

GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE EUROMEDITERRANEAN SPACE

From the Barcelona Process to the Union for the Mediterranean

A Project for a Shared Future

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The first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference was held in Barcelona 25 years ago, and its Final Declaration launched what has become the so-called Barcelona Process. The commemoration is a good time to evaluate the path taken, critically analyse the current situation, and predict the future as effectively as possible.

A Euro-Mediterranean Partnership for the Modernisation of the Arab Mediterranean World

The Barcelona Conference 1995 was an extraordinary opportunity to ambitiously bring Europe closer to the Arab Mediterranean countries and to clearly improve the traditional problems of inequality, misunderstanding and confrontation that the Mediterranean world had endured since time immemorial. The general realisation was that the situation of

excessive difference in living standards and economic progress between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean was unsustainable. After a series of overly weak European attempts to set up various aid systems for the Arab Mediterranean countries, in 1995 the occasion was finally conducive to launching a major European Union (EU) policy for the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

Paradoxically, this was brought about by a non-Mediterranean event: the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was seen by Germany as a great opportunity for reunification and for attracting to Western Europe the Central European countries through the promotion of a major policy of cooperation and aid. This policy was expected to help transition Eastern countries towards democratic free market systems. Southern European countries, particularly Spain, saw a great opportunity for the pact, as long as it was accompanied by a great European Community policy for the Southern Mediterranean European countries. From this great pact came the Phare and Thacis policies for the East and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership project called the Barcelona Process for the South.

The Barcelona Process, in accordance with the final declaration of 1995, therefore proposed a historic pact for Europe with Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries in a major project of cooperation and assistance that would decisively help with the economic, social and institutional modernisation of the southern countries.

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From the beginning, the central triple purpose of the Barcelona Process has been the construction of a great area of peace and stability, of shared economic progress, and of dialogue and understanding between the different peoples and cultures around the Mediterranean. It is therefore a great political project of historical scope. The driving force, however, had to be economic, with the progressive implementation of a free trade area, plus the financial and technical support of the MEDA programmes to help update the financial institutions of the southern countries, bringing them closer to the “acquis communautaire” prevalent in Western Europe, the economic area in which they were to participate. It was based on the idea that the gradual construction of the free trade area would create a virtuous circle and that the great European market would with its demand drive investments, growth and job creation in the new Southern Mediterranean partner countries. The key point, however, was the commitment of the southern countries to fostering the necessary reforms so that a virtuous circle of this nature could be set in motion, capable of driving the country’s economic development and transformation. The proposal was received enthusiastically by the southern countries and their societies,

arousing a great wave of hope and optimism. In fact, we could say today that hopes were as high as the risk of not fulfilling them.

One of the main features of the Barcelona Process was the call for the participation of civil society. For this reason, the Catalan Institute of the Mediterranean, as the IEMed was called at the time, directed by Baltasar Porcel, organised in those same days, at the request of the European Commission and the Spanish Presidency of that semester, the first great EuroMed Civil Forum, in which more than 2,200 people representing all walks of civil life in Europe and the now Mediterranean partner countries took part.

Thus began what we might call the classical period of the Barcelona Process, with the signing of the corresponding association agreements, beginning with those of Tunisia and Morocco and continuing with all the others except Libya, which did not participate due to the isolation imposed on it after the Lockerbie and Berlin attacks, and of Syria, which always dragged its feet without ever launching its participatory process.

In the following years, until the Spanish Presidency of the EU of 2002, the pieces of the Process came together. In the political sphere, we could symbolise this with the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly; in the economic field, with the FEMIP (Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership) of the European Investment Bank; and in the third pillar of the Barcelona Process with the creation of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures.

From 2004, two major projects to deepen the Barcelona Process were launched. First of all from the bilateral point of view - with each partner country -, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which consisted fundamentally of applying to the southern partner countries the pre-accession policy that had been so successful for the spectacular transformation of the Central European countries that joined the EU from 2004. As European Commission President Romano Prodi explained, this was now a fully-fledged invitation for the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean partner countries to join the European "internal market" as far as they wanted [1].

On the other hand, from 2008 the regional - multilateral - deepening of the Barcelona Process was launched with the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Important in the new Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework was the creation of a Permanent Secretariat based in the Palau de Pedralbes in Barcelona, recognising the symbol of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation that the name of Barcelona had represented since 1995. At the suggestion of French President Sarkozy, the aim was to adopt a more pragmatic attitude with the promotion of specific projects of a practical and applied nature and of co-ownership by partner countries through the creation of a North-South co-presidency.

A reality far from expectations

The reality was, however, that 15 years after the creation of the Barcelona Process, despite the gradual construction of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the feeling prevailed that reality had fallen far short of the expectations raised. European funding was skeletal for the tasks proposed and the authoritarian regimes of the South had not carried out the necessary reform measures to exploit the advantages or facilities of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Moreover, much of the population of the South was beginning to see the EU's Euro-Mediterranean policy as support for the authoritarian regimes of their countries, especially after President Sarkozy's proclamations of pragmatism and de-politicisation of the Barcelona Process, leaving aside the insistence on democratisation and human rights. All this frustrated the southern populations who were also increasingly aware of the situation because of the progress that education had nevertheless made, the facilities of the new social media, and the emergence of new outlets such as the Al Jazeera television channel, which broadcast in Arabic from Qatar, through which they could see and hear daily critical news about the predatory and authoritarian regimes of their own country. A novelty in the Arab world.

It was in this context that the immolation of the young Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia triggered rage and indignation at the oppression, unleashing an unexpected citizen and democratic revolution: first in Tunisia, overthrowing Ben Ali's regime, and later in Egypt, bringing down President Mubarak. From there, the revolutionary movement spread to the Arab world as a whole with varying success [2].

The truth is that the Arab Springs took the Barcelona Process by surprise. Just as the momentum of President Sarkozy's new policy proposed abandoning the insistence on democratisation, human rights and reforms, the Arab populations embarked on their citizen revolutions precisely in the name of those principles that the Barcelona Process had been preaching since 1995, and which had just been sidelined since 2008. It was now the Arab peoples themselves who were taking their destiny into their own hands, demanding democracy and human rights.

The democratic revolutions of the Arab Springs from 2011 actually meant the crisis of the traditional Arab authoritarian system inherited from the liberation movements since independence, imbued with the ideology of moderate or radical Arab nationalism according to the stance of each country in the bipolar confrontation of the time. However, all of them, "progressives" or conservatives, were more or less clearly single-party authoritarian regimes, bureaucratising and imbued with the ideology of state interventionism, in the economy as in everything else.

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With the coming of the Arab Springs, the crisis of the traditional Arab authoritarian system was triggered by the accumulated frustration of three different phenomena. First, disappointment with the lack of development and economic and social progress promised by independence. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the Arab populations saw independence as not following the promised economic and social development, and the persistence of poverty and precariousness for the growing masses. Second, the frustration over the repeated failure and defeat of all the combined Arab armies in the face of the small and hated State of Israel, which trampled on the rights of the Palestinians and usurped their territory. If the defeat of 1948 was a key ingredient in the fall of King Faruk's Egyptian monarchy, the even more glaring defeat in 1967, the real Arab collapse, the Nakba, was the key ingredient in the fall of the Rais Nasser. Finally, the growing frustration and anger at the perpetuation of corrupt and predatory powers and the breach of the promise of democracy that had historically been associated with the prospect of independence.

The crisis of Third Worldism, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and the final triumph of Western liberalism only added fuel to the fire. The development, despite everything, of the middle classes and the modernisation of the youth and urban citizens, coexisted with the lack of opportunities for young people and the increasing economic backwardness, more and more marked with respect to northern European neighbours.

An Increasingly Complicated International Context

The window of opportunity for peace in the Middle East opened by the 1991 Madrid Conference and the subsequent Oslo Talks, a moment of optimism and hope for the emergence from which the Barcelona Process emerged, abruptly closed with the subsequent first assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Isaac Rabin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, top promoters of that peace process, in both cases at the hands of extremists on their own side. Nevertheless, the Barcelona Process continued, so that the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conferences were the only forum where the representatives of Israel and Arab countries regularly met, whether or not they had formal diplomatic relations with the Jewish State. Subsequent evolution was also increasingly difficult. The confrontations in that complicated part of the world that ranges from the mountains of Afghanistan to the Mediterranean coasts of Syria and the Gulf gradually affected the Euro-Mediterranean world, and certainly the entire international scene. The mega-attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and, especially, in Iraq made the situation extraordinarily complicated. In the Arab Mediterranean world, the outbreak of international terrorism actually meant a strengthening of traditional Arab authoritarian regimes, such as that of Ben Ali in Tunisia, presented to European and international community partners as a guarantee of stability

and control and the fight against violent terrorist movements.

This whole situation further consolidated the concept of the Arab exception. In other words, the Arab world is a separate case and is not part of the subsequent waves of democratisation that have shaped the international scene since the defeat of fascism in World War II [3].

At the economic level there was a similar exception [4]. However, the oil flowed copiously, funding megalomaniac projects in Gulf countries and incredible incomes for the elite of these countries that were invested mainly in the best neighbourhoods of Paris, London, New York or the Spanish Costa del Sol and the French Côte d'Azur.

However, the great Euro-Mediterranean dream represented by the Barcelona Process continued. The European economy, the great European market and the successful gradual integration of the EU fostered hopes that this wave of economic growth could make a reality of that promise of shared progress expressed in the 1995 Barcelona Final Declaration.

Europe and the Mediterranean were becoming increasingly aware of their many complementarities. Europe was recognised as a progressively aging society compared to the plethora of youths in the Mediterranean partner countries. The great European market, the most powerful in the world due to its breadth and level of demand, could attract investment and economic growth from the southern countries that already signed their free trade agreements with the EU [5]. Morocco, for example, which had had growth of 1% in GDP per capita during the 1990s, increased this rate to 3.4% between 2000 and 2015. It was a great improvement, but not enough to become a tiger like the Asians and reach European economic levels, despite being, as has often been said, the best student of the Barcelona Process.

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There was some convergence with the economic levels of Western Europe. Nevertheless, the differential in absolute terms had increased enormously and that it would take too many decades for a significant convergence with these growth rates. In order to become a "tiger" and make a significant leap as the Asians had done, growth rates above 6.5% or well over 10% in the case of China were needed. And to grow more strongly, much deeper and more significant reforms were required than those carried out in the Mediterranean partner countries. The reality was that the Arab regimes had rejected the reforms set in Barcelona in 1995, especially in the political and institutional arenas, human rights and public liberties, but also in the social and economic spheres. The privatisation of public

enterprises had been carried out primarily for the benefit of the privileged elites close to or participants in power. Bureaucratisation continued stronger than ever. Tariff liberalisation had replaced the old tariffs with all kinds of impediments and licences that were granted at its discretion. The reform of the banking and financial system or the facilities to create companies continued to lag behind [6].

Despite this accumulation of difficulties, however, Arab societies have continued to make their way, especially youths, the professional urban classes and women. And it is precisely this evolution of the mindsets and frustrated expectations of these most active segments of the population, confronted with the immobility of traditional authoritarian systems, that led to the outbreak of the Arab Springs and what remains the driving force of this unfinished revolutionary process, which continues in different ways depending on the country.

Can We Take Stock?

Taking stock of the Barcelona Process is therefore a complicated exercise. First of all because we see what has happened, what actually happens, but not what has been avoided, what has not happened. What is certain is that, given the avalanche of violence, wars and instability that has befallen the Mediterranean world from the Middle East and the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and so many other episodes of violence and confrontation, without the Barcelona Process things would have been much worse. Without the presence and effectiveness, true but mitigated, of the Euro-Mediterranean Policy of the EU, the Mediterranean world would have suffered much more from the maelstrom unleashed since 2001. Despite the continuous interference of the old or new powers that intervene in and stir up the conflicts in the region, the other countries, insofar as they have been able to avoid open violence and destruction, have, as we said before, had limited but real and existing progress. That is why the great aims and objectives that we had set in Barcelona in 1995 are still more valid than ever: working to build an area of peace and stability, shared economic progress and dialogue between the different peoples and cultures around the Mediterranean Sea. And that is why the Barcelona Process and its now fundamental instrument of the UfM and its Permanent Secretariat in Barcelona are still important.

Looking to the future, it seems clear that large areas of cooperation and integration will be set up in the world, at least commercially. We have seen this in Southeast Asia with ASEAN, in the American continent, in Latin America, in China with its Asian neighbours, and so on. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has made this even more apparent. The breakdown of value chains and even the difficulties of supply from China and distant countries have highlighted the benefits of relocations to nearby and complementary areas. For Europe, these areas are necessarily the Arab Mediterranean countries and the rest of Africa. That is why the EU must continue with a renewed and decisively strengthened Euro-Mediterranean policy with much more important resources than it has had so far. The Covid-19 crisis can also contribute something positive to this. We have seen some really unexpected budgetary provision. There has even been talk that we are at a Hamilton time in Europe [7].

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In addition to the negative health, economic and social impact of the pandemic, the good news now is the EU's Next Generation programme and the step forward that this represents for the very construction of the Union. With regard to Euro-Mediterranean policy, the Next Generation's financial approach to neighbouring countries and what these new programmes may represent for Mediterranean partners are important, as general forecasts are already contained in the new multiannual financial plans of the EU. Therefore, perhaps we will be able to increase the hitherto limited budgets of the Euro-Mediterranean programmes and start working on the real heart of the problems.

The ENP and the UfM must see a decisive strengthening of their capacities to induce the changes in the necessary economic and social policies in the southern partner countries. Furthermore, it is also necessary to lay an effective foundation and start working with the rest of the African countries to build this great area of cooperation and integration, at least in trade and in some other decisive aspects. Our great area of cooperation and global integration must necessarily be Euro-African.

The New Challenges

The economic and social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been very significant. In the face of recovery, the biggest problem may come from the different capacities of countries to carry out a positive transformative recovery of their economies. It seems clear -as all the conditions for eligibility for aid and the provisions accompanying the EU's Next Generation programme show- that we will not return to a reconstruction of European economies as they were before the health crisis.

There are a number of emergencies that are not new but it is now clear that we cannot continue to ignore them. First of all, the environmental emergency. Climate change is already having major impacts in African and Sahel countries, as the experts from MedECC point out in their [contribution to this monographic issue](#). We must certainly hope that Europe will be a world leader in this regard, not only within its own continent but also in the realm of its neighbourhood, without which the internal environmental efforts of European countries would be futile.

This environmental emergency must be corrected by a series of important transitions. Firstly, for the energy transition, helping to implement clean and renewable energies so that the energy mix becomes more appropriate throughout the Mediterranean.

We must also undertake the digital transition, so that the economic recovery can take place

in sectors of the future and that digitalisation can be introduced in all sectors, making a qualitative leap in their productivity and contribution to GDP and in the general welfare. We must also transition forward from a social and human point of view. There must be inclusive development so that young people can develop their skills. This means correcting the growing inequalities, both internally and between northern and southern countries. Finally, there must also be a transition in governance.

The task is huge: we need a renewed Barcelona Process, which will help us face some major problems. The Barcelona Process and the UfM must be an instrument for the transition of the Arab world to modernity

It will not be easy, but the profound transformations taking place in the Arab world must bear fruit, helping to build democratic systems where solidarity and the exercise of freedoms replace the traditions of authoritarianism and its consequences. Education will play a key role in bringing about these transformations and ensuring opportunities for young people and integrating women in the shaping of their societies.

Globally, these new challenges are what the United Nations 2030 Agenda is trying to address. They are the famous SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals, the search for inclusive and sustainable development around the world. As the 2015 United Nations Resolution approving the 2030 Agenda says, “perhaps we are the last generation that has the possibility of stopping the destruction of the planet.”

The task is therefore huge. We need a renewed Barcelona Process, which will help us face some major problems. Fundamentally, the Barcelona Process and the UfM must be an instrument for the transition of the Arab world to modernity. The democratic transition that their societies are demanding in this revolutionary civil process initiated with the Arab Springs is a complicated one. The Arab world is in a time of great hope but also of immense difficulty. It is at a key moment, a possible turning point towards progress and modernity, which is not without its pitfalls. In the long run, it seems clear that the Arab world cannot continue to be the exception. But democracy is not just about elections, it is not just about approving a constitution. Democracy is in fact a social system that includes institutions and values, as well as corresponding collective behaviours, which needs an equally democratic economic and social base. That is why an immense effort is needed from everyone. The driving force of civil society in the Arab world is long established. The same effort and success is needed in terms of appropriate public policies and effective backing from European partners.

This is what the Barcelona Process means today and that is why, more than ever, we need a successful and effective policy of the whole of the EU towards its neighbouring countries and real and adequate cooperation between the EU and its member states and the Mediterranean partner countries. The UfM and its General Secretariat in Barcelona will

have to play a crucial role in this great effort. And we will all have to help.

NOTES

- 1 — The bilateral modernisation programme was implemented through the corresponding Action Plans agreed with the respective governments and could have the financial support of the European funds of the ENP and the technical assistance, modelled on the pre-accession assistance that had so helped the countries of Central Europe.
- 2 — In some countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, the revolution triumphed, although in Egypt General al-Sissi's coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government reversed the situation, returning to the tradition of authoritarian military rule. Other countries, especially Morocco and Jordan, undertook a process of constitutional and legislative reforms that redirected the situation. Others, such as Algeria, funded social peace by increasing wages and salaries with gas and oil revenues and a few reforms. Finally, in some cases the revolutionary movement was drowned in blood by the corresponding regimes leading to long cruel civil wars such as in Syria and Libya.
- 3 — The communal construction of democratic Europe since 1957, the process of decolonisation in the 1960s, the final arrival of democracy in Southern Europe in the 1970s, in Spain, Greece and Portugal, the democratisations in Latin America in the 1980s, in Eastern Europe and South Africa in the 1990s and even around 2000 in Southeast Asia, did not herald the start of a similar process in the Arab world.
- 4 — The economic transformations that had taken place in other countries did not happen in the arab countries. And when the centre of gravity of the world economy shifted the Atlantic to the Pacific it seemed that the Arab world was once again missing the train of history.
- 5 — It is true that, contrary to the demands of the South, agricultural products and services have not yet been incorporated, despite the promises, and that there are innumerable obstacles to the movement of workers. But Europe is where the investment, technology, tourists and remittances of migrant workers come from. And it is to Europe where migrants and most exports go, up to more than 70% in the Maghreb countries.
- 6 — While in 1995 the GDP per capita of the Mediterranean partner countries excluding Turkey was 10.52% of the European average, in 2015 this reached 14.4%. Between 1995 and 2015, Morocco went from 8.6% of the European average in GDP per capita to 9.5%. There was therefore a certain convergence, but too weak to have an impact comparable to the tigers. They started from an excessively low level. The GDP per capita of the Mediterranean countries was \$1,741 in 1995. With a cumulative growth until 2015 of 249%, \$2,605 was added to this, reaching \$4,340. The EU countries grew in that period by only 182%. In absolute terms, however, this added another \$13,599 to their initial GDP per capita of \$16,522, reaching \$30,121 per capita in 2015.

7 — The first US Secretary of the Treasury with President George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, managed to decisively push the construction and consolidation of the United States as a republic with strong federal power, federating the public debt that the 13 colonies had contracted to finance the American War of Independence. With the federation of debt he obviously strengthened financial capacity and in fact created the US federal tax system.

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