



## The Barcelona Process: An Assessment of a Decade of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

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**Theme:** On 27 and 28 November Spain hosted the Euro-Mediterranean Summit commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process –also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or EMP–. This paper attempts to shed some light on the achievements and deficiencies of the main themes of the EMP and the various national perspectives in these debates.<sup>1</sup>

**Summary:** In November 1995, the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) represented what appeared to be one of the European Union's most ambitious and innovative foreign policy initiatives. The EMP forged a partnership between the then fifteen EU member states and twelve southern Mediterranean states, across a comprehensive range of economic, social, cultural, political and security issues. The intervening decade has witnessed a gradual if undramatic solidification of the Partnership.

**Analysis:** There is general agreement that the EMP has failed to meet the loftier objectives enshrined in its founding Barcelona Declaration<sup>2</sup> and has struggled to adapt to changes in the strategic context, in particular those associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, beyond this common judgement that improvements are needed to match EMP rhetoric with reality, differences of interpretation abound.

These differences exist over the meaning and significance of what has been achieved under the EMP during the last decade; over how firmly embedded the Partnership really is after a decade in existence; and over who the EMP has most benefited, northern or southern partner governments, private sectors or civil societies. Consequently, differences also take shape around the question of future strategy, how much of the Barcelona philosophy is worth preserving and which elements merit fundamental revamping. Differences on such questions are evident between EU member states; *within* each of these states; between the European Commission and southern Mediterranean partners; between southern Mediterranean governments and civil society voices; and between Arabs and Israel. Amongst analysts a greater uniformity of robust critique is evident, although with a range of views on the continuing merits of the Partnership.

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<sup>2</sup> The Barcelona Declaration is available at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/euromed/bd.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/bd.htm)

Many of these differences were present at the EMP's birth. Some observers and policymakers argue that competing interests and perspectives have since converged, thanks to the socialising impact of the EMP. Others, however, are more inclined to highlight the persistence of divergence, after a decade of supposedly common partnership. It is certainly the case that, whether narrowing or widening, these differences have assumed a particular pertinence in the context of efforts to revitalise the Barcelona Process.

#### *The Changing Context of the Past Decade*

The EMP was launched at a moment of considerable optimism over the future of the southern Mediterranean. This was largely due to the initial dynamics generated by the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Further negotiations between Israel and some Arab states created a propitious background for discussions over the possibility of developing a Euro-Mediterranean 'zone of peace, stability and security', as stated in the Barcelona Declaration. As time passed and the Middle East peace process stagnated –and indeed, intra-regional tensions deepened– the EMP entered a period of severe difficulty. The increasingly unhelpful regional environment, added to the EU's own internal inertia, undermined the capacity and political willingness of EMP partner countries and institutions to implement the wide range of reforms originally adumbrated in the Barcelona Declaration.

Ten years after the EMP was launched, the political, social and economic context of individual Arab countries, as well as of the Arab region as a whole, has changed dramatically. Most observers, Arabs and non-Arabs, agree that challenges to Arab human development remain grave. Some would argue that the Arab development crisis has even deepened and grown more complex in recent years. The UNDP 2004 Arab Human Development Report has identified 'the acute deficit of freedom and good governance in the Arab world as the most stubborn of all the impediments to an Arab renaissance'.<sup>3</sup>

Intervention by foreign powers, such as the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel and the US-led occupation of Iraq continue adversely to influence the levels of security and well-being in the region. Other impediments relate to the existence of political, social and economic structures within Arab countries that continue to underpin authoritarian regimes. The apparent beginning of political reform processes in the Arab world has attracted much comment. Such incipient change is of undoubted significance, and promises to impact in important ways upon the Barcelona Process. However, political openings in the southern Mediterranean have so far remained cautious, selective and controlled by incumbent regimes. Reforms have been fragmentary, and have not yet had any discernible impact on easing the human development crisis in the region. The international context, marked since 11 September 2001 (9/11) by the US-led 'war on terror', is also having an effect on Arab freedoms, with several governments having imposed even tighter controls and restrictions on their citizens and citing fear of terrorism as the justification.

Despite all the limiting factors, calls for reforms to address some of the critical challenges facing the Arab world have emanated in recent years both from within the region and from external powers. It is widely perceived that much debate over reform has been prompted by a new US (declared) commitment to back democracy movements in the Middle East.

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<sup>3</sup> Arab Human Development Report 2004. *Towards Freedom in the Arab World*, UNDP, New York, 2005, p. 4.

The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA), which was adopted at the G-8 summit in June 2004, along with the US's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), represent new elements in the policy environment conditioning the EMP.

Alongside these international trends, developments within the European Union itself provide a backdrop to the EMP that looks significantly different today than it did in 1995. Change within the EU has been no less noteworthy than within the Arab world. During the last decade, the EU has incrementally strengthened its profile as an international actor. Undramatic but steady reform has been introduced to the EU external relations machinery. This has increased expectations throughout the world that the EU is better able to meet its own stated objectives of an effective, unified and values-based foreign policy. The accession of ten new member states in May 2004 accorded the EU greater weight and potential international influence, incorporated a range of states having recently undergone the kind of political and economic transformations that the EMP propounds for the southern Mediterranean and has also given further impetus to ensuring that the EU possesses adequate procedures more efficiently to make foreign policy decisions.

The Constitutional Treaty, rejected by French and Dutch voters, had promised to inject greater commitment behind a number of EU policy aims, in particular in relation to comprehensive approaches to security, development and human rights. It had additionally incorporated key institutional improvements, including the post of EU foreign minister, ostensibly aimed at cohering the Union's increasing range of policy instruments. So far, the fate of such reforms to the EU's foreign policy machinery remains uncertain.

On the back of these general developments, the moulding of the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has added a new dimension to relations with the southern Mediterranean. The ENP purports to foster a 'ring of friends' on the EU's new post-enlargement periphery. This initiative has bred some confusion over how the linking together of southern Mediterranean states with countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia under a single policy framework will impact upon the EMP. Official EU doctrine is that the Neighbourhood Policy reflects a continuation and reinforcing of the Barcelona Process. Debate remains open, however, on the precise division of policy initiatives between these two frameworks.

In short, a plethora of developments –the ENP, new debates over European values and internal democratic vibrancy, eastern enlargement, evolving EU foreign policy mechanisms and the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty– combine to produce a changing context for EU strategies towards the southern Mediterranean. With the precise implication of these changes remaining unclear, they are important ingredients in the mix of considerations that inform perspectives on the record of and prospects for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

#### *Assessment of a Decade of the Partnership*

Given the vicissitudes of the international and domestic environments, the failure to secure more far reaching economic, political, social and strategic results cannot be attributed only to the shortcomings in the design and implementation of the EMP. Moreover, it might justifiably be suggested that ten years is a relatively short period of time over which to assess the extent of profound economic and political transformation processes in such a large region. And yet, it is unanimously considered that change is required to the Barcelona Process that extends beyond the superficial.

An assessment of the first decade of the EMP yields the following preliminary conclusions:

- A widespread and pervasive disappointment with the EMP's ten-year record, allied with a judgement that many of the bases have, nevertheless, been laid for correcting current shortcomings. Disillusionment with the Barcelona Process appears particularly acute on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Many observers identify a twin paucity of achievement: the EMP has helped neither governments to development and grow their way to modernisation, nor civil society forces to pressure their way to reform.
- Revitalising the Barcelona Process properly requires more than simply 'doing more of the same'. Progress on the principles and commitments of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration requires more than simply providing a little more funding in some areas of cooperation, strengthened political will and improved implementation mechanisms. Rather, on a number of key issues and trends, some fundamental rethinking is merited on the approaches pursued through the EMP. A risk is that the tenth anniversary summit will eschew such qualitative reassessment in favour of quantitative addition to the EMP's existing *acquis*. This would do a disservice to the opportunity provided by the summit.
- A judgement that policy developments since 9/11 have, if anything, taken the Partnership further away from some of its key founding principles –at precisely the moment when those very principles find such resonance in the challenges affecting the Middle East–. 'Securitisiation' is the spectre either implicitly or explicitly haunting the preoccupations of many analysts. This requires policy-makers, dealing with undoubtedly difficult security issues on a day-to-day basis, to take a step back and assess broader trends in strategic approaches that threaten the longer term self-interest of both the EU and Arab partners.
- The United States' presence has been increasingly felt in the EMP's evolution across the economic, political and security realms. This also suggests itself as a crucial issue requiring deliberation at the tenth anniversary summit, in order both to clear the way for more productive cooperation with the US where this is appropriate and to better understand exactly how and where Europe should seek to retain distinctiveness in its relations with southern EMP partners.
- The need to move towards clarifying the relationship between the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Neighbourhood Policy is presented by many as a double edged sword, simultaneously offering real advantages over the Barcelona Process, while also threatening to undermine the latter's genuinely strong points.
- A recognition that complexity remains striking in the relationship between, on the one hand, changes within the multilateral EMP and, on the other hand, the national policy developments of the Partnership's member states. A decade on from the EMP's inception, the incremental dynamics of 'socialisation' have brought about a refashioning of some national interests around a shared commitment in the Barcelona Process. However, both European and Arab governments still seek to and succeed in

counter-balancing such 'Barcelona identification' with more instrumental national interest-maximising strategies. States have been able either to harness or to temper the EMP's 'reach' as they deem desirable for specific national governmental purpose. Indeed, the relationship between national governmental agency and the EMP has, if anything, become more complex and varied since the attacks of 9/11.

### *Rethinking Policies*

The EMP was launched in 1995 within a context of optimism, both in the Middle East and the EU. Since then, many reversals that were not directly linked to the EMP have led to a decrease in the initial level of optimism and culminated in an overall sense of paralysis. The efforts that are currently being undertaken to reinvigorate the Process are taking place within a very different context, marked by the crisis caused by the French and Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty and the difficulties in reaching an agreement on the EU's 2007-13 financial perspective (a critical aspect for the future of the Barcelona Process). Such a scenario could lead one to be sceptical concerning the evolution of the Barcelona Process in the short term. Nevertheless, a more positive reading would suggest that these difficulties will increase the resolve of governments and civil societies working to create conditions for more optimism in the long run.

Achievements within the first basket of the EMP, which deals with issues of political and security dialogue, are so far considered to have been meagre. However, the different initiatives that have been implemented within this domain have generated a process of socialisation that has contributed positively to the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean identity.

Despite the fact that the Barcelona Declaration refers repeatedly to *democracy and human rights*, the main point is to consider how these stated objectives complement other aims, such as attaining peace, stability, prosperity, human development and cultural cooperation. Differing perceptions in Europe and the United States on the root causes of terrorism emerging from the Arab world should not detract the EU from the end goal of its reform plans for the Mediterranean. Indeed, a balance between the EMP's various objectives needs to be maintained. Besides, EU policies should be primarily directed towards the citizens and civil societies of partner countries in order to create the necessary political and institutional conditions for peaceful social change. This implies establishing dialogues with all political and social forces that renounce violence explicitly and are willing to cooperate with the West.

There is ample debate on both shores of the Mediterranean concerning the use of conditionality by the EU. This debate is at the heart of proposals for re-launching the EMP and is directly linked to the expectations raised by the ENP. In contrast to what has happened in the case of new EU member states, the use of positive conditionality in the framework of the EMP has been rather weak during the last decade. In part, this is due to the limited interest that the southern Mediterranean partners have in the rewards and advantages offered to them so far by the European Union. The ENP envisages greater incentives for those countries that implement reforms in line with the agreed Barcelona principles and the action plans that are a result of a 'reinforced political dialogue'. The EU should offer more appealing incentives, especially in areas that are of high priority for southern Mediterranean countries, such as migration, the free movement of people and free trade in agricultural products.

In this sense, debate persists over the use of negative and positive conditionality. If the offer of rewards more tightly linked to specific reforms in southern Mediterranean countries emerges as a point of broad agreement, from the southern shore in particular are sceptical over the desirability of more punitive European pressure. As a minimum, it is essential that European countries develop greater unity on this question amongst themselves. Otherwise, political difficulties will continue to arise every time the EU addresses local realities that provoke negative reactions in non-democratic governments and among conservative religious and nationalist sectors in the southern Mediterranean. So far, it has been the case of some Arab governments conditioning the EU more than vice versa, in what could be termed a 'reverse conditionality'.

There is a need to establish clear mechanisms and policies related to *security and defence* issues in the Mediterranean. Police reform and human rights training of police forces in southern partner countries should be developed as a higher priority for the EU. Policies should not be limited to enhancing the efficiency of these police forces in preventing undocumented migration across the Mediterranean, as has largely been the case so far.

One of the consequences of the democracy deficit in Arab countries is a range of deficiencies in the defence sectors of these states, such as the limited civilian participation in and oversight over security policy-making, the limited separation of police and military forces and the high levels of defence spending accompanied by a serious lack of transparency and public accountability. In order to help overcome these deficiencies, there is a series of measures that the EU can help promote through the ESDP, such as increasing cooperation in the area of conflict prevention and crisis management, and creating networks among civilians and military personnel of EMP countries involved in crisis management and peacekeeping. Most crucially, security policies need to have a precise mandate under the EMP in order to avoid the use by governments in the region of the US-led 'war on terror' as an excuse to impose ever tighter controls and restrictions on their citizens, citing the fear of terrorism as a justification.

Numerous analyses of the second basket of the EMP, which deals with *economic and financial affairs*, coincide in showing the weakness of some of the basic economic premises that have been at the core of the EMP since its inception. Firstly, the assumption that there is a causal link between economic and political liberalisation has proven to be incorrect. This sequencing has not taken place and that in fact there are some countries where economic reform has coincided with political deliberalisation. Secondly, repeated claims that economic reforms in southern Mediterranean countries would lead to an increase in foreign direct investment, which would in turn help create new jobs, have not been realised. Indeed, during the last decade much of the potential domestic investment has fled the region towards more profitable markets elsewhere. The southern Mediterranean countries have had trouble attracting foreign investment because they lack comparative advantages outside of the oil and gas industries. A range of factors continues to discourage investors, including the lack of transparency and public accountability, inadequate physical and virtual infrastructure, the insufficient level of training and qualified labour, and the small size of national markets. A decade of the Barcelona Process has not helped southern Mediterranean economies sufficiently to integrate into the global economic system. Higher levels of European direct assistance should be assigned for building and reconstructing physical infrastructure and revitalising human resources in partner countries. The EU should come up with imaginative formulas for co-financing this

type of projects within the framework of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

Economic reforms in southern Mediterranean countries, including the privatisation of former state monopolies, have usually not been implemented in a transparent fashion. It is reasonable to believe that regimes that are not accountable to anyone will favour their own narrow interests during transitions to a more liberalised economy. One of the measures that the EU could take to counter this tendency would be to scrutinise those southern Mediterranean companies owned or chaired by members of the ruling regimes or their families. It is this which could help ensure that economic reform leads to the emergence of new centres of power that are willing to compete with existing ruling regimes.

*Cultural activities* across the Euro-Mediterranean space have increased significantly since the launching of the Barcelona Process. Achievements in the third basket of the EMP (social, cultural and human domains) have been modest during the last decade. The holding of Civil Forums accompanying EMP foreign ministers' summits has allowed for enhanced dialogue between civil society actors across the Mediterranean. However, civil society actors have as yet to demonstrate their capacity to put forward concrete proposals in terms of policy substance.

Initiatives have proliferated in areas such as education, culture, youth and civil society cooperation. Nevertheless, these initiatives have faced a series of shortcomings that affect the functioning of the EMP as a whole. There is broad consensus on the fact that the Partnership has become a highly bureaucratized process. The existence of a broad number of initiatives with diverging objectives hinders overall coherence and requires greater degree of coordination. Also, there is a real need for increased financial resources for efforts to have a real impact on societies of both sides of the Mediterranean and for the Partnership to gain visibility at the societal level. Many argue that the limited participation of non-official actors in the decision-making process of EMP initiatives and programmes is one of their major shortcomings. The creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Non-Governmental Platform, as well as increased dialogue between officials and civil society actors in the run-up to the tenth anniversary summit, are positive measures that could lead to more constructive cooperation in the future.

The extension of educational programmes such as Tempus –and possibly Erasmus– to the southern Mediterranean is most certainly an achievement. Critics, however, consider that such programmes are elite-oriented and remain relatively unknown outside certain milieux. Furthermore, exchanges tend to be mostly one-way. The EU Commission proposal in April 2005 to substantially increase member states' support for educational and vocational training in southern Mediterranean countries, including scholarships for university studies in Europe with a percentage of grants reserved for women, is a step towards addressing such critiques. Crucially, however, EU institutions and member states need to address the constraints to mobility that hinder cultural exchange. Accordingly, European migration and visa policies need to be adapted to bring down the barriers that prevent true cultural dynamism from taking place within and among Euro-Mediterranean societies.

Since 9/11 and as a result of terrorist attacks –including the most recent ones on European soil– the cultural aspects of the EMP have acquired political salience. This has led advocates of the third basket of the Partnership to highlight its distinctiveness; because of the transversal nature of cultural and social activities and their interconnectedness with

economic and political aspects, the third basket could become an effective tool –in conjunction with the first and second baskets– to advance democratic reform. It is necessary to include cultural programmes in European policies aimed at promoting democracy in the Euro-Mediterranean space and to monitor the results of these initiatives. Such a suggestion is consistent with the UK Presidency's proposal to focus on a series of benchmarks to be achieved during the next decade.

Over the past few years, the European Union has launched a series of initiatives to deal with issues related to *migration*. One problem facing the EU is the persistence of a deeply-rooted security approach to migration. Such a security-oriented approach is exemplified by the decision to place issues related to illegal immigration under the third basket of the Barcelona Process, along with other 'transnational risks' such as terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking, instead of in the political and security section. The increased regularisation of illegal immigrants living and working in European countries, such as the regularisation process that took place in Spain in the first half of 2005, has emphasised the limitations of restrictive visa policies. A possible way of establishing more realistic policies would lie in the creation of a more flexible visa system, as recommended by the European Parliament. Restrictive migration policies merely encourage the growth of illegal immigration. This is certainly an area where the drift of current policy developments threatens to undermine other areas of cooperation and the general sense of 'partnership' that ostensibly guides the EMP.

#### *Seizing the Moment*

Recent years have witnessed a shift in the US administration's Middle Eastern policy from a discourse of benign neglect to one of proactive engagement for democratic reform. Such declarations have still to bear fruit. In the post 9/11 international context, the EU should seek to complement its democracy-promotion efforts in the Mediterranean with other initiatives that have similar objectives, such as the American Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA). Nonetheless, the European Union has already built up an *acquis* in this area that should maintain its own specificities, to avoid possible confusion in targeted countries concerning the aims and means of each initiative. The EU is currently in a good position to encourage Arab countries to reaffirm their commitment to the Barcelona principles, which are viewed by many as less interventionist and more respectful to national sovereignty than the policies of the Bush administration.

Europe should take advantage of this momentum to encourage southern Mediterranean governments actively to engage in the promotion of democracy and the rule of law. At the same time, the EU needs to provide a significant amount of resources to offset the negative effects that economic liberalisation is having on societies in transition. Current EU funding to the Mediterranean, although far more generous than American funding, is still insufficient to meet the enormous challenges facing the region. If the EU does not accompany its well-intentioned rhetoric with a larger involvement in the Mediterranean at all levels, especially through engagement with southern Mediterranean civil societies, the Barcelona Process runs the risk of losing its relevance, as fatigue on the part of potential reformist partners could divert their attention to other non-European proposals.

If the evolution of US policy renders new European effort and ideas opportune, changes within the EU also make it essential that the Barcelona Process reaffirm its relevance to contemporary challenges. The bilateral approach underlying the ENP can be viewed as a response to the lack of coordination that besets the policies of the southern Mediterranean

countries. Such an approach could be advantageous for countries who want to deepen their relations with the EU at a faster rate than others. However, policy-makers need to be aware of the risk inherent in this approach, as it could widen existing differences among southern partners and undermine the creation of a common Euro-Mediterranean region in the process. The EU has still to clarify missing details in relation to the implementation of the ENP and how the relationship between the Neighbourhood Policy and the EMP will be articulated. If the tenth anniversary summit were to map out a more detailed plan for ensuring the complementarity of these two initiatives, this would help reassure many doubters in both Europe and the Arab world.

In sum, a challenging agenda presents itself ahead of the EMP's tenth anniversary summit. Difficulties relate both to the design of individual policy areas and the broader regional and international context within which the Barcelona Process now finds itself. At the same time, the EMP's very success in establishing itself firmly as an innovative framework of relations between European and the southern Mediterranean provides a firm foundation for reassessment and self-critique. A failure to utilise this potential for change would corrupt the very principles upon which the Barcelona Process was founded ten years ago.

### **Links of interest**

- *The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Assessing the First Decade*, a book co-edited by Haizam Amirah Fernández and Richard Youngs, Elcano Royal Institute for International and Strategic Studies and the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), November 2005. Available at:  
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