Relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Pasqualina **NAPOLETANO** (PES, IT) on the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. The committee considers that this process, adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the Summit for the Mediterranean held in Paris on 13 July 2008, contributes towards peace and prosperity and that it will constitute a step towards economic and regional integration as well as ecological and climatic cooperation between the Mediterranean countries. It points out that opening up the process to countries not involved in the partnership increases the likelihood of establishing parity in relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean partner countries and of tackling the problems of the region in a comprehensive way.

MEPs consider it necessary, however, for the strategic value of Euro-Mediterranean relations and the Barcelona Process acquis, including the involvement of civil society, to be reaffirmed in the shape of regional and sub-regional programmes and common guidelines for bilateral cooperation. MEPs call on the Council and the Commission in this respect to ensure the cohesion of European Union action, especially with regard to possible institutional developments (in particular the role of the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy as Vice-President of the Commission) and the utilisation of the Community budget.

Clarify projects and strengthen financing: MEPs point out that the projects financed within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean should be supported by funding from the Community, from partner states and from private financing. They reiterate their support for the creation of a **Euro-Mediterranean Investment Bank**. Pending review of the financial perspective, MEPs state that the European Union's share of funding for Mediterranean projects, while guaranteed, must not be to the detriment of the Euro-Mediterranean regional projects already in progress or scheduled. They hope that Parliament will be regularly updated on the stage reached in projects.

Reinforce democratic legitimacy of the Union for the Mediterranean: overall, MEPs support the decision to bring a strong parliamentary dimension to the Union for the Mediterranean, thereby reinforcing its democratic legitimacy, however this should be further consolidated and its work better articulated with that of the other institutions of the Partnership, with the possibility being envisaged of granting it legal personality and entitling it to propose and assess economic and regional integration strategies and projects and allowing it to make recommendations to the meetings of foreign affairs ministers. They emphasise the need to include regional and local authorities in the new institutional framework as well as members of the civil society.

Extend the scope of action: MEPs request that all member countries of the Union for the Mediterranean are able to access the regional programmes already provided for under the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

They stress the need for an extensive overhaul of Euro-Mediterranean policy as a whole that strengthens its **political dimension**. They take the view that the issues of peace and security, human rights and democracy, and cultural cooperation, must be addressed via the Euro-Mediterranean dimension. According to MEPs, the Union for the Mediterranean should step up existing forms of cooperation under EuroMed in order to provide all partner countries with the chance of participating in the Union's regional programmes and corresponding policies on the basis of priorities and objectives set by mutual agreement, pointing to the importance of extending the scope of Community programmes to include participation by

partner countries, not least in the fields of education, research and professional training (student exchanges, etc.). In order to attain the ambitious objectives of the Barcelona Process, it is necessary rapidly to extend the areas of cooperation to cover water management, agriculture, food security, energy, professional training, culture, health, tourism, etc.

They strongly support the environmental dimension of the Barcelona Process and the related initiatives and projects, such as the new Euro-Mediterranean initiative for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean and the Mediterranean Project for Solar Energy.

Ease regional tension: MEPs hope that the strengthening of Euro-Mediterranean relations will provide a boost to the development of an area of peace and prosperity. This aim can only be achieved through negotiated and comprehensive settlement of the conflicts in the region. MEPs believe that the **EU must assume the role of leadership in the resolution of those conflicts** by winning the confidence of all parties involved. They stress the need to formally maintain cooperation in the field of combating international terrorism, drugs trafficking, organised crime and the trafficking of human beings and welcome the call made in the Marseilles Declaration to the parties concerned to endeavour to implement a process of gradual demilitarisation and disarmament of the Middle East with a view, in particular, to creating an area free of nuclear armaments and weapons of mass destruction.

Reinforcing the Human Rights aspect of the Barcelona Process: MEPs reiterate the importance of promoting human rights and the rule of law. They call for an assessment of what has been achieved so far and for adjustment of the instruments implemented under the partnership. They urge the Commission to set precise criteria for eligibility of those instruments, including as regards other international organisations such as the Council of Europe, and to put in place an effective system to monitor their implementation. In that connection, they call on all the parties concerned to further and promote respect for freedom of religion and belief and for minority rights and hope that a **joint policy-making and institutional framework** will be defined that facilitates greater mutual cooperation in the pinpointing of problems and in the search for common solutions. The Council and the Commission are called upon to enshrine the promotion of human rights and democracy in the objectives of this new initiative, to further strengthen the implementation of existing mechanisms such as the human rights clause contained in the Association agreements and the setting-up of subcommittees on human rights, and to create a mechanism for the implementation of that clause in the new generation of agreements and the ENP bilateral Action Plans. They emphasise that the instruments for promoting human rights available under the European Neighbourhood Policy must be exploited to the full, guaranteeing greater political cohesion between the European institutions.

Joint migration policies: MEPs call on the different partners to inject fresh vigour into the management of joint migration policies in order to better harness human resources and exchanges between the peoples of the Mediterranean while also eschewing a ‘security-first’ approach. They consider that immigration issues must focus on the possibilities for legal migration, the combating of illegal migratory flows, on smoother integration of immigrant groups and on the exercising of the right of asylum. They highlight the importance of there being close cooperation and a spirit of joint responsibility between the Member States of the European Union and the Southern Mediterranean countries. They note that the agreements between the European Union and Member States, of the one part, and the Mediterranean countries, of the other part, provide for cooperation measures in the field of immigration and political asylum, including the funding of immigration centres, and urge the European Union and Member States to verify that human rights and fundamental freedoms are being fully respected in those centres.

Fight poverty and reinforce exchanges: MEPs consider that, in order to permit the creation of a mutually beneficial Euro-Mediterranean free trade area, the economic and commercial initiatives of the Union for the Mediterranean must favour the economic growth of the region, help improve its integration into the world economy and contribute to reducing the development gap between the Northern and Southern Mediterranean, while boosting social cohesion. They also stress the need to encourage young

people to create small businesses and believe it essential to achieve concrete and tangible targets in the social field; points out in this regard that the objective of a free trade area cannot be measured simply in terms of economic growth, but also and above all in terms of job creation; points out that youth and female unemployment is the foremost social emergency in the Mediterranean countries. They invite the Southern Mediterranean partner countries to develop south-south trade, as in the Agadir Economic Agreement signed by Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.