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**EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP: A NEW 5-
YEAR WORK PROGRAMME BY THE COMMISSION**

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On April 14, 2005, the EU Commission issued a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament to express its ideas and set out a number of proposals with a view to reinforcing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in the next five years¹.

The Communication comes up at the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration. In 2005, further to the ordinary EMP Ministerial conference scheduled in Luxembourg on 30-31 May, there will be an extraordinary anniversary conference of the Foreign Ministers in Barcelona at the end of November. The anniversary meeting will take stock of ten-year experiences with the EMP and try to upgrade the process by adopting fresh guidelines and policies. The document we comment on in this note is the EU Commission's contribution to such endeavour.

Among many policies carried out by the EU in a conflict prevention perspective, the EMP belongs to the family of the policies directed at peace-building, that is at shaping the international environment and making it either less conflict prone or more conducive to co-operation. Conflict prevention objectives are strongly mainstreamed in the EMP. Hence the significance of the latter for this newsletter.

The EU Commission document deals with the three basic dimensions of the Barcelona process (political dialogue and security, economic development, social and human co-operation). It sets out, however, three transversal "critical areas" as the most significant challenges the EU should tackle within next years in the EMP process: (a) human rights and democracy; (b) sustainable economic growth and reform; (c) education. Let's deal with the political and security dimension in this note. If this dimension is taken into consideration, the promotion of human rights and democracy is the prominent "critical area", although education may be relevant to political and security relations as well.

The Commission says that an "important issue in this respect is to strive towards common perceptions of the challenges of democratisation, including the role of democratic Islamic political movements in national polities". Two aspects are noteworthy in this statement. First, the Commission does not use the concept of "promoting democracy" but alludes to a process in which Partners are expected to "strive" towards "common perception" of democracy and democratisation. Indirectly, this perspective stresses the idea of a dialogue in which democratisation would be stimulated from outside but expected to emerge from inside, in tune with the on going debate in the region.

The second significant aspect is the statement on the integration of democratic Islamic political movements in domestic political processes. The statement reflects the Western debate of the last years, in which the role and structure of the Islamic parties and groups have been thoroughly reconsidered. Western analyses on this point came to the conclusion that only a minority in these parties and groups use violence and is

¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership: A Work Programme to Meet the Challenges of the Next Five Years*, published in the "EuroMed Report" series, edition No. 89, 14 April 2005 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/index_eng.htm).

moved by undemocratic principles and objectives, the large majority being ready to acting democratically or evolving more or less quickly towards acting democratically in the political arena - although there will be significant ideological differences between Middle Eastern/Mediterranean emerging democracies and Western/European ones.

So, these two statements are very innovative. They reflect a most mature thinking in the European public opinion – turning decidedly away from the “one man, one vote, one time” syndrome that influenced it so markedly since the Algerian 1991 elections. They promise a significant renewal in EMP policies and practices.

In this perspective, the Commission puts forward two specific initiatives: (a) to hold a Euro-Mediterranean conference on human rights and democracy in 2006; (b) to set up a “Democracy Facility” that will contribute to promote, support and reward Partners showing a clear commitment to common values and agreed political reform priorities.

While the conference is expected to be an occasion for political mobilisation and ideological cohesiveness, the Democracy Facility will support the inclusive policy envisaged by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) predicated on rewarding Partners which would abide by the understandings enshrined in the Action Plans, that is the plans for political and economic reform that the parties are expected to agree upon within the framework of the ENP. The Democracy Facility would be a section in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the ENP financial fund that will enter into force in 2007 by replacing MEDA (and the other funds presently acting towards the European East). The Democratic Facility will work side by side with the European Initiative for Human Rights and Democracy (EIHRD), the first having the task of addressing the governments, whereas the second will continue to deal with non governmental actors.

In the same political and security perspective other specific actions the documents sets out in the field of migration and education are worth being mentioned. Although these actions are not targeting democracy and human rights, they affect the latter indirectly.

Education – a theme given strong significance in the Arab Human Development Report series – is going to become a high priority in the EU initiatives towards the EMP as well. “The Commission – points out the document – proposes to engage in a dialogue with partner countries and member states in order to substantially increase bilateral cooperation to the sector of education and vocational training”. The goal would be an increase of 50% with respect to present flows. An increase devoted to mobility, mostly in the field of higher education, would be linked to that broad increase.

As for migration, the broad political orientation expressed by the Commission in the document looks crucial to shifting from present security-oriented programmes towards a broad policy of integration of migrants in the Union. The document says “Rather than focussing on reducing migratory pressures, Partners should agree on a more strategic approach that aims to optimise the benefits of migration for all Partners”. No doubt, innovative approaches, as those just mentioned on education and migration, would strongly contribute to security and political co-operation in the EMP as well as upgrade significantly the conflict prevention potential of the Barcelona process.