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TEN POINTS ON THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP

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1. The Barcelona Process is by far the most relevant of the various existing Euro-Mediterranean initiatives, not only because it has a multilateral character but also because it is intended to be a multilayered process, comprising political and security as well as economic and social or human dimensions.

The main goal of the EMP is to expand the area of peace, democracy and development in the North-South direction, through a process of *inclusion*. Therefore, it is necessarily a long-term initiative. More than six years after Barcelona, the overall assessment is contradictory: both its potential and its difficulties have become more apparent. A number of the underlying assumptions are also open to question.

2. The potential is evident and proven. The Barcelona process is an essential and virtually the sole framework for the participation of southern countries in the world economy. Regionalism is a growing trend and an essential platform to both face and benefit from globalisation. At this point, as the Trade Ministers noted in Toledo, “the grid of Association Agreements between the EU and its Mediterranean partners [is] about to be completed, with the exception of Syria with which negotiations are still ongoing”. No State in the region questions the relevance of these agreements. The Union, despite the pressure of enlargement to the East, has kept its financial commitments at a reasonable level (MEDA is endowed with EUR 5.35 million for 2000-06), though implementation is still far from the intended standards.

3. The EMP is also conceived as a vast confidence-building initiative. The EMP is in fact the sole multilateral Mediterranean framework in which a consistent, high-level dialogue has been pursued involving both Israel and a significant number of Arab countries. It is a remarkable achievement that the channel for dialogue was kept open, though Senior Officials in charge of the Barcelona process have had very limited success in actually implementing confidence-building measures. At the civil society level, however, the EuroMeSCo network of foreign policy institutes from the EMP countries, launched in 1993 and enlarged to full EMP member-countries participation in 1996, is tackling both soft and hard security issues since its inception.

4. Difficulties, nonetheless, are more than evident. They stem from four main root-causes:

a) The lack of political convergence among the EMP member States, and the apparent lack of progress – in some cases even a step back – in the chapter of human rights and democracy. Democratic transitions, with the exception of Morocco, are at a standstill.

b) The collapse of the peace process in the Middle East, which in effect renders security cooperation in the framework of the Barcelona process unfeasible, and which has all but paralysed the Senior Officials' meetings, having led to the failure of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability.

c) The weakness of South-South integration. Creating a Euro-Mediterranean regional group implies south-south integration as well, and most notably the free flow of trade among southern partners. Progress here has been of little significance, although

the initiative free-trade area launched in Agadir between Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan is noteworthy. Without South-South agreements, there can be no MEFTA – that is, a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area – in 2005.

d) The issue of asymmetry, which poses a genuine problem to the Barcelona process. Part of it is naturally to be expected, as we have a closely integrated group of countries in the North, i.e. the European Union, while in the South there is no comparable group. Another aspect, however, resides in the fact that the EMP is directed by European institutions. The issue of ownership thus arises, as southern partners feel they lack sufficient influence in the decision-making process. A number of proposals have been made to remedy this situation.

5. One of Barcelona's assumptions now open to question is its all-encompassing geometry. This is characterised by one crucial assumption behind the Process that has turned out to be misplaced or at least wrongly emphasised: the holistic nature of its prescriptions for the achievement of peace, prosperity and security. National peculiarities have to be taken into account when assessing what measures are to be taken. The Maghrib and the Mashriq for example, should be seen as sub-regions of the Mediterranean with entirely different economic, political and security realities. The challenge lies in how to make the multilateral holism of the EMP and its more restricted sub-regional frameworks compatible and mutually reinforcing.

6. In the security arena, it is forceful to note that the main dimension is based on a South-South relationship or even internal to specific countries. It is wrong to assume that the framework should be limited to South-North or North-South relationships, where little problems in fact exist, while the Algerian conflict has caused more than one hundred thousand victims. Perhaps the main problem within political and security cooperation within the EMP is precisely the lack of a South-South approach.

7. The security dimension of the Barcelona process is also weakened by the absence of a fundamental security actor in the Mediterranean: the United States. There is no question that the United States remains a Mediterranean power, as much as a European power, as far as security and defence are concerned, and this should be fully appreciated. This is not to say that the EMP should be further enlarged, but merely to point out that all those involved stand to benefit from a Mediterranean dialogue between the European Union and the United States. It is doubtful, however, that Nato should be the adequate framework for such a dialogue. Mediterranean issues of concern to both Europe and the United States clearly transcend the realm of security. On the other hand, although it may increasingly tend to do so, the European Union as such is not part of Nato. As far as Europe and the United States are concerned, the Transatlantic Dialogue, where a comprehensive approach, including political and economic issues may be included together with security, seems to be the right forum for such a dialogue to bear all its potential fruits. But no dialogue will be entirely fruitful unless it involves all the interested parties, i.e. the Mediterranean countries themselves. An initiative along the lines of the projected CSCM, but perhaps less ambitious in geographical scope, will most likely emerge as a cornerstone in the near future.

8. The events of September 11th and the vast US-led coalition against international terrorism have shed some light on some of the problems facing the Mediterranean region, and in some cases have aggravated those problems:

a) The gap in the realm of perceptions between public opinion in the North and the South was made blatantly apparent. Only very few intellectuals in the South denounced

with a clear voice the barbaric act committed against American citizens, and the totalitarian project that radical Islamism represents. Western impotence and at times complicity with Israel's encroachment of Palestine, on the other hand, has only contributed to widen the perceptions gap.

b) The international coalition and the priority given to fighting terrorism entails, in many cases, the opportunistic collaboration of some States, hoping to pursue their own internal and regional agendas. It was so with the government of Ariel Sharon, which tried to link Bin Laden and Arafat, and it was so with various countries where authoritarianism grew, and with it grew the lack of political convergence within the EMP.

9. The coming months may further complicate the EMP should a US military offensive against Iraq take place. At this point, the majority of EU States and all their Southern partners strongly oppose such an offensive. The breaking of this Euro-Mediterranean consensus would certainly have an impact in the EMP's credibility, and it would also increase negative perceptions in the Arab public opinion. In what concerns the European Union, it would contribute to reinforce the image of its irrelevance as an actor in the domain of security and defence.

10. The future of the Barcelona Process largely depends on the Union's ability to assert an autonomous role in foreign and defence policy, namely in the Mediterranean. That implies:

a) That the Union should develop an objective political stance of its own towards the crises that affect the region, namely the Middle East, including those where the United States are involved.

b) That the Union should refuse to remain hostage to the limited consensus achievable within the EMP. It should develop its own initiatives towards the Algerian crisis or human rights issues, for example. Progress in this domain, moreover, is crucial to the success of the Barcelona process.

c) That the Union is a security actor in its own right, and should therefore directly address a number of security concerns expressed by Mediterranean countries. It should thus initiate a dialogue on the issue of European defence policy, perhaps re-launching a slightly modified version of the old WEU Mediterranean dialogue.

d) That, as follows from the above, the Union should integrate issues such as human rights and justice in both the dialogue and cooperative initiatives in the fight against terrorism.