Relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries

2008/2231(INI) - 20/05/2008 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to propose a new framework for the “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”.

CONTENT: the European Council of 13-14 March 2008 approved the principle of a Union for the Mediterranean and invited the Commission to present proposals defining the modalities of what will be called “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”. In this context, the Commission has made an analysis of the achievements of the Barcelona process over the last 10 years and its contribution to dialogue, peace, stability and prosperity in this region. They have also taken into account the shortcomings and difficulties in this process of cooperation since 1995.

This communication sets out the Commission's proposals for developing the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”. It assesses the achievements and outlines the future of the renewed processes.

Barcelona Process: assessment: the Barcelona Process has been the central instrument for Euro-Mediterranean relations since 1995. Representing a partnership of 39 governments and over 700 million people, it has provided a framework for continued engagement and development. It is also the only forum where all Mediterranean partners exchange views and engage in constructive dialogue. It represents a strong commitment to regional stability and democracy through regional cooperation and integration, and aims to build on that consensus to pursue the path to political and socio-economic reform and modernisation. However, the persistence of the conflict in the Middle East has challenged and stretched the Partnership to the limit of its abilities to preserve the channels of dialogue among all partners.

One of the main features of the Process is the institutionalised dialogue with different political and economic agents, including civil society, women’s organisations and the media.

In economic terms, the EU remains the main partner of Mediterranean countries both in trade of goods and services. Significant progress has been made towards the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area by 2010. Advances have been made in South- South economic integration but progress has been slow and remains below potential. Reforms are therefore needed if the EU's Mediterranean partners are to reap the potential benefits of globalisation and free trade with the EU.

Overall, the Partnership has witnessed a strong promotion of multilateral and bilateral relations, but now needs a qualitative and quantitative change, to spur investment and employment creation and optimise the use of human resources.

Scope and main objectives of the “Union for the Mediterranean”: the challenge of a new initiative is to enhance multilateral relations, increase co-ownership of the process and make it more visible to citizens. To do this, it should build on and reinforce the successful elements of the existing Barcelona Process. In this context, the elements of the original Barcelona Declaration should be retained alongside its goals (political dialogue, economic cooperation and free trade, and human, social and cultural dialogue) as well as the 5-year work programme adopted by the 2005 Barcelona Summit (migration, social integration, justice and security). The 2008 annual work programme adopted by Foreign Affairs Ministers in Lisbon in November 2007 should also be retained.

The new elements of the “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” shall be based on a **multilateral partnership**, focusing on regional and trans-national projects for regional integration and

cohesion. It will encompass all EU Member States and the European Commission, together with the other members and observers of the Barcelona Process (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Palestinian Authority, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Albania), and the other Mediterranean coastal states (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Monaco).

It will be complementary to the regional dimension of the EU enlargement policy. It will also be coherent and complementary with the EU- Africa Strategy.

This new initiative will give a new impulse to the Barcelona Process in at least three ways:

- by upgrading the political level of the EU's relationship with its Mediterranean partners;
- by providing more co-ownership to our multilateral relations;
- by making these relations more concrete and visible through additional regional and sub-regional projects, relevant for the citizens of the region.

Upgrading of relations: the proposed decision to hold biennial summits of Heads of Government is a clear signal of the intention to upgrade the relationship. In principle, the summit meetings should take place alternately in the EU and in Mediterranean partner countries. The role of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) shall be confirmed as the Parliamentary dimension of the Barcelona Process.

Increased co-ownership: to build a stronger partnership, as envisaged by the Process, the establishment of a **co-presidency** and the setting-up of a joint secretariat have been proposed. Establishing a co-presidency would increase and improve the balance and the joint ownership of cooperation and would be compatible with the provisions on the external representation of the European Union in the Treaty of the European Union. For the first Summit (13 July 2008 in Paris), the rotating EU Presidency will hold the Presidency from the EU side. The selection of the co-president from the Mediterranean partner countries will require consensus and their mandate shall be for a period of two years. At the same time, another key instrument for enhancing co-ownership and promoting a more balanced partnership will be an improved system of institutional governance and the creation of a new secretariat. The secretariat shall perform the role of making proposals for joint initiatives to be decided by the political bodies and to ensure the necessary follow-up of project-related decisions taken at the highest level.

Projects and funding: the project dimension should be at the heart of the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean". The programmes developed under this initiative should promote regional cohesion and economic integration, and develop infrastructural interconnections. They should constitute visible and relevant projects for the citizens of the region (the communication lists the type of projects that could receive funding through existing instruments).

The priorities set out in the Regional Indicative Programme for the countries concerned will continue to apply and any potential EC contribution to the new regional projects will not be financed at the expense of the existing bilateral allocations under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument or the Pre-accession Instrument. On the other hand, in order to bring added value to existing arrangements, the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" should be designed to mobilise additional funding for the region, mainly through regional projects. The Commission believes that **additional funding** for regional projects and activities should come mainly from the following sources:

- private sector participation;
- bilateral cooperation from EU Member States;
- contributions from Mediterranean partners;
- international financial institutions, regional banks and other bilateral funds;
- the Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership Facility (FEMIP);
- the ENPI (approx. € 50 million per year already programmed for the period 2007-2010).

Conclusions and next steps: the Commission invites the European Council at its meeting in June 2008 to discuss and endorse the proposals contained in this Communication. They can then become the agreed position of the EU to be put to the inaugural meeting of the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" planned for 13 July 2008 in Paris. The Commission will fully involve the European Parliament and the EMPA in the ongoing discussions on this new initiative.