

**Creating a More Viable Mediterranean:
Regional Efforts, Difficulties and Future Prospects**

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General

Cooperation in the Mediterranean region is one of the most elusive issues in international politics. This could have been understandable in the past but it is becoming a persistent dilemma today.

The world of 20 years ago was encumbered with the bi-polar situation brought on by the Cold War. Every part of the globe was divided in ideological camps whether they wanted it or not. An effort of overcoming this divide, *détente*, the word that now belongs to a particular era was partially used in the Mediterranean as well. The first thoughts of bringing this region in line with these efforts were within the OSCE. There were also some initiatives within the context of NATO.

In sum, these ideas were too modest or ambitious, exclusive or unrealistic. I will try to give an overview of the efforts of the past decade.

With ideological differences buried, initiatives of cooperation sprang up all around the globe. The Mediterranean had its share as well. It had seemed that in this new era, partnership could now forge ahead with the aim of bringing stability to the region. However, now that the Cold War was over, certain regional conflicts, border disputes, and other related matters became even more pronounced. This eventually began to have an effect on every kind of initiative in the Mediterranean.

Currently there are three different but overlapping processes in the Mediterranean. In chronological order, they are the "5+5" (also called the Western Mediterranean Forum), the Mediterranean Forum and the Barcelona Process. They have their own peculiarities. All three discuss more or less the same subjects in a similar manner. They elaborate on political, economic and cultural matters.

While the first two are narrower in membership, none of these processes truly encompass the whole of the region without exception. Again the first two are countries made up mostly of Mediterranean countries, but some have countries that do not have a shore on the Mediterranean who are also members. For example "5+5" includes Mauritania and Portugal, while the Forum has Portugal. The Barcelona Process includes all the EU countries, whether they have a coast or not, as well as Jordan. One may call this political rather than geographic proximity. On the other hand, some countries that are on the Mediterranean do not belong to any of these groupings. They are Albania and the countries of the Former Yugoslavia.

The "5+5" and the Forum do not include countries that have conflicts amongst themselves. So these two can be considered as processes of mostly like-minded states.

In these respects, it is true that you can have a more open and free discussion about the issues at hand. However they also have a weakness, which is that they have no permanent structure or financial capability outside the contributions of the countries themselves.

While these two processes began their work in the early 90's, it became evident that a more coherent approach was necessary.

The EU Effort

The EU or the Community as was then called, already had a policy towards the Mediterranean. It was soon found to be insufficient. The Community had several bilateral agreements throughout the 60's and 70's. However, there was no coordinated policy. In 1972, at the Paris European Council a Global Mediterranean Approach was initiated. Nevertheless, even this lacked a coherent strategy. There was a differentiation between those countries that were considered likely to accede, those that had historical links to some EU countries and the others.

As the EU itself was evolving in the aftermath of the Cold War, it saw the Mediterranean as its near abroad. After Central and East Europe, the Mediterranean is considered to be its highest priority. Its propinquity and the underdevelopment of the countries in the southern rim had several issues that led to concerns, which needed to be addressed. In 1992, at the Lisbon European Council, there was a prioritization of foreign policy objectives according to security threats.

Rapid population growth, high unemployment rates and a lack of sufficient resources that impede development are identified as the major questions. With high expectations in areas such as health, education and housing that cannot be easily met, social tensions may arise. Inadequate responses to these needs can subsequently lead to migratory tendencies and an increase of extremist influences. These problems cannot be met by one country alone and have to be addressed together.

Furthermore, there was also the ubiquitous Israeli – Arab conflict.

This led to establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which the principles were approved at the end of 1994 at the Essen European Council. The Barcelona Process that we now belong to, come into existence with these basic considerations. After a yearlong debate that was held in Brussels, the inaugural Conference in Barcelona launched this process in November 1995.

It had a promising start. The two most important aspects of the Process was that it was able to bring together most of the Mediterranean countries and had financial means for the projects that were to be envisaged. In addition, at the time the Israeli – Palestinian conflict was being addressed in a peaceful manner.

It was important to be realistic and in certain cases more modest regarding expectations from the Euromed process. Developing and building on political and security issues was essential and for this reason confidence-building measures were being pursued. Certain areas where joint action was imperative were drug trafficking, terrorism and international crime. Yet, not soon after, the differences among the Partners became more visible and progress in the political and security partnership became elusive.

As the current world trend towards economic integration was growing, it was only natural that the Mediterranean basin should have been a driving force. For this reason the economic and financial aspect should have been the dominant feature of the Euromed Partnership.

The driving forces would have been trade and investment. The development of trade would open new fields for employment, reduce economic and social pressures and increase welfare. The trade figures show that commercial flows are mainly between the EU and the Mediterranean countries. A true partnership would entail increased trade among the Mediterranean countries as well.

In the beginning, during the Italian Presidency, there were several initiatives in various fields and suddenly there was an abundance of high-level meetings. However, the successive EU Presidencies did not continue this policy. Along with shadow cast by the Middle East Peace Process, the Process slowly began to lose its steam.

The full weight of the political difficulties became apparent when during the Malta Ministerial Conference in 1997, the Foreign Ministers enwrapped in Arab-Israeli divergences, could not agree on a Final Communiqué.

The British Presidency tried another approach to overcome these difficulties and to revitalize the Process. At the Palermo informal Ministerial meeting in 1998, all the Partners agreed on a Presidency Conclusions paper that would not be binding on anyone. The same formula was used at the formal 1999 Stuttgart Foreign Ministers meeting.

We have also seen the Euromed Process turn into some sort of Euro-Arab dialogue. This will become even more so when the composition changes with EU enlargement. Only Israel and Turkey will remain outside any grouping.

In addition, MEDA funds, the most strong point of the EU in this process, were not forthcoming. MEDA I ended in a disappointing manner. Even Commissioner Patten confessed that it was less than perfect, when he announced during the Lisbon “think tank” Ministerial meeting in May 2000, that only a quarter of EU commitments could be transferred to the Partner countries.

The French Presidency in the second half of 2000 valiantly struggled on agreeing on a Charter for Peace and Stability, but this effort collapsed due to the situation in the Middle East. In fact, Syria and Lebanon did not participate in the last two Foreign Ministers Meetings.

During the Spanish Presidency, a further effort was made to reactivate the process. Currently we have the Valencia Action Plan to move ahead. It may be seen as a list of things to do, but they are both ambitious and touch upon certain institutional issues that need to be addressed. It is incumbent on all of the Partners to make it work.

Constraints and efforts of creating a viable Euromed:

In order to make the Euromed process more relevant, we have to take stock of the realities and accept the fact that despite all the efforts, the Barcelona process is not proceeding as envisaged.

While most of the Partners applauded the Palermo Ministerial meeting as a revival of the Process, we had glossed over the real situation. Since the Malta Ministerial Meeting in 1997, until Valencia, we have been able to agree on a text only if it was innocuous enough. We relied on Presidential summaries, which are non-binding. It must be said that the present political situation warrants little change.

Among the technical problems are the MEDA funds, which are controlled solely by the EU. As long as there is insufficient transparency, and as long as the bureaucracy is cumbersome and unpractical, this will constantly strain relations between Partners. The way in which disbursement of funds occurs causes disagreement. These have to be resolved. In addition, pragmatic and quick ways should be found in order to be able to disburse the funds. There should also be more involvement of the Partners.

A positive development is the possibility of creating a Mediterranean Investment Bank. The EU has taken some steps, but it is still in its initial stages.

Furthermore, the Commission is acting as the Secretariat of the Process. This is welcome, but it is also discriminatory as only one side is involved in the day-to-day work, while the Mediterranean Partners are left out. Even basic information is retrieved with difficulty. This can be remedied by creating a true Secretariat in which all sides participate equally. The Mediterranean Partners should then contribute also to the financial implications of this development. Otherwise the unbalanced situation will continue.

The Presidency of the Process is always on the shoulders of the EU members. Although the reason is understandably political, it creates an unequal situation.

Many members mention the term “ownership”. Indeed, if the Process is to move ahead it has to be both inclusive and comprehensive. Until now, there has been only one Foreign Ministers meeting held outside the EU.

In short, the Middle East Peace Process unfortunately continues to have an important effect on the Euromed process and it is quite pronounced. Unless there is sufficient development in that field, then the Euromed process will not be able to progress as intended.

Do the other two Processes fare any better. In certain ways they do. While they do not have the financial resources of the Commission at hand, they have other advantages.

Other Initiatives (“5 + 5” and Mediterranean Forum)

These like-minded groups provide its members to assess in a more open and frank manner what they cannot at Euromed. In effect the Forum and the “5+5” act as a small think tank.

- “5+5” Western Mediterranean Forum

The 5+5 can possibly be considered to be the first attempt at regional cooperation after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The sub-region was considered to be free from major political disputes even though Morocco and Algeria were still locked over Western Sahara. The work of the Forum was based on a number of working groups that covered the following themes:

- Multilateral financial institutions
- Food-sufficiency and desertification
- Communities and Migration
- Cultural dialogue
- Transport and Communications
- Environment
- Foreign debt
- Technological development and Scientific Research

The Ministers met in Algiers in October 1991 and adopted a Declaration that was to regulate the work of the Forum. A Summit of Heads of State or Government was to be held in Tunis in 1992.

However, with the indictment of Libya in relation to the Lockerbie incident the whole process came to a halt.

Of late, Portugal asked to relaunch the process and the Ministers met again in Lisbon in January 2001. The “5+5” now meet at a regular pace in which the last Ministerial Meeting took place in Tripoli earlier this year. Most recently, they held a meeting in Tunisia on 16 – 17 October on immigration matters.

- *The Mediterranean Forum*

Launched in 1994, at the initiative of Egypt and France, the Mediterranean Forum was created as an instrument for cooperation envisaged to be loose and all encompassing. It was composed of countries that had common interests and were ready to cooperate. Any future membership was to be decided on a consensus basis. It initially created the political, economic and social and cultural working groups.

The Forum first convened at ministerial level in Alexandria in July 1994 and held Foreign Ministers meetings every year since then. It also held some extraordinary sessions, most recently in Agadir (Morocco) in October 2001, to take stock of the events of 11 September. The next ordinary meeting will take place in Turkey in the fall of 2003. Beside ministerial meetings, the members of the Forum hold meetings at senior official level.

The fact that it is informal and pragmatic makes it possible to have lengthy discussions on various issues. However, for a long time nothing tangible came out of these meetings. The working groups would agree on certain projects, but because there was no financial mechanism, there would be no meaningful follow up. Different countries would chair the working groups, which brought on its own coordination problems. As there was no secretariat it depended on the respective Presidencies to continue the work begun by the previous one.

In 2000, during the Portuguese Presidency of the Forum, it was agreed to do away with the working groups and entitle the senior officials to take up all the issues and pursue them.

Currently Turkey is presiding the Forum. We envisage making the Forum more visible and believe that it can take the lead in certain areas.

For example, with the Euro - Mediterranean Process entangled in political difficulties, the Forum was able to go ahead and tackle such a difficult matter like the issue of combating terrorism. The matter is so sensitive that there is no agreed definition on terrorism. Yet, the Forum was able to agree on a Code of Conduct in combating terrorism. This is a small but significant step that has to be pursued.

Conclusion

With all the constraints of cooperation, one may ask the question: is cooperation in the Mediterranean an illusion or is it possible.

The main problems encountered in the Mediterranean regarding cooperation and the way to overcome them can be summed in the following manner:

- Membership: any initiative must be composed of countries that do not have major political problems amongst themselves. In other words there should be coherence between its members
- Political Will: coming together is not enough; the members must take the process seriously themselves. We have noted that in many cases the Ministers are not always aware of the tools they have. Initiatives must be taken and be followed.
- Capacity to cooperate: do these countries have the capacity in economic, commercial, social or even cultural areas to cooperate meaningfully.
 - Finance: financial constraints are the most important drawback, but they also have to be backed by concrete projects.
 - Institutions: While the Barcelona Process has the EU Commission acting as a secretariat, we have witnessed its drawbacks. The other two rely on the capability of its respective presidencies. It cannot rely only on the Presidencies but a system must be devised for follow-up.
 - Ownership by all or majority: Members must sense that they benefit from whatever process they belong to. The lack of visibility of the processes can be overcome only in this manner.

To conclude, it is still early to write off the Mediterranean. Much depends on political reconciliation and the will to cooperate. While there are like-minded countries, realistically little progress has been made because all countries consider other regions as their priority. It nevertheless provides a useful opportunity for officials to get together and discuss matters of interest. These have to be capped with tangible progress. In order to do that, there has to be real convergence of interest on a certain issue and the process at hand must be perceived as a real tool. The Code of Conduct on combating terrorism could be considered as one such area. A realistic evaluation would be: do not expect much, do not give up and be ready to cooperate.

Annex 1

THE CURRENTLY ACTIVE MEDITERRANEAN PROCESSES

Members of the “5 + 5”:

Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia

Members of the Mediterranean Forum:

Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey

Members of the Barcelona Process:

Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, the Netherlands, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom,

Libya is currently an observer

Countries that have a shore line to the Mediterranean but do not belong to any of the above:

Albania, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia

Annex 2

MEDITERRANEAN FORUM FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETINGS

3 – 4 July 1994	-	Alexandria, Egypt
8 – 9 April 1995	-	St. Maxime, France
28 – 29 July 1995	-	Tabarka, Tunisia (Extraordinary)
9 – 10 May 1996	-	Ravello, Italy
11 – 12 July 1997	-	Algeria
20 – 21 April 1998	-	Palma de Mallorca, Spain
4 – 5 March 1999	-	Malta
30–31 March 2000	-	Funchal, Portugal
9 – 10 May 2001	-	Tanger, Morocco
25 – 26 October 2001	-	Agadir, Morocco (Extraordinary)
21 – 22 May 2002	-	Delos, Greece