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Research Report

"Barcelona Plus 10": No breakthrough in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership

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“Barcelona Plus 10”

No Breakthrough in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

Muriel Asseburg

On November 27 and 28, 2005 the tenth anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was to be celebrated with a summit of heads of state and government in Barcelona. The high-level meeting was supposed to demonstrate Europe's closeness to and solidarity with its largely Muslim neighborhood, because, as a result of September 11, 2001 and the attacks on Madrid and London, a climate of mistrust, xenophobia, and Islamophobia had developed. The meeting was also supposed to rejuvenate the Partnership, frequently criticized as inefficient and ineffective, by infusing it with new priorities and clear objectives. As the summit approached, however, it turned out that the European and Arab Mediterranean partners had very different ideas for the future of the Partnership. These differences were among the reasons why the southern partner countries' heads of state and government, with two exceptions, stayed away from the meeting. In the end, the summit's participants adopted a work program for the next five years and a Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism. However, they could not agree on a joint vision for the future of the Partnership.

During the run-up to the summit, the Europeans and their Southern Mediterranean neighbors (see box on page 2) agreed on the common goals of preserving the regional, long-term, partnership approach of the EMP (not least against the backdrop of American efforts at democratization and changing the regional order in the Greater Middle East since September 11, 2001) and on deepening it in accordance with their mutual interests. They also agreed that much needs to be done in order to achieve the ambitious objective, formulated in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, of creating a “zone of peace, stability, and shared pros-

perity” around the Mediterranean in addition to establishing the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area, targeted for 2010.

However, the EMP members' priorities have changed in the past few years. In Barcelona, the EU bet on economic cooperation, liberalization and integration, as well as a long-term and careful political transformation in order to obtain stability and contain soft security risks originating in the region. Since then, governments north and south of the Mediterranean have realized that direct cooperation, especially concerning the fight against terrorism and the management of migration, would have

The summit's participants:**35 member states of the EMP + observers**

- ▶ 25 EU member states
- ▶ 10 Southern Mediterranean member states
 - Algeria Egypt Israel
 - Jordan Lebanon Morocco
 - Palestinian Authority
 - Syria Tunisia Turkey
- ▶ 2 observer states
 - Libya Mauritania*
 - * has applied for membership
- ▶ 3 EU accession countries
 - Bulgaria Croatia Romania

to be expanded in order to get those security risks under control. Such cooperation would have to be accompanied by a more intense cultural dialogue that would serve to reduce mistrust and negative stereotypes. At the same time, drawing on the analysis of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s Arab Human Development Reports, there should be increased investment in high quality education and good governance.

The British presidency wanted the anniversary summit to adopt an ambitious agenda for reform and cooperation. They hoped that the identification of distinct priorities and clear objectives, together with more focused financial support, would clarify and adjust the goals of the partnership and accelerate their implementation.

What has the EMP achieved over the past ten years in the various policy fields? And to what extent can the concrete decisions of the anniversary summit contribute to overcoming obstacles and asymmetries found in the three previous dimensions of the partnership—"political and security partnership," "economic and financial partnership," "social, cultural and human affairs partnership"—and the newly-added dimension "migration, social integration, justice, and security"?

Political and security partnership

It has been emphasized time and again that the EMP is the only forum (besides the United Nations) in which the parties to the Middle East conflict sit together at one table and also discuss the region's security issues. This is a significant achievement in itself. Nevertheless, the Partnership—because of the failure of the Oslo Accords and the continuous conflicts and power imbalances within the region—is more notable for its lack of confidence building and "spirit of partnership," particularly among the southern members. Since the Partnership's existence there has hardly been any progress with regard to security cooperation; the project for a *Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Security* failed in 2000.

The work program agreed upon at the anniversary summit is, with respect to future **security policy cooperation**, rather modest. There is neither a new approach to revive the charter project, nor—out of consideration for Israel—has the Arab proposal to make the Mediterranean an area free of weapons of mass destruction been adopted. This is so although the EU included the renunciation of weapons of mass destruction in its new generation of association agreements (first used with Syria.) The program mentions that the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) dialogue with the Mediterranean partners shall be strengthened. It also states that, in the future, there shall be closer cooperation on conflict prevention, crisis management, civil defense, and the prevention of natural disasters, albeit solely on a voluntary basis.

However, with this agenda, the work program does not do justice to the importance of regional cooperation, confidence and partnership building for the region's stabilization—especially considering the ongoing conflicts. In addition, the European Neighborhood Policy's (ENP) bilateral focus reinforces the inclination to ignore the tedious regional dimension of the process (see below, page 7). One potential side effect is that relations between

the EU and Israel could be decoupled from the search for a solution to the Middle East conflict and Israel's integration into the region. The EU is thus depriving itself of an instrument (even if not yet actively used) that it could use to push for resolution of the conflict in the Middle East.

In the **Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism**, the EMP members condemn terrorism in all of its forms and affirm their determination to fight the phenomenon and its causes. In this as well as in dealing with the consequences of terrorist attacks, they plan to cooperate more closely and effectively in the future. Furthermore, they have committed themselves to respect human and civil rights and to not compromise democratic values in the fight against terrorism.

Altogether, however, the Code of Conduct is rather vague. This is due in large part to the dispute about the Middle East conflict and the definition of terrorism that broke out between EU members and the Arab group. In the summit declaration—which ultimately was not adopted—the Arab group insisted on emphasizing the right to resist against occupying forces. Given that Israel and the Europeans were not ready to support such a passage, the partners abandoned attempts to define terrorism in the Code of Conduct. Moreover, there is no reference as to how to protect human rights and basic civil rights in the war against terrorism. In addition, there are hardly any concrete measures for cooperation that go beyond the international conventions and standards.

Good governance, democracy and human rights: In the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, each member state pledged to adhere to democracy and the protection of human rights. These elements are also included in all the Euromed association agreements as “essential elements.” In spite of this, the EMP has so far turned out to be an ineffective instrument for political liberalization, protection of human rights or the extension of political participation in the Arab member states.

In the five year work program, the EU is offering a new financial instrument, the so-called *Governance Facility*, to financially reward those countries that can show progress with political reform. However, it is still not clear how this instrument is supposed to function and how progress can be concretely measured because in the areas of governance, democratization and human rights there is neither benchmarking nor the specification of indicators, let alone the establishment of an independent observer or ombudsman. The EU has merely promised to support the implementation of national reform priorities. Apart from abstract references to decentralization, the human rights dialogue, and the promotion of women's rights, the work program does not contain any specific measures aimed at improving governance and the human rights situation or the extension of political participation. It thus stands to reason that the distribution of funds will continue to depend more on the European states' geopolitical interests rather than on good governance, the status of democratization or the protection of human rights.

The work program emphasizes the importance of free and fair elections in accordance with international standards. This, however, is not necessarily related to effective political participation. The program does not make any reference to which political offices are to be filled by popular vote—for example, it does not mention the election of the principal decision-makers or an empowered parliament. Concrete precautions for compliance with international standards are missing and relevant proposals were sacrificed because of the Arab group's resistance. This was the fate of, among other things, the proposal by Germany for a system similar to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) model for the reciprocal observation of elections, the European offer of assistance with the implementation and observation of elections,

and the appointment of a Euromed election coordinator.

Economic and financial partnership

In the past few years, the EU has directed considerable funds into the region in order to support structural adjustment and regional cooperation: through the MEDA programs almost 9 billion euros have been committed, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) has thus far given grants of about 10 billion euros.* Despite some considerable growth rates, living standards in the southern Mediterranean countries have hardly improved, and the unequal distribution of wealth between North and South has not noticeably decreased in the past few years. In some countries poverty and unemployment have even increased. This is partly attributable to the high population growth in the region. This is also due to the fact that most of the Euromed association agreements only went into effect in the last few years (except the one with Syria which has been put on ice for the time being) and therefore have not had enough of a chance to have had an impact. Moreover, trade liberalization among the EU and its partner countries has so far mainly been restricted to industrial goods, which can only marginally benefit the southern partners. Also, liberalization and economic integration among the southern partner countries has proceeded hesitantly. The notable exception is the *Agadir Agreement*, concluded in 2004 by Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, which represents an important step towards the formation of the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area. Socio-economic development in the South has also only made sporadic progress because the general legal and political conditions for entrepreneurship, creativity, and foreign direct investment are still not present in most of the partner countries—despite the support for structural adjustment measures within the scope of MEDA programs and by the European Investment Bank.

* According to information from the *European Commission*: commitments through MEDA I (1995–1999): almost 3.5 billion euros; MEDA II (2000–2006): almost 5.4 billion euros. The EIB's credit volume 1995–1999: about 4.8 billion euros, 2000–2007: about 6.4 billion euros.

Therefore, summit participants agreed to make **socio-economic reform** a priority in the coming years in order to improve the investment climate, macroeconomic stability, and social security. In addition, they agreed to develop a *roadmap* detailing the steps to set up the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by the 2010 deadline. However, the European initiative to speed up trade liberalization for agricultural products has encountered conflicting reactions in the southern Mediterranean. The reduction of trade barriers (customs, quotas and timetable regulations of the EU) could, in principle, offer the countries a chance to increase their agricultural exports. However, agricultural production in the South will not be able to compete with European production so long as the high EU agricultural subsidies are not reduced. A quick reduction of trade barriers (without a simultaneous reduction in the EU's agricultural subsidies) would therefore threaten agricultural production in the region and, especially in rural areas, aggravate poverty, ultimately adding new causes for migration.

The EU Commission had first requested reciprocal and rapid (and almost complete) liberalization of the agricultural sector. In the course of the negotiations leading up to the summit, the Europeans took the Mediterranean states' interests into consideration. This is reflected in the language of the work program, which is rather vague in this field as well, emphasizing exceptions, the need for gradual and asymmetrical implementation and consideration for the specific characteristics of the agricultural sector in each of the partner countries. This implies the possibility that a study, commissioned by the EU to evaluate the consequences of agricultural trade liberalization for employment, living standards, and migration, will be included in a strategy for rural development and the fight against poverty.

Partnership in social, cultural and human affairs

The partners agreed that **education** should be a main area of financial cooperation in the future. This meeting of the minds is also reflected in the fact that the work program provides concrete benchmarks and time lines for implementing the *Millennium Development Goals*, reducing illiteracy, and improving the quality of education in southern partner countries—for instance, through scholarship programs, exchanges, and advanced training for teachers.

The outcome of the Barcelona Process with respect to **civil society** has thus far been mostly disappointing. It is true that, within the scope of the EMP, NGOs in southern partner countries have received substantial support. But so far, civil society has hardly been able to take on the prominent role that was expected in the process: it has become neither the engine for political reform and socio-economic development, nor the bridge between the partnership on the level of government and the bureaucracy and the broader public. This is due to, among other things, the repressive conditions in the Arab partner states, in which civil society cannot fully realize its potential. It is also due to the focus of previous EU support measures and dialogue on the societal elite (and NGOs for the most part) and a nearly complete exclusion of those social forces which actually have broad popular support: the Islamists.

The work program is devoid of new approaches to working with civil society. There are no specific measures for opening the dialogue to additional non-violent segments of society, as the EU Commission had proposed, or a move to change visa policies which would allow for exchanges between larger parts of the population. In the Partnership one can generally recognize a tendency to emphasize civil society's role in cultural dialogue rather than its political and socio-economic functions.

In the spirit of this new paradigm, the *Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures* was opened in Alexandria in Spring

2005—the first permanent institution of the partnership located in a southern member state and to which all member states (even if only symbolically) contribute financially. The foundation is supposed to function as a “network of networks” and encourage exchange and comprehensive dialogue. The problem with this concept is the top-down approach to civil society cooperation and the dominance of national network coordinators who are either close to their governments or themselves government agencies. However, the establishment of the *Euromed Platform* in Spring 2005, to represent civil society in the EMP, should not be overlooked. This elected body is much more representative and transparent than the previous *Civil Forums*, which had been organized ahead of the EMP foreign ministers meetings, and is thus in a better position to link up NGOs and national NGO networks across the Mediterranean as well as to inject civil society concerns into the EMP decision-making process. This has recently been made possible by the presence of the platform's representatives at meetings of the Euromed Committee.

Migration, social integration, justice and security

What can be called a “fourth basket” of the Partnership, cooperation in the fields of “migration, social integration, justice and security,” has been included in the work program—a field of cooperation that in reality has been growing in significance since the meeting of foreign ministers in Valencia in 2002. The importance of cooperation in the field of migration is emphasized in the work program: a common migration strategy is supposed to be developed, which will encompass the support of legal migration and integration of immigrants on the one hand and cooperation on the fight against illegal migration on the other. This indeed is a significant first shift away from the notion of “fortress Europe” towards recognizing demographic complementarity. The simple differentia-

tion between how legal and illegal migration should be treated, however, does not do much to solve the complex problems of migration and transit in the Euromed area.

The Partnership's asymmetries

The Partnership's structural problems are not addressed in the work program. In the past few years, the EU and southern partners have repeatedly emphasized the principle of *co-ownership* of the Barcelona Process, i.e. consultation and decision-making among equal partners. This understanding of the partnership is, however, saddled with a two-fold contradiction: on the one hand there can hardly be a partnership on equal footing between donor and recipient countries or between the entire EU block and individual partner states. On the other hand, conditionality should not really be a part of a cooperative relationship among equal partners.

Moreover, as a result of EU enlargement in May 2004, the asymmetries became even more apparent; today, 25 EU countries sit across the table from only 10 Mediterranean ones. The imbalance between the two sides in population, economic power and the extent of integration is also reflected in the institutional set-up of the EMP. The European institutions take the lead here: the EU Presidency also serves as the Presidency of the EMP, and the EU Commission has a dominant position as the engine and de facto secretariat of the partnership (not least due to its role in negotiating association agreements and action plans as well as in the allocation of MEDA funds.).

The Mediterranean partners on the other hand do not have any joint institutional representation. Their inability to agree on a joint representation of interests is primarily attributable to regional conflicts, the imbalance of powers and Turkey's and Israel's special relations with the EU. That does not mean, however, that they have not been able to push through their interests with increasing efficacy by, among other

things, forming coalitions with individual actors within the EU.

The work program does not contain any institutional changes—neither those that aim to remedy asymmetries, nor those that would make the process more visible. There is no plan to establish a permanent secretariat, a co-presidency or a “Mr./Ms. Med.” The set up of a *Euromed Information Center*, planned for December 2005, will probably contribute to making the Partnership more transparent, but it will hardly remedy the lack of visibility of the EMP.

Differing interests

Even within the EU, as the summit approached, key actors had different ideas about the focal points of the work program: the European Parliament on the one hand wanted to put the promotion of democracy and an improvement of the human rights situation in the partner countries on center stage, and spoke out in favor of building a “community of democratic states.” The British presidency on the other hand wanted to use the summit in order to lay out four main areas for future cooperation: (1) closer cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, in particular the fight against terrorism and the regulation of migration; (2) an intensification of the efforts to create the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area on schedule, by 2010; (3) a qualitative and quantitative improvement of education; and, (4) the improvement of governance in the southern partner countries (rather than democratization).

Similar to the stand the Arabs had taken at the mid-November 2005 *Forum for the Future* in Bahrain—the second summit meeting of its kind in the context of the US-EU *Broader Middle East Initiative*—the Arab group, coordinated by Egypt, made clear ahead of the Barcelona anniversary summit that it had a different understanding of partnership. In particular, they indicated that they are not willing to have reforms imposed on them in exchange for financial support. Rather, the Arab partners em-

phasized the *ownership*-principle: the EU should acknowledge each nation's modernization priorities and generously support their implementation instead of issuing instructions for reform.

In general, the slowly developing cooperation within the Arab group of the EMP and their increased self-confidence should be welcomed. Only if the partner countries can communicate and align their priorities and concerns, will they be able to effectively include their positions as part of the decision-making process. As a case in point, prior to the latest EMP foreign ministers' meeting in Luxembourg, the Arab group submitted a draft declaration, which they had never done before. As a result, the closing declaration was prepared not by the European presidency alone, as had been the norm, but jointly. The coordination of the Arab group, however, will be problematic if it is merely used to reverse previously agreed commitments and to prevent meaningful political reform, or if it is used to bring partner states, who actually do have a reform agenda, down to the lowest common denominator.

At least on a rhetorical level, there has been progress within the past few years, against which the regimes will ultimately be judged by their own populations: in May 2004 the Arab League Summit committed itself to a reform program (albeit not binding on the individual countries) that, among other things, aims to improve governance and increase political participation. In addition, Algeria and Egypt have subjected themselves to the voluntary *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM) of the African Union, a mechanism for reciprocal, non-confrontational monitoring of governance.

European Neighborhood Policy

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) might offer a way of more effectively tackling the above-described problems. The EU has, with the ENP, developed a new policy instrument aimed at preventing

the development of new rifts between the EU and its neighbors. It addresses not only the "new neighbors" to the East following EU Enlargement, but also the Southern Mediterranean countries. The EU wants to surround itself with a "ring of well-governed countries," with whom it can cultivate close and friendly relations. To achieve this goal, economic integration and political cooperation with the countries bordering the EU will be substantially deepened. Guided by the values and foreign policy objectives of the EU, such cooperation is supposed to initiate a reform process measured by benchmarks and cover five major fields of cooperation: (1) the development of shared infrastructure networks, (2) the cooperation of Justice and Interior ministries, (3) civil society exchanges, (4) political dialogue, and, lastly, (5) inclusion in the Single European Market. This will be accomplished by negotiating a bilateral action plan with each partner country that will define reform priorities and fields of cooperation.

The differentiated action plans of the ENP as well as the introduction of competition for financial support among recipient countries provide the opportunity to accelerate reform in the field of governance. Some Arab regimes even have a strong interest in implementing good governance programs—admittedly for the purpose of legitimizing and stabilizing their rule, not restricting it. Expectations should not run too high, however, because in the action plans previously agreed to priorities for politics and legislation in the field of governance were included, but effective, measurable benchmarks and binding timelines for their achievement are missing. Therefore, when implementing measures under the EMP or ENP, the EU should, at a minimum, insist on the application of minimum human rights standards.

Up to now, action plans with Israel, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Tunisia have been finalized. From 2007, MEDA financing will be replaced by a new Neighborhood Policy instrument.

Indeed, the EU has emphasized that the ENP should complement the EMP. However, it is not clear how this will be achieved with two fundamentally different policy approaches. As a result, the EU itself—in spite of statements to the contrary—has made the multilateral Barcelona Process less meaningful. This is another reason why the southern heads of state and government were so obviously disinterested in the anniversary summit—even though they blamed their absences on domestic politics or illness.

new impetus, it is rather unlikely that even after ten more years of partnership we will see the realization of the Barcelona vision of a zone of peace, stability and shared prosperity.

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No reinvigoration

Not only did the anniversary summit itself make the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership look pathetic, but also the work program agreed to gives little cause for enthusiasm. A reinvigoration of the process was not initiated. The fact that the participants agreed on new priorities (strengthening of cooperation in the fight against terrorism, development of a strategy for addressing migration, expansion of dialogue) does make sense in the face of the current security risks. However, no ideas were put forward with respect to overcoming the structural problems in the Arab partner states, addressing the main obstacles in the Mediterranean or fixing the inadequacies of the EMP—trade liberalization and increased efforts to strengthen education and training programs are clearly not sufficient. The measures to be taken in the fields of governance, the extension of popular participation and human rights remain vague. The summit also missed the opportunity to reinforce the regional approach of the EMP through concrete, new cooperation initiatives—thereby also making it more distinct from the other initiatives for the region.

As a result, the EMP will continue to be a relatively ineffective instrument, which in spite of the emphasis on partnership, will be characterized in particular by a lack of ownership on the part of the populations and by asymmetries. In addition, without