

Mediterranean dialogue. The Barcelona Process

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The Mediterranean is an open book whose pages testify to the complexity of a history marked by meetings of minds and misunderstandings between Europeans and the Islamic-Arab world. Over the last two centuries, these sideways glances and the Mediterranean's geo-historic reality have developed along uneven lines manifested, for example, in European/Western hegemony, embodied in colonialism, and the Arab world's increasing awareness of its position, expressed through a search for new directions prompted by the Arab Renaissance (*Nahda*), and for ways to embrace Western European modernity while preserving its identifying codes. Decolonisation was to focus debate within southern Mediterranean Islamic-Arab societies on how to meet the challenge of modernisation and identity preservation. The development of international society — the Cold War and the profound changes occurring in its wake — and of the very future of Europe, particularly the European integration process, were to have far-reaching consequences in the Mediterranean.

This area has been an abiding concern since the early days of European integration because of its connection with certain European countries, particularly France. The Treaty of Rome (1957) made provision for association agreements with some independent southern Mediterranean countries in the franc zone. The Mediterranean dimension was therefore part of the original identity of the process of European integration. The Global Mediterranean Policy, based on cooperation with Mediterranean third countries, was formulated in 1972 and provided a framework for the largely economic relations between the European Community and the countries on the southern shores. The nature and pace of Mediterranean policy was not to change significantly until the end of the Cold War. In 1990 an internal Commission report drew attention to the Mediterranean's strategic importance in the new circumstances, and the Commission proposed the Renewed Mediterranean Policy in the middle of that year. Giving its decision on the latter, the Council of Ministers underscored its belief that geographical proximity and the intensity of all kinds of trade meant that the stability and prosperity of the Mediterranean basin were key factors for the Community itself, the very security of which was at stake.

The end of the Cold War had thrown the huge North-South fault line between the two shores into sharp relief, dramatising one of the widest socio-economic gaps on the planet, a situation exacerbated by cultural differences. From a northern perspective, demographic issues, particularly emigration to the northern shores, political instability, the difficulties of economic and social development and other serious concerns such as Islamic terrorism highlighted the importance of security in the Mediterranean. The geo-political, geo-economic and geo-cultural dimension of the Barcelona Process must be interpreted in this light. According to Paul Balta, this process was the founding act of the 21st century Mediterranean (BALTA, Paul, *El euromediterráneo*, Madrid, Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo, 2005, p. 190). The changes and uncertainties that were to characterise the post-Cold War world starkly demonstrated that security was defined by its multidimensional and global nature. National and international spheres overlap, so that to paraphrase Celestino del Arenal ('El nuevo escenario mundial y la teoría de las relaciones internacionales', various authors, *Hacia un nuevo orden internacional y europeo. Estudios en homenaje al profesor Don Manuel Díez de Velasco*, Madrid, 1993), the outmoded idea that security was exclusively a function of national power or of military and economic might had to be set aside. In trying to resolve the problem of insecurity, states increasingly had to tackle circumstances that were beyond their control, such as structural economic crises and economic, demographic, environmental and financial trends that could only be addressed by means of unified joint action.

Richard Gillespie argues along similar lines in raising the problem of security in terms of stability. Since the end of the Cold War, the security agenda has gradually demilitarised, which means that approaches and strategic thinking have tended to shift from a state-centric perspective to an outlook geared more towards societies, and from a national setting to a more global concept of security encompassing not only diplomatic, military and geo-strategic issues, but also economic, cultural and political problems.

The Euro-Mediterranean arena was to be particularly sensitive to the instability and uncertainty generated by the end of the Cold War. From the 1990s the debate on security in the Mediterranean was to focus

essentially on two questions: the nature of the problems affecting security, on the one hand, and the architecture best suited to promote stability in the basin on the other. The first question was to give rise to reflection on the real extent of military threats to European security in the light of problems arising more from the nature of the political, economic and social tensions generated by the north-south dialectic. Discussion on the second question was to underscore a growing consensus around the suitability of a multi-dimensional rather than a merely military approach to the problem of security in multilateral forums and institutions.

The awakening of European and particularly Spanish interest in the Mediterranean in the 1990s and its influence on the charting of new directions within the Global Mediterranean Policy, formulated in the European Community in 1972, was to develop in that context into a growing awareness of the basin's instability in the post-Cold War world.

With the end of the Cold War, the Atlantic Alliance was to embark upon a long process of readjustment to international society's new expectations and uncertainties. The 'New Strategic Concept' formulated at the Rome Summit in 1991 pushed the areas or fronts of uncertainty towards Central and Eastern Europe and towards the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the Alliance's southern flank, an area of high risk of war, according to John R. Galvin, NATO's military chief in Europe. The Heads of State or Government of the Alliance decided to improve practical cooperation and promote the policy of Mediterranean dialogue that had begun in 1994.

The perception and understanding of security in peripheral contexts, particularly the Mediterranean as an area of special interest in this light, has led to an active policy in various multilateral European and Atlantic forums — the Atlantic Alliance, Western European Union and the European Union.

At Euro-Atlantic level, the Atlantic Alliance was to begin to pay greater attention to the southern flank from 1994 as a result of the persistence of Italy, France and Spain due to their concern at the polarisation of NATO's interest in Central and Eastern Europe, at the expense of the problems of its southern neighbours. In the same year the Atlantic Council, at Spain's initiative, adopted by consensus a strategic document entitled *Recomendaciones sobre la puesta en práctica de un diálogo con países mediterráneos no miembros de la Alianza* [Recommendations on the initiation of dialogue with Mediterranean non-member countries], which established three stages for achieving a direct political and security dialogue with North African and Middle Eastern countries. The objectives of NATO dialogue were to contribute to security and stability in the Mediterranean, achieve better mutual understanding and correct negative perceptions of the Alliance in Mediterranean countries. Dialogue was subsequently to come under the auspices of the Mediterranean Cooperation Group, but because of the reticence prevailing between the two shores, the results have not been widely publicised.

Among the European institutions, Western European Union was to become a pioneering forum for reflecting upon and seeking ways to address security issues in the Mediterranean. At the same time as defining the Petersberg tasks in 1992, in the Declaration itself WEU members decided to initiate a gradual bilateral dialogue with some Mediterranean countries — Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, subsequently extended to Egypt, Mauritania, Israel and Jordan. Turkey was already a WEU associate member. These initiatives to encourage security dialogue were undertaken not so much because of the eventuality of a military threat against Europe from the south — a North-South military conflict — but because of the effects of possible destabilisation of the South caused by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the accession of radical groups to power, demographic pressure, economic underdevelopment and cultural divides.

Despite their limitations, the policies initiated within the European Union were ultimately to be the most important in the Mediterranean context. Since the early 1990s, initiatives to take European Mediterranean policy further had differed considerably. These included the policy formulated by France in 1990 which promoted the Mediterranean Forum or '4+5 Process'. This was geared towards the Western Mediterranean and encompassed the coastal countries — France, Italy, Spain and Portugal in Europe, followed subsequently by Malta, and the Maghreb countries, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya — but it was soon to be undermined by the collapse of the Maghreb Arab Union (UMA), the political events in

Algeria and the international sanctions imposed upon Libya because of the Lockerbie bombing. Wary of French influence, Spain and Italy promoted a more global pan-Mediterranean approach to Mediterranean policy that covered the whole basin, involving an initiative in September of the same year to hold the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), modelled directly on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

This was to lead to the most ambitious global initiative arising out of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona in November 1995, giving rise to the ‘Barcelona Process’. The Conference sanctioned the new global dimension of Mediterranean policy, the aim being to convert the Mediterranean basin into an area of cooperation, peace, security and well-being, and to promote the idea of a partnership — or association agreements — in the area. In addition to the EU Member States, the delegates in Barcelona also included 12 non-member Mediterranean countries: Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, the Palestine National Authority, Jordan, Syria, the Lebanon, Turkey, Cyprus and Malta.

The final Conference document focused on three pillars modelled on the Helsinki Process ‘baskets’: political and security dialogue, economic and financial partnership, and social, cultural and human partnership. The focus of the Barcelona Process was to be economic and financial cooperation, leading to a significant package of financial assistance managed by the MEDA programme, but the conception of which derived from the principles of security and the search for stability in the Mediterranean. The first pillar, the one involving the greatest political depth, included principles already set out in other documents on international security, such as respect for the right to self-determination or abstention from intervention in other countries’ internal affairs, together with newer principles within that regional framework, such as the promotion of regional security, stability and prosperity, cooperation in preventing and combating terrorism, and the promotion of non-proliferation in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. This chapter was to cover the long-term possibility of establishing a Mediterranean Pact or achieving an agreement on a future Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability.

Although commitment to the process was reaffirmed at successive Euro-Mediterranean conferences — Malta (1997), Stuttgart (1999), Marseille (2000) and Valencia (2002) — instability in the Mediterranean basin, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the difficulties in understanding between the two shores have undermined the fluidity and effectiveness of the Barcelona objectives. Current efforts to stimulate Mediterranean policy, prompted by President Sarkozy’s proposal to create a Mediterranean Union, have been reformulated, not without suspicions within the EU and in some Mediterranean basin Member States. In May 2008 the European Commission approved a plan to give a new direction to the Barcelona Process and to the French plan, under the title of ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean’, a pragmatic agreement for developing the southern shore based on four major initiatives: depollution in the Mediterranean, the creation of coastal and land motorways in the Maghreb countries, the exploitation of solar energy and improvements in security in the region.