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## Europe and the Mediterranean: time for action

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Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Let me start by thanking the academic, local and regional authorities here at this conference today. When Professor Bichara Khader invited me to talk to the students of the Université Catholique de Louvain, I was delighted to accept for a number of reasons.

First and foremost because, having been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University, I somehow feel I am a member of its academic community.

Also because relations between Europe and the Mediterranean are central to my concerns, my thoughts and my political actions.

And lastly, because I believe we should pay tribute to Professor Khader's efforts over the last 25 years to bring the people who live around the shores of the Mediterranean closer together.

If I may, I would like to share a few thoughts with you about the Mediterranean at a difficult time for Europe and the world.

Before taking a new look at the Mediterranean we must first decide what "Mediterranean" means.

Fernand Braudel described the Mediterranean as a thousand things together. It was, he said, not one landscape, but numerous landscapes; not one sea, but a complex of seas; not one civilisation, but a number of civilisations piled one above the other. He called the Mediterranean an ancient crossroads because for millennia everything had flowed towards it, throwing its history into confusion and enriching it. (*Fernand Braudel – The Mediterranean*).

At a time when we are building a new Europe, a united European continent, when we are seeking to work out new ways for people of different cultures to live and work together, when we are creating a new unity within diversity, when the EU's borders are expanding, we must also develop our strategy towards the regions closest to Europe and, above all, we must be decisive in our Mediterranean policy.

To build the new Europe but neglect the Mediterranean, Europe's cradle, would clearly be a grave mistake.

But the region's diversity makes the task particularly difficult. We might even wonder whether the Mediterranean really exists, politically and economically.

After all, the Mediterranean is marked by deep differences and divided by lasting conflicts.

And yet we sense the need for a common approach, an approach that allows us -- both Europeans and Mediterraneans -- to decide together the future of a region whose destiny has all too often depended solely on decisions taken elsewhere.

One thing is certain. There is a human, social and historical reality called the Mediterranean -- a reality that ever more urgently demands courageous, long-term action.

Let us start by considering what the situation will be like for the Mediterranean when the Union enlarges.

We have two very different alternatives.



The first involves viewing the Mediterranean primarily as a question of security. In this case, the Mediterranean becomes the southern border of the Union, where we must take up position to manage the flows of migrants, combat any forms of international terrorism there and encourage a development policy heavily geared towards cooperation in the fight against unlawful activities.

The second option involves viewing the Mediterranean as a new area of cooperation, where a special relationship can be established within the context of a broader **proximity policy**, which will need to address the whole band of regions around the Union, stretching from the Maghreb to Russia.

Under this new policy, which I will go into in greater detail at the Conference on peace, security and stability to take place in Brussels on 5 and 6 December, the Mediterranean will occupy a key position.

When we look to the east and the south, it is very difficult to make out the Union's new frontiers. This, of course, is nothing new: for thousands of years it has been hard to decide how far Europe stretches in these two directions. But this does not mean the Union can just keep on enlarging. The cost would be too great, since it would effectively mean abandoning the European political project.

At the same time we cannot draw a neat demarcation line, as some Mediterranean countries -- Malta and Cyprus -- are preparing to become members of the Union, others -- Turkey -- are candidates for membership, and all are linked to Europe by ties of tradition, special situations and interests.

This is why the time has come to be decisive and implement and strengthen our Mediterranean policy.

From this viewpoint, the Mediterranean in all its diversity is seen as a girdle of peace and cooperation, the focal point of a vast political and economic region stretching from Spain to the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf.

We must not start, however, from a closed, one-sided Eurocentric position. We must base our approach on a certain idea of belonging together -- an idea already implicit in the processes under way, but which needs to be bolstered with firmness and vision.

I fervently hope that next year, under the Greek and Italian Presidencies, we can take significant steps in that direction.

Of course, it is not as if we are starting from scratch.

The Euro-Arab dialogue, which was launched by the European Community in the 1970s, was the first step towards that objective. But without Turkey and Israel it was not sufficiently inclusive and was therefore an incomplete measure.

The Barcelona process, which got going in 1995, remains the instrument on which we can base our actions.

We must see that, if the process has not yielded all the results we had hoped for, the causes lie more in external factors -- I am thinking primarily of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- than in any weaknesses in the process in itself.



At the same time, it is with some sadness that we must admit that the topics discussed in 1995 (political instability, risks in connection with religious fundamentalism, poverty, migratory flows and demographic imbalances) are still highly topical in the region, and sometimes give even greater cause for alarm now than they once did.

However, the Barcelona process is still fully valid because it is the only attempt ever made to address instability and diversity in the Mediterranean multilaterally and from a long-term perspective.

Multilateralism rather than unilateralism, and persuasion rather than coercion are the watchwords that will guide our actions in the world and particularly in the Mediterranean. Barcelona's multilateral structure encourages exchanges, interaction and synergies between the various partners. It makes it possible to bring together around the same table political leaders who would otherwise be far apart, such as the Syrians, Israelis and Palestinians. It promotes the reciprocal strengthening of political action, economic cooperation and dialogue between cultures and civilisations.

Bilateral cooperation also has a part to play. It allows us to take account of the special characteristics and needs of each partner while we work to achieve common regional objectives.

Today, however, we need to extend this strategy.

To do so, we must ask ourselves what interests do European and Mediterranean countries really share.

Europeans would like to see recognised throughout the Mediterranean the values and principles on which our European integration process is based, starting with human rights.

For the Mediterranean countries, acceptance of these principles will greatly enhance the credibility of their political proposals.

Europeans would like to extend the liberalisation of trade to the neighbouring regions.

For the Mediterraneans, the shared objective of starting to create a free trade area by 2010 will be a key factor contributing to the modernisation of their economic and social systems.

Europeans are learning the importance of intercultural dialogue, and that it is a powerful instrument for integrating and including millions of immigrants in Europe, not just another aspect of foreign policy.

For the Mediterraneans, intercultural dialogue is an important means of achieving greater awareness of their cultures and wider recognition of their special characteristics.

All these elements are inherent in the Barcelona structure. So what we need are fresh incentives and greater flexibility.

The incentives are needed to provide greater encouragement for the internal reforms that are vital if the Mediterranean countries are to benefit fully from bilateral relations with the Union and from the opening-up of economies and trade.



With the exception of the Mediterranean countries that are candidates for membership of the Union, it is impossible to find a sufficiently developed private sector or a public opinion that fully supports change and the reforms in the region.

So we have to find a way to transform the relationship with the Union to make it an even more important element of the reformers' domestic-policy programmes in the various countries in the region.

Having excluded the possibility of integrating them in the Union's institutions, we must clarify our joint objectives in the Mediterranean.

We are in the process of completing the network of association agreements with the countries on the Mediterranean's southern shore. And incidentally, I would like to take this opportunity to call on Syria to conclude the negotiations quickly.

Apart from the current candidate countries, the Mediterranean countries may be the only ones with such strong links to Europe.

We must therefore make full use of these agreements to promote the implementation of the sort of micro-economic reforms that are essential if these countries are to modernise: the financial and commercial sectors must be modernised, companies must become more competitive, education and training must adapt to meet the new challenges of globalisation, and employment markets must be opened up.

The Union is the Mediterranean countries' main trading partner. Between 1994 and 2000, for example, Euro-Mediterranean trade doubled. And yet the Mediterranean region is still unable to develop its own personality on the world stage. It is still a long way from developing any sort of trade association like NAFTA or ASEAN.

This must be one of the objectives of a new proximity policy, as a prelude to a new form of political and economic regionalism. We must move forward in sensitive areas, such as agriculture. So far we have succeeded in finding sensible common ground, reconciling liberalisation with the need to maintain balanced markets. We are going in the right direction, but we still have a long way to go.

To get there, Europe needs to make even better use of the external potential of its various common policies, from the single market to the single currency, from the environment to research and education.

A keystone of the new proximity policy will be the extension, as far as possible, of principles, rules, standards and sectoral cooperation to the Union's neighbours, which will enable us to develop a truly all-embracing special relationship.

We have launched action programmes focusing on training, technical assistance, advice and cooperation with regard to the single market, customs and taxation, specifically to share our experience with the countries on the Mediterranean.

The euro can also play a fundamental role in strengthening economic and commercial ties in the region and helping these countries gain access to international capital flows. In particular, the euro will become the natural reference currency for those countries that have tied their currencies to a basket of currencies.



The objective is not simply to increase the competitiveness of these countries and trade with the Union, but also to further regional cooperation between the countries of the south.

Free trade between the countries in the region is an important corollary to free trade between North and South. This sort of regional cooperation does not need to develop between all the Mediterranean countries immediately. Making the Barcelona process more flexible also means encouraging cooperation between groups of countries, at least in the beginning. The Agadir initiative -- the decision by Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan to speed up the liberalisation of trade between them -- must be seen as a very positive step.

Other forms of regional integration are possible, even if they will need to overcome obstacles stemming from the conflicts of the past.

We must increase our common efforts to create favourable conditions.

After 26 years of close cooperation between the European Union and the Maghreb countries, for example, I believe the time has come to think about developing new forms of sub-regional integration among the countries in the area in specific sectors, such as infrastructure, new technologies and the environment. We must also start taking an interest in the positive signals coming from Libya, a country that could perhaps be involved in this type of cooperation, in accordance, of course, with the principles underlying the Barcelona process.

We should remember that the growth of regional and sub-regional markets could alleviate the migratory pressure on the Union and lessen the risks of the region becoming destabilised, as could still happen at present.

The Commission had proposed setting up a Euro-Mediterranean bank specialised in the development of the private sector. The Council has so far agreed to create a facility at the European Investment Bank and has postponed any decision to set up a new institution. There can be no doubt that such an initiative can also directly or indirectly encourage integration between groups of countries in the region.

Action in the Mediterranean will also involve developing existing institutional and political structures.

Agreement was reached at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial meeting in Valencia to set up a Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary assembly and other provisions were adopted to promote more direct participation in the political process by the Mediterranean countries as equal partners.

In future, we must further strengthen the political and institutional dimension of the process. When I say that the motto of the proximity policy is "everything but the institutions", I am referring to the existing Community institutions. But there is nothing to stop us setting up new permanent structures for Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and cooperation if they can help to strengthen the whole process.

Moreover, with the Convention still at work, and with the proximity policy as one of the chapters of the draft Treaty presented by Mr Giscard d'Estaing, I believe we must start asking ourselves what such a policy means at institutional level. We need a new project to act as a catalyst and spur us on to map out together the course for a





common future. For this reason we may need to develop a type of political and institutional integration that goes far beyond association agreements. This could offer our partners an additional strong incentive for internal reform and significant political prospects for the future.

In my introduction I wondered whether the Mediterranean actually exists today.

I have said yes to that question, but we still need to look at its central aspect: culture.

Personally, I am convinced that the "Mediterranean question" is primarily a question of culture, for a number of reasons.

First, one of the causes of the region's backwardness and the slowness of the reform process is the weakness of civil society in Mediterranean countries. A democratic and socially sustainable reform process must involve the development of a civil society that can make a positive, spontaneous contribution.

As was rightly pointed out in the excellent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Arab Human Development Report, governments in the region must adapt to the new relationship between the State, markets and society, and stop viewing their relationships with civil society as zero-sum games.

As part of this process, encouraging women to participate in public life and economic activities is particularly important. In some Mediterranean countries, the fact that not enough women are involved is artificially limiting social and economic development. In addition to the obvious humanitarian considerations, this reserve of unused energy seems to us a waste and a missed opportunity.

The UNDP report also states unequivocally that, in the age of globalisation, there is an urgent need to address the problem of education and training. Just think, for example, that only 0.6% of the population use the Internet and only 1.2% have access to a computer. Knowledge and culture are the cornerstones of development. Education and training form the basis for active participation in political and democratic life.

For this reason, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the fields of education and culture -- which we have recently stepped up with proposals for exchanges between young people and schools (Euromed Youth), the development of the cultural heritage (Euromed Heritage), cooperation between universities (Tempus Meda and Erasmus World) -- must be developed further. Real civil society in the Mediterranean will be built around artists, intellectuals, young people and universities.

The aim of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue between cultures and civilisations that we proposed in Valencia is to improve mutual understanding in the region through intellectual, cultural and personal exchanges.

We should also make far more use of the press, TV and radio, because that is the only way we can get our message across to broad sections of the public.

Dialogue and mutual understanding, however, are not just foreign policy instruments. Within the context of the Mediterranean they take on a dual significance, external and internal.



External, because the whole region has a wealth of artistic, intellectual and historical riches to offer, a heritage we must make the best use of and develop by sharing and spreading the word on all shores of the Mediterranean.

Internal, because dialogue between cultures takes place primarily within our cities in Europe, where we must find ways to live in multicultural societies and derive the full benefit from the experience.

When we think what were the great historic poles in the development of scientific, artistic and legal thought in the Islamic world, Andalusia and Persia must come top of the list. At the far edges of the Islamic world, they were in contact with the Mediterranean and compared themselves structurally and almost always peacefully with the Other. It was this that gave birth to the wealth of Islamic thought during its golden age. This was the origin of part of the *ijtihad*, the renewal of that thought.

Today, the frontier world between the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean no longer lies on the other side of the sea.

Let us not forget that certain European capitals such as Paris and London have become centres for major Mediterranean social, economic and cultural developments.

It is now within our societies, in our countries, that the communities that came from the south long ago or more recently are developing new ways of living together. These dynamics have nothing to do with security or the prosecution of illegality. Rather they hold out the promise of new vibrant forms of social behaviour.

And so that is what we should focus on.

In this situation, religions -- in particular the three great monotheistic religions -- take on fundamental importance.

As I said back in March in a speech on intercultural dialogue, historically speaking, religions have been a source of conflict and, at times, of bloody wars. However, they have also always been sources of hope, creativity and wisdom. Today religions can - - and must -- make a fundamental contribution to defining the goals we all share, to bring together all the peoples on the Mediterranean shores and lead them to work ever more closely in combating injustice and poverty.

This was why I decided to set up a High-Level Advisory Group on intercultural dialogue, which will start work in January. Its task will be to look beyond immediate concerns and consider the medium-term prospects for a more comprehensive policy of cultural dialogue. This must be based on simple principles and will adopt a broad and forward-looking approach with a view to making new and practical proposals. The main objective will be to identify possible ways of opening up the debate to society as a whole, rather than confining the discussion to the restricted circles of elites in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Allow me to end on a personal note.

My culture, my personal and political past and my values drive me on, with constancy and determination, along the course I have tried to map out today.

It is a difficult and exhausting course.





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We have seen what great differences there are in this region, where perhaps people today have very little in common.

The Mediterranean, wrote Mercator, was given different names depending upon the shores it washed up against. The Bible also gives the Mediterranean various names. And diversity was also great when we called it *mare nostrum*.

Perhaps there is no single Mediterranean. Perhaps there are lots of Mediterraneans. But I am convinced that the course I have suggested today is the only real way to ensure peace, stability and mutual understanding.

Thank you.