas.de/poldimed
thomas.volk@kas.de



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