

# **New Challenges in the Relation between the European Union and the Mediterranean**

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## *Abstract*

*With the unforeseen calls for democracy and change from the Middle Eastern and North African countries the political terrain of the region has profoundly changed and new challenges have made their way in the old framework of relation between the European Union and its southern neighbors. The aim of the paper is to assess the impact of the contemporary events on the relation between the European Union and the Mediterranean neighbors. It will draw from the analysis on the historical course of relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries and it will highlight the main initiatives and consequences of the adopted practices in the region. In the end this paper will emphasize the implications of this collaboration on the region.*

**Keywords: European Union, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, European Neighborhood Policy, Arab Spring, democracy.**

## **Introduction**

Aware of the importance of a stable Neighbourhood the European Union used different policies and instruments, that aimed to bring stability, prosperity, the respect of human rights, the rule of law and good governance in the Mediterranean region. From regional perspectives to individual approaches, from political to socio-economic aspects, the EU has foreshadowed as a prominent and constant player in the region. However, the events that started on December 2010 with the protest of Mohamed Bouazizi against his treatment by the Tunisian police, was not a foreseen event by the long standing partner of the Mediterranean countries. Moreover, the Arab Spring impelled the relation of the Middle East and North Africa countries with the European Union with new dynamics that exceeds the traditional regional boundaries.

To assess the impact of the contemporary events on the relation between the European Union and the Mediterranean, this paper will examine the historical course of relation between the EU and the Mediterranean and it will analyze how the European practices affected the regimes, the economies and the societies of the South. What have been the changes brought by these initiatives, how these practices affected the region and what are the consequences of the adopted practices on the region? Furthermore this paper will analyze the Global Mediterranean Policy, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean as well as what has been achieved, what are the benefits and the costs of the partnership, and what are the new challenges given the Arab uprisings? Last but not least, the paper will focus on emphasizing the overall implications of this collaboration on the Mediterranean region.

## **The Global Mediterranean Policy**

The first formal attempt of establishing institutional linkages between the European Community and the Mediterranean countries came in the early 1960s when a number of special association and trade agreements were signed with all the Mediterranean countries,

except Algeria.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1970s the European Community went further and deepened the relation with the southern Mediterranean states by launching the Global Mediterranean Policy. The novelty brought by the Global Mediterranean Policy was the regional dimension of all the riverian countries. The European Community stressed "the communalities and the existent linkages among the Mediterranean states" and emphasized their regional dimension as belonging to a single region, the Mediterranean. In EC's words, the Mediterranean was no longer a generic geographical expression but indicated instead a specific group of countries, roughly homogenous among themselves.<sup>2</sup> The idea of promotion of a regional policy was based on a global approach and a development policy, meant to support its economic progress. The European Community provided unilateral free access to the European market for industrial goods and limited concessions for specific agricultural products originating from the Mediterranean countries. This initial framework was later improved with technical and financial cooperation intended to back economic development and stimulate cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> This initial framework proved to have a positive impact on the trade for the Mediterranean countries by increasing the exports of industrial goods to European Community markets from 1979 onwards. In terms of manufactured products the overall share of total Mediterranean exports doubled from 28 % to 56 % between 1979 and 1994.<sup>4</sup>

However through the commercial agreements the European Community was aiming to obtain much more than an ascending trend in the manufactured trade. Relying on the market logic, the EC hoped that the introduction of free trade will oblige the partners to adopt more and more elements of the market economy and to reduce the role of the state in the economy.<sup>5</sup> The European Community believed that the gradual spreading of market forces will have deep effects on the societies as well: it will raise the standard of living of the population, it will create new power centers that will want to participate in the political decision making, it will weaken the role of the military and authoritarian leaders and it will enhance the transparency of the system. Moreover, the policy was aiming to loosen the grip of the various political and

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<sup>1</sup> Saleh M. Nsouli, Oussama Kanaan, Amer Bisat, "The European Union's new Mediterranean strategy", *Finance and Development*, September 1996, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Federica Bicchi, "The European Origins of Euro-Mediterranean Practices", *Working Papers*, No. 12, 2004, Centre for the Analysis of Political Change, Berkley California, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ricardo Gomez, "The EU's Mediterranean Policy: common foreign policy by the backdoor?", in J. Peterson and H. Sjursen (eds.), *A common Foreign Policy for Europe? Competing vision of the CFSP*, London, New York, Routledge, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Saleh M. Nsouli, Oussama Kanaan, Amer Bisat, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen C., Calleya, *Evaluating Euro-Mediterranean Relations*, Routledge, USA and Canada. 2005.

family networks that were present in the economic and business affairs. Although this logic seemed to be pragmatic and correct, the reform was impossible to be done without the help of the political elites of the region. The Mediterranean countries, and especially their leaders did not acknowledge that they have to contribute themselves to the good of their societies and that such reforms mean more prosperity, better education and less social tensions and unrest.

With all the difficulties, the dialogue between the two parts of the Mediterranean continued with the establishment of structural funds in 1988. Also, the European Community supported the establishment of the Arab-Maghreb Union as a means of advocating political dialogue and possibly regional integration. In parallel, individual EC states launched the "5+5" dialogue<sup>6</sup> which brought five countries from Europe<sup>7</sup> and five from the Maghreb<sup>8</sup> together with the aim of developing political dialogue and cooperation.

Although the European Community deployed considerable expenses of effort and resources, both human and financial, the only prominent influence was registered in the economic relations between the two regions. The additional effects on the regimes or the population welfare of the region were inconsistent. There were no notable changes in the employment rate or the level of poverty, neither in the democratization of the region or the transparency of the systems.

### **The Barcelona Declaration and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**

The broad idea of a Mediterranean region introduced by the Global Mediterranean Policy, had survived and was taken up again, with a new momentum, in the early 1990s when a comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean concept was developed, based on more interaction between Europe and the Mediterranean.

Launched in November 1995, the Barcelona Declaration represents the cornerstone of the EU-Mediterranean relations.<sup>9</sup> The Declaration formulated the common objective of "turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation, guaranteeing peace,

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Ortega (ed.), "The European Union and the crises in the Middle East", in *Chaillot Paper*, No. 62, Paris, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Malta.

<sup>8</sup> Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia.

<sup>9</sup> Asli Süel, "From the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to the Union for the Mediterranean", *Perceptions*, Winter 2008, p. 90.

stability and prosperity". The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership established a multilateral framework of relation and represented a true novelty and a crucial step in the direction of creating a Mediterranean region. The Partnership brought together all of the EU 15 member states and 12 Mediterranean countries.<sup>10</sup>

The new strategy did not represent a break with the past, but rather a reinforcement of the past efforts.<sup>11</sup> The strategy was aiming to reach more ambitious objectives than the previous attempts, to stimulate the change and adjustments on the southern shores, to open up societies through dialogue, trade, private investments, movement of people and freedom of information. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was covering extensive areas and was structured in three main *baskets*: the "Political and Security Partnership", the "Economic Partnership" and the "Social and Cultural Partnership". The first dimension emphasized the need to foster cooperation on political and security issues, with important partnership-building measures. The Political and Security Partnership encompassed stringent issues as the fight against terrorism<sup>12</sup>, crisis management and conflict prevention, civil protection and good governance, political reform and promotion of human rights. The second dimension of the Partnership strived to enhance economic and financial cooperation and aimed to create an area of shared prosperity through sustainable and balanced socio-economic development by fostering economic transition in three important ways: favoring the economic condition for growth, reforming key sectors and establishing a free trade area by 2010. The third *basket* of the Partnership aimed to enhance the cultural and intercultural dialogue, bringing people and organizations closer together, from the both sides of the Mediterranean. It emphasized the importance of cultural dialogue, the respect for fundamental rights, the essential contribution that the civil society can make to the EMP and the need for cooperation in the field of immigration, fight against terrorism, international crime and corruption.<sup>13</sup>

Assessing the Barcelona Process and its effects on the Mediterranean region we can distinguish some successes but with extremely modest results compared to the costs of the

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<sup>10</sup> Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Turkey, Cyprus and Malta. (After the enlargement from 2004 of Cyprus and Malta, the number of Mediterranean partners reduced to ten).

<sup>11</sup> Saleh M. Nsouli, Oussama Kanaan, Amer Bisat, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Asli Süel, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, *Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference*, Brussels, available at [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2005/july/tradoc\\_124236.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2005/july/tradoc_124236.pdf).

process.<sup>14</sup> The primary success of the EMP, which otherwise did not involve any cost from the Mediterranean, was that it was the only political institution which managed to continue bringing Mediterranean states together for specific cooperation schemes.<sup>15</sup> The partnership made it possible to deal with regional questions collectively and therefore the Union contributed to the definition of a neighboring region. The Union contributed to the awareness of the region throughout the EU, especially in countries that are not riparian or do not historically have links with the region.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the fastest improving field of the partnership is the trade policy, mostly owing its development to the EU's economic aspiration regarding the region. Extensive trade liberalization is considered one of the most direct and tangible consequence of the Mediterranean Partnership for the Mediterranean countries, with important economic and legal implications (changes in trade flows and prices, ratification of international conventions and their reflection in the national legislation).<sup>17</sup> The creation of free trade areas with the EU is considered as a first step of integrating southern Mediterranean economies into the world economy. However, the effects of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Areas implied also numerous transitional costs as considerable administrative difficulties.<sup>18</sup>

In line with the positive achievements several projects on culture and education have been successfully implemented. Also, the European Union involvement in the region led to the creation of the academia and civil society networks. This aspect can be qualified as an extremely important step given the previous situation of the region and their absolute absence. Also, the EU assistance considerably increased under the new Mediterranean Policy. Orientated towards structural adjustments, economic reform, health care and education, the European Union assistance succeeded to respond effectively to the financial needs of the Mediterranean countries.

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<sup>14</sup> Annette Jünemann, 2004, *Euro-Mediterranean Relations after September 11. International, Regional and Domestic Dynamics*, London, Frank Cass.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Emerson, Gergena Noutcheva, "From Barcelona Process to Neighbourhood Policy, Assessments and Open Issues", CEPS Working Document, No. 220, March 2005, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ortega, Martin, "Some Comments on the European Union's Mediterranean Policy", *Chaillot Paper*, No. 64, October 2003, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ivan Martin, "The Social Impact of Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Areas: A first approach with special reference to the case of Morocco", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Autumn 2004), p. 442.

<sup>18</sup> Henri Ghesquiere, "Impact of European Union Association Agreements on Mediterranean Countries", *IMF Working Paper*, August 1998, p. 5.

However, despite these modest achievements, the European Union was criticized by prioritizing structural reforms and trade liberalisation rather than political liberalization. Furthermore, despite the big hopes, the policy headings under the security chapter have made the least progress of all. The European Union favored security and regime stability in the short run, at the expense of the long-term goal of democratisation and proliferation of human rights norms.<sup>19</sup> Although both bilateral Association Agreements between the EU and each country and multilateral documents attached great importance to progress of democracy and human rights, in practice the EU has not shown any determination to see that such undertakings are respected.

### **The European Neighbourhood Policy**

After the inconsistencies of the Barcelona Declaration, the European Commission launched a new major initiative to reinforce the relation with the southern Neighbours. Launched in 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy was developed in order to avoid the creation of new dividing lines between the enlarged European Union and the new neighbors and was formulated in hope of replicating the success of the enlargement but without offering prospects of membership. Through the European Neighbourhood framework the EU aimed to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood, “a ring of friends” with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations.<sup>20</sup> Unlike the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which emphasized multilateralism, the European Neighbourhood Policy was characterized by differentiation and bilateralism, which sought to promote EU cooperation with southern Mediterranean countries individually.<sup>21</sup>

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was aiming to reduce poverty and to create an area of prosperity, while taking into account the need to carry out economic reforms with a view to upgrading these countries to enable them to participate in the Internal Market, through law approximation and compatible rules. A key element of the European Neighbourhood Policy is constituted by the bilateral ENP Action Plans mutually agreed between the European Union and each partner country. In 2004, the Commission determined the areas on which the action plans in the ENP should focus. These areas included “political dialogue and reform,

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<sup>19</sup> Asli Süel, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, “Wider Europe-neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with our eastern and southern neighbours”, Brussels, March 2003, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03\\_104\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Martin Ortega, *op. cit.*, 2003a.

trade and measures preparing partners for gradually obtaining a stake in the EU's Internal Market, justice and home affairs, energy, transport, information society, environment, and research and innovation, and social policy and people-to-people contacts".<sup>22</sup> In the framework of these agreements, the EU provides financial and technical assistance to support the implementation efforts of the partner countries. From 2007 onwards, as part of the reform of Community assistance instruments, the TACIS and MEDA programmes have been replaced by a single instrument: **the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**.

Compared to previous initiatives such the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy put far more emphasis on democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the ENP brought on the table more funds, more trade and more cooperation for the south that increased the EU effects on the region in terms of economic development, sustainability and human rights. However, these effects did not influence the question of democracy or the employment rates or poverty reduction that remained the main issues that all Mediterranean countries faced.

### **The European Union and the Arab Spring**

The Arab Spring gave an important impetus to the European Union policy towards the region. The popular demonstration that started in Tunisia in December 2010 have touched every Arab state of the region and brought new trends and new challenges that the European Union has to handle. More important is that the European Union can turn these challenges into opportunities by playing a crucial role in the events by helping the Mediterranean countries to stabilize the region, to build constitutional states and develop democracy and rule of law. With successful political and economic transition stories in the ex-communist Eastern Europe, with diverse and wide instruments at its disposal, the European Union can be a redoubtable player in the reconstruction game of the Mediterranean countries.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the EU is their natural partner in democracy and has been actively involved in the process of building democracy in the region.

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<sup>22</sup> European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy. Strategy Paper*, Brussels, May 2004, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Tobias Schumacher, "The EU and the Arab Spring: Between Spectatorship and Actorness", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2011, p. 108.

The EU's response to the Arab Spring began with the Commission Communication of 8<sup>th</sup> of March when the ambitious *Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean* was launched.<sup>24</sup> The Union actions were meant to promote a negotiated settlement of the conflict and to demonstrate the importance of Europe's role in the Arab Spring and the Middle East Peace Process. The New Partnership promised a new start that places the promotion of democracy and human rights at the central of its approach. The new initiative wants to be a joint commitment to common values, the advancement towards higher standards of human rights, the rule of law and good governance.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in the new approach, the European Union stresses the differentiation and conditionality. Despite the commonalities of the region, the EU aims to focus on a differentiated approach for every country of the region, acting after the specificities of each of them. The partnership represent an incentive-based approach based on a differentiation "more for more"<sup>26</sup>, those that go further and faster with reforms will be able to count on greater support from the European Union. The EU stressed the need for faster and more ambitious political and economic reform in order to assure the political participation, the freedom and the employment opportunities. Furthermore, in the *Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity*, the European Union emphasized its support to the democratic and constitutional reform process. Judicial reform, enhanced transparency and fight against corruption are considered of particular importance in this process. The Union support for democratic transition includes support to establish an appropriate legal framework for holding of elections and the deployment of an important number of instruments designed to back up the democratic transition.

Furthermore, two months after the "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean", the European Union launched a new and ambitious European Neighbourhood Policy that confirmed the European engagement with its neighbours and established a new framework that is aiming to promote "deep and sustainable democracy with economic prosperity".

The EU initiatives are vital for the development of the Mediterranean countries. The way the EU will succeed the transition will have an important impact not only on the specific country

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<sup>24</sup> European Commission, Joint Communication: *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, Brussels, 08.03.2011.

<sup>25</sup> Paul James Cardwell, "Mapping out Democracy Promotion in EU's External Relations", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 16, 2011, pp. 26-28.

<sup>26</sup> Štefan Fülle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.

but also on the region, given the chain of events that characterizes the pan-Arabic societies. As Catherine Ashton noted “the future of the Arab Spring depends on Tunisia and Egypt becoming success stories”.<sup>27</sup> What happens in the leading countries of the Arab Spring will send vital messages elsewhere. In Egypt, the EU is ensuring the free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections respecting in the same time the local ownership of the reform process and in Tunisia the EU implemented with success a Task Force that will allow the improvement of coordination of European and international support.

## **Conclusion**

The European Union’s impact on the southern Mediterranean is marked by contradictory outcomes. Both, the Global Mediterranean Policy, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or the European Neighbourhood Policy brought successes and inconsistencies. While on one side the EU succeeded important reforms in trade liberalization (for example over the years the Mediterranean countries recorded upward flows) on the other hand the EU did not bring any positive changes in the political and social order of the region. However before labeling the European initiatives as failures it is important to note the ex-ante situation of the Mediterranean countries, before the EU initiatives. Although the EU did not bring clear changes over the times, the Union has the merit of installing the values of the democratic world in the Arab countries of Middle East and North Africa.

Based on values such as justice, democracy and freedom the uprisings have shown that the democratic values had an important echo on the region. Now, the Arab Spring opened new challenges where the European Union can play a crucial role by responding effectively to the demands and aspirations of the peoples of the region.

The transition process of the southern Mediterranean has to be supported by a realistic approach, where the European Union can led the way as a long-standing partner of the Mediterranean countries and also as an experienced leader of the transitional processes. Achieving the necessary coherence between the political reforms and economic and social policies are a sure guarantee of EU’s success in the region and the way the EU can transform the contemporary Mediterranean challenges into great opportunities beneficial for the

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine Ashton, *Speech on North Africa and the Arab world*, Strasbourg, 6 July 2011.

European Union itself, for the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa and also for the rest of the globalized world.

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