



THE BARCELONA PROCESS AND THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO FIGHTING TERRORISM

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On April 22 in Valencia, Spain, 15 EU foreign ministers met with their counterparts from 12 of their poorer, mostly Arab neighbors in the Mediterranean. At the two-day meeting, they attempted to reinvigorate the “Barcelona Process” of regional cooperation begun in 1995 and launched an action plan to promote regional development and stability. Even careful U.S.-based observers of European affairs can be forgiven for having missed this development. *The New York Times* gave it brief mention on page 15, the rest of the U.S. daily press passed over it completely.¹ Given the various preoccupations of American politics these days, this lack of American attention is hardly surprising, but it is nonetheless unfortunate. The Barcelona Process serves as a critical piece of the European approach to fighting terrorism. As such, understanding what the Europeans, and particularly the French, were trying to accomplish at Valencia would help U.S. audiences understand the European position on the U.S.-led war on terrorism as well as demonstrate an important and yet distinct approach to the common problem of Islamic terrorism.

From the European perspective, stability and development in the Mediterranean is essential for security at home and abroad. Particularly in France, with its large Muslim and Jewish populations, nearly every salient domestic politic issue, from to crime to immigration to anti-Semitism, has an important Mediterranean dimension. The war in Afghanistan, the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, and the surprise electoral success of Jean-Marie Le Pen have only heightened the awareness in France of the impact of regional events on French politics and society. At the same time, they feel that the roots of terrorism lie in the social, economic and political inequities that are rife on the southern littoral of the Mediterranean and as such can only be addressed through a comprehensive framework that strikes at the deepest causes of terrorism. Thus, the Valencia conference presented France and its European partners with the opportunity to promote their views on how to achieve regional stability and development and to present a contrast with what many European officials see as the “narrow” and excessively militaristic American view on how to combat terrorism.

The Barcelona Process

The 1995 Euro-Mediterranean Conference that launched the Barcelona Process was a turning point in relations between the member states of the European Union and the 12 partners of the southern Mediterranean (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey).² In fact, it represented the beginning of a new

¹ Emma Daly, “World Briefing Europe: Plan for North-South Cooperation,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2002, p. A15.

² The 27 partners reached a consensus on the admission of Libya on the occasion of the Barcelona III Stuttgart conference on 15-16 April 1999. Libya will be admitted following the lifting of the UN Security Council sanctions

security concept to replace the Cold War construct that had long dictated Mediterranean policy. When the Soviet Union crumbled, the member states of the EU no longer saw a nuclear threat or the potential for North-South conflict. Rather, they saw numerous south-south struggles and a range of new transnational risks (particularly illegal trafficking in arms, drugs and persons; immigration; and terrorism connected to various regional struggles). These new transnational risks meant that the massive differential in wealth that characterized the two sides of the Mediterranean was no longer compatible with long-run stability and prosperity within the EU. European security, they believed, had become less tied to military preparedness or to non-proliferation, than to the economic, social and political development of the southern countries.

The EU's approach to its Mediterranean "near abroad" is innovative not only because EU external relations are a consensus of national policies, but also because the policy reflects the philosophy of the EU's founders. In that sense, the Barcelona Process recalled one of the founding principles of the European Union: common objectives and common interests need to be addressed in a spirit of co-responsibility. According to Chris Patten, EU Commissioner for External Relations, "these aims represent a deliberate political choice made by the EU and its Mediterranean partners to adopt a global and comprehensive policy."

Implementation and goals

The Barcelona Declaration defined three main objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership based on the pattern of the Helsinki Declaration of 1975. The first objective is the creation of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogues based on fundamental principles such as respect for human rights and democracy (the Political and Security Chapter). The second objective calls for the construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership that includes the gradual establishment of a free trade zone by 2010 (the Economic and Financial chapter). After enlargement, this zone would include some 40 states and 600-800 million consumers, making it one of the world's most important trading entities. The economic and social consequences of the reform process will be accompanied by substantial EU financial support. The third objective envisions the development of human resources, the promotion of understanding and the rapprochement and exchange of peoples (the Social, Cultural and Human Chapter). The ultimate goal is to develop free and flourishing civil societies.

The Barcelona Process comprises two complementary bilateral and regional frameworks. At the bilateral level, the Union plans to negotiate a new set of Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements with the Mediterranean Partners individually. Beyond this bilateral 'vertical' trade liberalization with Europe, the Mediterranean partners are committed to implementing free trade among themselves. Dismantling trade barriers, particularly tariffs, requires substantial fiscal, economic and industrial reforms. To this end, the MEDA program was established as the principle financing mechanism that supports economic reforms in the public and private sector.

and the acceptance of the full terms of the Barcelona declaration. Since its participation in the Stuttgart conference as a special guest of the EU Presidency, Libya has taken part as an observer in some of the meetings of the Barcelona Process.

For 1995-1999 MEDA accounted for €3.44 billion of the €4.42 billion of the EU funds devoted to financial aid to the EU's Mediterranean partners. In 2000, the EU devoted €879 million to MEDA and for 2000-2006, the member nations have endowed MEDA with €5.35 billion. Substantial lending by the European Investment Bank supplements MEDA grants that come directly from the Community budget.³

In one of the most innovative aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, this bilateral approach is supplemented with a multilateral regional dialogue. This multilateral dimension takes place under the Euro-Med Association Agreements and concurrently covers cooperation in the political, economic and cultural fields.⁴

Future challenges

Much has been done since 1995 to achieve Euro-Mediterranean objectives. Negotiations for Agreements already concluded include those with Tunisia (1995), Israel (1995), Morocco (1996), Jordan (1997), and Algeria (2002). The first three have been ratified and are in force. Interim Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements signed with Israel (1995) and the PLO (1997) concerning trade related matters are in force (in June 2000, the EU-Israel Association Agreement replaced the Interim Agreement). Negotiations with Egypt are being finalized, while those with Lebanon are well advanced. Those with Syria and Algeria are at a less advanced stage.

Despite these achievements, various problems have postponed much of the implementation of the Barcelona Process. A certain lack of will on behalf of the southern countries, the competition between the EU and the United States, ambivalence on behalf of the members of the European Union, and the revival of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have slowed down the initiative.

The first impediment has been the southern countries themselves. From an economic perspective, the Arab countries have had no choice but to integrate into the European economic sphere in an increasingly globalized world.⁵ Nonetheless, some of the southern Mediterranean perceptions of the region's "common destiny" differ from this view. Traditional nationalism, African vocation, Arabism and Pan-Arabism contrast with European understandings of development. Differences in risk appreciation have also appeared. The southern countries have emphasized underdevelopment and South-South conflicts as the two primary destabilizing factors. They have also denounced the European emphasis on soft security issues and the "Fortress Europe" mentality. They also point out their structural disadvantage in a closer free trade relationship with an increasingly integrating European Union that excludes agricultural imports. The southern countries also feel uncomfortable with the European desire to bind them to the implementation of the three objectives, with the general principle of transparency and with the closer scrutiny of their internal affairs implied by the process. They feel that improving

³ See http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/meda.htm

⁴ See http://www.euromed.net/information-notes/barcelona_en.html

⁵ In the early nineties, Arab countries represented less than 1% of international trade not including oil. South-South trade was trifling. European countries, on the other hand imported almost 70% of their products. Closer integration with the European Union through the creation of a free trade area combined with financial aid would help them to recover from structural economic and social crisis and its accompanying isolation.

human rights and implementing democratic reforms would destabilize their societies. Perhaps more to the point, it would deprive southern elites of a great part of their present political power.

During this last decade, the actions of the European Union in the Mediterranean also have been undermined by American ambivalence or at best indifference toward European initiatives. Specifically, the United States has shown little interest in coordinating its Mediterranean policy within the Euro-Mediterranean process. Moreover, U.S. security concerns often overrode any desire the U.S. government might have had to press a more comprehensive agenda. For example, Washington turned a blind eye to the suppression of the Islamic opposition in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt in order to gain their acquiescence to the Middle East Peace Process begun at Madrid in 1991. As a result of this lack of coordination and of the American priority to security affairs, European and American programs in the region often end up competing with each other for the participation of Arab nations. Arab partners are able to play their wealthier partners off against one another and neither the U.S. nor the EU is able to impose difficult social or political conditions on the Arab states.

The European countries are also responsible for the slow development of the process. There was no real consensus about the priority of Mediterranean issues among the European countries. It ranked far behind enlargement to Eastern Europe, Cyprus and Malta, the evolution of European institutions, and EU involvement in the Balkans. There are also profound disagreements among the European countries about certain sensitive issues when they cross American interests and this has limited their ability to achieve consensus.

Finally, even if the Euro-Mediterranean partners have agreed not to let the Middle East Peace Process interfere with the Euro-Mediterranean initiative, the gradual abandonment of the Oslo Agreements has destroyed confidence and slowed the Partnership's development. The revival of the intifada had a strong impact on the Euro-Mediterranean security dialogue. These meetings represent one of the few forums for Israeli-Arab dialogue, but Syria and Lebanon both boycotted the recent meeting in Valencia and the rest of the Arab ministers present refused to meet with or even listen to Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres.

Development and Terrorism

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 reaffirmed Europe's desire for a stable and more democratic Arab World. The terrorist threat is not yet defeated and cannot be overcome by military force alone. The social conditions that feed terrorism are still flourishing. The events of September 11th justify a forceful response, but in the long-term they also underline the crucial importance for European security of dialogues with the Islamic world on a host of issues from mutual security to human rights to development. In Valencia, European countries asked their Mediterranean partners to give unconditional backing to the convening of an International Conference on Terrorism under UN auspices, to fully support the UN resolutions 1368 and 1373, and to pursue and bring to justice those who perpetrate, plan and sponsor terrorist acts. The

European Troïka⁶ also held separate meetings with Arab officials to talk about cooperation against terrorism.

This broad approach to the problem of terrorism begins with the assumption that the repressive political systems in the Arab world give frustrated young activists few legitimate political outlets and naturally push them toward the radical fundamentalists that fill their minds with hatred of the West. If we accept that security also comes from building peace and not only from building barriers, the European approach to international relations in the Middle East and North Africa makes sense. The American president's State of the Union speech of January 29, 2002, however, "made no mention of foreign assistance for any place other than Afghanistan, no allusion to exploring a modern-day Marshall Plan focused on depriving extremist leaders of the desperate people willing to kill themselves and others."⁷ The President has proposed a very large increase in U.S. foreign aid that will certainly help matters. From a European standpoint, however, a multilateral aid strategy coordinated within the Euro-Mediterranean process would have avoided the type of policy competition between the U.S and the EU that has often made a comprehensive approach difficult to implement.

At a time when force dominates the headlines in the Middle East and when the United States appears to be moving toward the use of force to topple the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, the value of peace building, development and the promotion of democratic values in the Arab world should be reassessed. The current turning point in the Middle East is also a turning point in European and French security because European and Middle East security have become intimately connected. Given the sizeable and apparently growing gap between European and U.S. military capability, the European Union's experience in peace building and stabilization and the U.S. reluctance to work in partnership with Europe in the Mediterranean, burden sharing will be a challenge. However, even if the western powers are unable to cooperate to stabilize the region, there is value in different approaches to the problem of terrorism. In any case, the Europeans and the Americans should at least avoid undermining one another on an issue of such importance.

⁶ The European troika consists of a representative of the country presently holding the six-month rotating presidency of the European Council (currently Spain), a representative of the country that previously held the presidency (currently Belgium), and a representative of the country that will hold it next (currently Denmark).

⁷ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "Security comes with building Peace not barriers", *San Jose Mercury News*, February 3 2002 at <http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/daalder/20020203.htm>