

# **DOCUMENTI IAI**

## **BARCELONA 2005 Fresh Endeavours To Promote Democracy in the Euro- Mediterranean Partnership**

*by Roberto Aliboni*

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Fresh Endeavours To Promote Democracy in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

*by Roberto Aliboni<sup>i</sup>*

On 28-29 November 2005, further to the ordinary EMP Ministerial conference, already unfolded in Luxembourg on 30-31 May, there will be an extraordinary anniversary conference of the Foreign Ministers in Barcelona. The Euro-Med Partners will return to Barcelona to confirm and reinvigorate their cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). This event takes place in a difficult political framework, essentially because of the uninterrupted crisis in Iraq and the strong tensions it triggers in the United States-Arab World-Europe triangle. The course of the Palestinian crisis after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza is giving raise to hopes, yet what its evolution will actually be looks very uncertain and there are little motives for optimism. Most important, the US policy of democracy promotion – of which the military intervention in Iraq is part - has stirred up strong opposition in the Arab and Muslim world, both in undemocratic and democratic quarters.

Despite these difficulties, relations between the Arab members to the EMP and the EU are well. Democracy promotion has always been central to the EMP. In these last few years, thanks to the introduction of joint ownership within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), while tensions and differences between Northern and Southern Euro-Med Partners have not been entirely cleared up, there is no doubt that they are about to initiate a new cycle of talks and cooperation starting from a much more promising platform than in past relations. It is in this sense that one can dare say that current difficulties in the United States-Arab World-Europe triangle are affecting the EU-Arab side of the triangle less than the US-Arab one. The EU platform in negotiating and promoting reform within the EMP framework looks definitely more credible than what is happening with the Partnership for Progress and, more broadly speaking, in US-Arab bilateral or regional relations.

In this favourable framework, the 28-29 November 2005 anniversary meeting will take stock of ten-year experiences with the EMP as well as the newly adopted ENP and try to upgrade the process by adopting fresh guidelines and policies. The Barcelona 2005 conference will obviously deal with the three basic dimensions of the Barcelona process (political dialogue and security, economic development, social and human co-operation). Democracy and reform will play a central role in the conference, however. This is why this paper focuses on this dimension.

In fact, democracy and reform are central in two important documents recently unveiled with a view to provide substance to the 2<sup>d</sup> Barcelona conference deliberations.

One of them comes from EuroMeSCo, i.e. from the civil society<sup>1</sup>. The other one comes from the Commission.<sup>2</sup>

The EuroMeSCo Report points out that in the EMP framework the EU is decidedly shifting from an “economy-first” policy to giving high priority to political dialogue and reform. “Many in the EU developed a policy of economy first – says EuroMeSCo Secretary, Álvaro Vasconcelos<sup>3</sup> – assuming that economic and social development would bring security, isolate Islamists, and in the long term promote democracy ... Ten years after the launching of the Partnership, the EuroMeSCo Report concludes that this sequence of economic reform leading to democratisation has not worked”. Hence the need for a shift to political reform and a new attitude towards political Islam and its moderate vs. radical, democratic vs. undemocratic and violent components.

The Commission’s document is in tune with this analysis. It tries to draw from it a number of policy-orientations. The documents sets out 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.

When it comes to political dialogue as key to political reform, the prominent “critical area” is the promotion of human rights and democracy, 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 as well as Arab analyses<sup>4</sup> on

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<sup>1</sup> EuroMeSCo, *Barcelona Plus. Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States*, Lisbon, April 2005.

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/index_eng.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> Álvaro Vasconcelos, “Reform: economic vs. political. An overview: politics first”, *Bitterlemon-international.org*, Edition 33, Vol. 3, September 1, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Most recently see Amr Hamzawy, “The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists, Policy Brief, No. 40, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., August 2005; see also Roberto Aliboni,

this point came to the conclusion that only a minority in these parties and groups use violence and is moved by undemocratic principles and objectives, the large majority being very likely 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.

These two statements, while confirming the ideas put forward in the EuroMeSCo Report, 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

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*Promoting Democracy in the EMP. Which Political Strategy?*, EuroMeSCo Reports November 2004.  
Both texts provide references.

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.

From a political point of view, what will qualify EU and EMP future will be the activities to translate into concrete actions the ideas about moderate political Islam. We have two problems here, one concerning the way in which political action can be engineered as to overcome the legacy of past policies of stability and enact policy of change instead. The other problem is the gap of information and analysis existing in this respect. The EMP needs, beside fresh political action, a research agenda with a view to learn more about domestic politics in the Southern Mediterranean countries and, most of all, about Islamist groups and parties.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A recent book by Ann-Kristin Jonasson, *At the Command of God? On the Political linkage of Islamist Parties*, Department of Political Science, Göteborg University, 2004, provides systemic and interesting insights in these question.