Relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries

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The European Parliament adopted, by 521 votes to 44 with 13 abstentions, a resolution on the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean.

The resolution 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. Plenary **expresses its concern for the recrudescence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict** which has already affected the political dialogue among the partners of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Parliament hopes that the cooperation will gather pace again as soon as possible, making its contribution to the shared goal of peace in the Middle East.

Institutional aspect of the Union of the Mediterranean: Parliament considers that the Secretariat will be able to demonstrate major potential for revitalising EuroMediterranean relations thanks to its operational capacity and the political value of its composition. It agrees that, from an EU perspective, the co presidency must be compatible with the external representation of the EU in accordance with the Treaty provisions in force and hopes in this regard, on the assumption that the Treaty of Lisbon will enter into force, that the European Union will ensure consistency and continuity in its representation in the new institutions of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Clarify projects and strengthen financing: Parliament points 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. It reiterates 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, Parliament supports 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. It emphasises the need to include regional and local authorities in the new institutional framework as well as members of the civil society. Parliament underlines that **participation in the Union for the Mediterranean does not constitute an alternative to enlargement of the EU** and does not affect the accession prospects of any current or future candidate state.

Extend the scope of action: Parliament requests 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. It stresses the need for an extensive overhaul of Euro-Mediterranean policy as a whole that strengthens its **political dimension**. It also takes 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 the Parliament, 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. Cooperation should also be sought in the area of energy.

Ease regional tension: Parliament hopes 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. Parliament believes that the **EU must assume the role of leadership in the resolution of those conflicts** by winning the confidence of all parties involved. Against this background, it welcomes 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: Parliament reiterates the importance of promoting human rights and the rule of law. It considers that, in order to ease tensions around the Mediterranean, intercultural and inter societal understanding among its peoples must be improved and it calls 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**.

Joint migration policies: Parliament calls 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. It considers 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. It highlights 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. Parliament urges the European Union and Member States to verify that human rights and fundamental freedoms are being fully respected in detention centres.

Fight poverty and reinforce exchanges: Parliament considers that all areas of cooperation should be covered. It also considers 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, whilst boosting social cohesion.