

# Beyond Paris Summit: Prospects for Regional Co-operation in the Mediterranean

**By Stephen C. Calleya and Demetris K. Xenakis**

Professor Stephen C. Calleya is Director of the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, with the title of Ambassador as an advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dr. Dimitris K. Xenakis is Lecturer of International Politics at the Department of Political Science, University of Crete and Head of the Mediterranean and Middle East Unit at the Institute of International Economic Relations in Athens

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Since his electoral victory in May 2007, President Sarkozy reiterated his unwavering will to push forward a Mediterranean initiative as a main objective of France's foreign policy. Until the founding Summit in Paris last July, his idea of a Mediterranean Union -now termed Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean-, created several tensions among Europeans, as a result of diverging views on the new initiative's legitimacy, usefulness, scope of action, and participating actors. Following negotiations on several fronts, a consensus (with Germany) has finally been reached: the new initiative will not replace the Barcelona Process, but will complement it, by boosting regional and international attention in key infrastructural projects that will facilitate interaction of Mediterranean riparian states. For a long time absent from political discourse, the issue of regional integration through Sarkozy's recent proposal offers Europe and the international community an opportunity to carry out a strategic reassessment that will allow for more political attention and economic resources to be directed towards upgrading stability and economic opportunities across the Mediterranean. But to prove successful it has to tackle six critical problems that have affected the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since its' launching in 1995:

- The Barcelona Process has been too politicised, focusing on meetings rather than tangible projects/results.
- The financial instruments offered have fallen far short of expectations – needs not

being met – much less that what Eastern Europe has received to manage their transformation in the post-Cold War era.

- The partnership needs to become more future-oriented with tangible links to the grassroots it is seeking to assist.
- The new financial mechanism of the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), appears too diluted when it comes to policy objectives, too little considering the number of countries being addressed and not coherent enough especially when it comes to follow up mechanisms.
- The issue of 'joint ownership' especially when it comes to joint decision and implementation making between Europe and the Mediterranean states has also not been properly addressed.
- Serious consideration of the proposal to establish a Euro-Med Development Bank that would boost economic and financial attention in the Mediterranean has also been lacking.

The French proposal for establishing a new Mediterranean initiative helped to focus international attention on a very important geo-strategic crossroads of different civilisations and a crucial post-Cold War theatre of operations. For the re-launching of regional cooperation to be successful it is essential that important factors are addressed simultaneously to create a more conducive climate. A concerted international effort is needed to address the following issues:

- The Palestinian issue needs to be resolved – the post Annapolis phase of diplomacy must deliver some positive steps with a two state solution possible.
- The rise of terrorism and the global war against terrorism dominates contemporary security discourse. An effort must take place to enhance strategic cooperation in this sector.
- The growing call for political reform in the Arab world must be supported by the international community.
- The rise of political Islam must be better accommodated by both Europe and the US. The West has so far failed to engage Islamic political movements.

- The slowdown of EU political integration as a result of the Reform Treaty saga has stalled its engagement in the Mediterranean. After the Lisbon compromise, any future ratification of the Treaty must guarantee with a new focus on the Mediterranean.
- As a result of increase in global competition both China and India are superseding the Mediterranean when it comes to competitiveness. A Euro-Med strategy to address this reality is required.
- The increase in illegal immigration trends is a main issue of contention. The EU must adopt a comprehensive policy to address this major both humanitarian and security related issue.
- Future EU enlargements that may see the EU expand from 27 to 35 should not result in further marginalisation of the Mediterranean in the EU's agenda.
- The slowdown in EU economic growth, with the Lisbon Strategy having not yet deliver results, is preventing the EU from focusing more actively on its external agenda.
- The lack of regional integration in the Mediterranean is a major handicap preventing closer political and economic relations. To date no serious south-south Mediterranean regional forum has emerged that the EU can engage with – perhaps the Arab League could assume this role, with the initiative by Malta to promote EU/Arab League relations serving as a mechanism to spur such relations.

When it comes to addressing regional security challenges the list of threats and risks is a daunting one. The plethora of the security challenges associated with the North-South debate includes illegal migration, terrorism, religious intolerance and the lack of human rights. Across the region geopolitical and geoeconomic indicators are not positive. Foreign direct investment is lacking, intra-Mediterranean trade remains limited, north-south economic disparity is resulting in a permanent poverty curtain across the Mediterranean, the demographic time-bomb continues to escalate, unemployment continues to increase, illegal migration has reached alarming levels, illiteracy remains a very high levels, and an escalation of ongoing conflicts remains a serious concern. The indivisibility of security between Europe and the Mediterranean is the key reason for both the EU and the Mediterranean states to support the new initiative. European and Mediterranean partners

need a critical reassessment of their regional cooperation strategies, with clearly defined objectives and instruments to advance long-term objectives and a clear sense of priorities. Important questions arise here, including, what sort of regional cooperation makes sense? Where is there a chance of advancing? In the case of the Mediterranean, the task of overcoming the obstacles that are hampering regional cooperation must consist of better management of ongoing regional efforts and more effective monitoring of goals being sought. A road map that stipulates short, medium, and long-term phases of region-building is necessary if any progress is to be registered in establishing a Euro-Mediterranean community of values. All international institutions with a Mediterranean dimension should provide their think tank platform to map out such a strategy so that a Union of diverse Mediterranean states becomes a reality in the near future. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Mediterranean runs the risk of becoming a permanent fault-line between the prosperous North and an impoverished South. The key development to watch in the next decade will be to see whether the phase of cooperative competition that has dominated post-Cold War relations to date is eventually superseded by an era of conflictual competition. If this age of socio-economic indifference scenario does take hold, disorder will dominate Mediterranean relations and as resources are depleted, the region will become an economic wasteland. The only way this scenario can be avoided is if the Barcelona Process is overhauled, international institutions such as the World Bank, OECD, and the IMF become more altruistic in their dealings with the region, and the Mediterranean countries themselves adopt a self-help mentality. Rather than undermine or diminish the significance of the Barcelona Process, the growing socio-economic disparities across the Mediterranean underlines further the significance of the Barcelona Process, the only multilateral process of its kind in the area. The failure of the Barcelona Process to register significant advances has forced Euro-Mediterranean strategists to reconsider what policy mechanisms might be introduced to stimulate progress toward the achievement of its' founding objectives. These mechanisms include greater attention to specific sub-regional trends that are currently manifesting themselves around the Mediterranean and greater attention to the domestic prerequisites of transnational cooperation. If the EU wants to promote regional integration in

the Mediterranean in the short term, it must seek to support more directly all sub-regional groupings that can have a positive impact on the conflictual patterns of regional relations. A sub-regional approach does not entail formal dissolution of the Barcelona project. All current and prospective members could maintain their membership, whatever their status in sub-regional groups (whether defined by geography or by functionality). This could facilitate a more efficient operation of other sub-regional groupings by compartmentalizing the Israeli-Arab conflict resolution. Regardless of whether this has been a real impediment or merely a diversion; it has nevertheless complicated Barcelona proceedings, sometimes to the point of paralysis. Pending a resolution of the conflict, minimizing if not eliminating the number of forums in which Israelis and Arabs participate together might facilitate more focused attention by all parties on the economic, social, and governance issues that are at the heart of the EU's post-Cold War Mediterranean experiment. All extra-regional actors, with an interest in ensuring that future relations in the Mediterranean remain peaceful and more prosperous, including NATO and the US must act to ensure that the Middle East is not left to collapse as a result of an attitude of indifference. International organizations must guard against adopting an attitude of indifference when it comes to securing a peaceful future for this region. The outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other regional conflicts will have a major bearing on the future of regional relations. Geographical proximity and stability in the Mediterranean dictates that the EU needs to try and influence dynamics in the Middle East more systematically than it has been in recent years. Failure to do so will continue to stifle attempts to strengthen regional relations through the Barcelona Process and also have a negative impact on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy's agenda and therefore in the development of President Sarkozy's initiative. The French initiative must aim at reviving and recalibrating the Barcelona Process by building on the pattern of relations that exists today: to create a 'Barcelona Plus' situation where Euro-Mediterranean relations are truly re-launched on a more solid footing. It offers an opportunity to spur the resurgence of sub regionalism – intensify sub regionalism and bilateral interplay. It also offers the chance to map out a more action oriented and more target focused agenda. However, it will be necessary to engage both EUs' and Mediterranean states' leadership and

political will. It will also need political focus and practical input from business and civil society, from both sides of the Mediterranean. The task is huge. The success or failure of regional cooperation will determine whether the Mediterranean will become an area of peace and prosperity or continue to struggle as an underdeveloped hotbed of tensions and violent conflicts.