

The Union for the Mediterranean What has it changed and what can be changed in the domain of security?

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No. 4 / December 2009

This Policy Brief focuses on Euro-Mediterranean relations in the field of security. It analyses the treatment given to the security agenda in the Barcelona Process, noting that regional conflicts have undermined the development of cooperation in this field and that the partners have opted for the more pragmatic approach of bilateral or sub-regional frameworks. The paper also looks at the new Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and finds that, as far as security cooperation is concerned, there is a significant degree of continuity: the UfM remains hostage to the Arab-Israeli conflict, while attempting to work on politically less sensitive issues (such as civil protection) and exploring more flexible formats. Given this situation, the authors argue for a redoubling of the EU's efforts towards a Middle East Peace Process, and for a strategy on how to deal with security cooperation, even in adverse situations.



Research for this Policy Brief was conducted in the context of INEX, a three-year project on converging and conflicting ethical values in the internal/external security continuum in Europe, funded by the Security Programme of DG Enterprise of the European Commission's Seventh Framework Research Programme. The project is

coordinated by PRIO, International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. For more information about the project, please visit:
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International Peace Research Institute, Oslo

THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

WHAT HAS IT CHANGED AND WHAT CAN BE CHANGED IN THE DOMAIN OF SECURITY?

INEX POLICY BRIEF No. 4 / DECEMBER 2009

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Everything seemed to indicate that the Euro-Mediterranean partnership was entering a new phase on the 13th of July 2008. The Paris summit gave birth to the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) under the auspices of France, with the cooperation of Egypt and the acquiescence of all the countries of the EU and the majority of the Mediterranean countries, with the exception of Libya. This Union was thus launched and captured the attention of the international community. But not before it was obliged to undergo substantial modification in order to accommodate the criticism levelled at it from both shores of the Mediterranean. Indeed, this modification went so far as to transform the very nature of the project. The initiative, which was first conceived as an alternative to the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy, evolved to complement the already existing initiatives and in the end, incorporated the ‘Barcelona *acquis*’ as a new phase of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that both analysts and stakeholders find themselves wondering where the novelty is in this new phase.

This Policy Brief focuses on changes and continuities in the field of security. It starts with a brief analysis of the dynamics that have characterised the treatment given to the security agenda in the Barcelona Process. It then explains the transition towards the UfM. Next, it analyses the treatment given to this agenda in the UfM and finally, as the ultimate goal of this paper, it outlines possible guidelines for action to boost dialogue and cooperation on security matters in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.

1. The Barcelona Process and the security agenda

The Barcelona Process was initiated in 1995 and undertook to enhance an area of peace and stability. From the very beginning it was involved in a double dynamic. On the one hand, this framework was affected by the escalations of the conflict in the Middle East, which did not block the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership but prevented substantial progress in many spheres of cooperation, especially in the field of security. On the other hand, there have been attempts to revitalise, strengthen and even reinvent a framework that, despite its enormous virtues, did not manage to meet the objectives initially established.

The effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the Barcelona Process can best be illustrated by the impossibility of reaching a consensus on a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability in the year 2000. The partners of the Barcelona Process thus opted for a more pragmatic approach. Not only was any attempt to operate in the framework of regional conflicts ruled out, but expectations were also lowered. Hence, bilateral cooperation channels were given priority, for instance within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). In the multilateral field, cooperation and dialogue have focused on aspects that are mid-way between

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domestic and external security, such as the fight against terrorism, and less sensitive political issues, such as civil protection. At the same time, sub-regional frameworks such as the '5+5' (the sub-regional dialogue bringing together Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya on issues such as foreign affairs, defence, interior, transportation, etc.) have gained momentum, profiting from the fact that they are less vulnerable to the escalade of regional conflicts in the Middle East. Southern Mediterranean officials, and particularly those working on security matters, feel more at ease in informal and flexible formats, where smaller and more pragmatic projects are implemented and where its members are on an equal footing.

The issues of migration and border control deserve a special mention here as they have been increasingly securitised. Present on the Euro-Mediterranean agenda since the very beginning, the first differences of opinion between EU and Mediterranean Partners on this area emerged when drafting the Barcelona Declaration. Countries such as Spain and France demanded commitments regarding readmission agreements, while North African countries asked for the rights of regular migrants living in the EU to be ensured. Such a gap in perceptions and priorities explains the lack of progress in this specific area during the second half of the nineties. Later on, several factors, such as the increasing importance for the EU of the Justice and Home Affairs agenda since the Tampere European Council, the tragic deaths of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean Sea and the increasing attention given to the fight against terrorism, contributed to assuring the place of JHA on the Euro-Mediterranean agenda in 2002. Nonetheless, it was not until 2005 that these aspects were included as an independent chapter in the Barcelona Process. The thinking behind this inclusion was that an effective dialogue and cooperation on migration control could not exclusively rely on security actions and that a more comprehensive approach, which would include developmental policies, should be implemented in cooperation with the Mediterranean partners and their African neighbours. In fact, since 2005 we can observe that some North-African countries are more willing to cooperate with the EU on migration control as irregular migration has become an internal problem in some of these countries as well.

In more general terms, two shortcomings of the Barcelona Process should be highlighted as they have also had an impact on the management of the security agenda. The first is that certain dimensions of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, such as trade liberalisation, have been given priority. The Barcelona Process relied on the belief that trade liberalisation, together with accompanying measures, would result in progress and development and pave the path of political openness in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Those future democratic governments would give up violence as a tool to settle differences. Tracing a causal chain whose starting point was the economic dimension, the practice of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership overlooked the fact that the Barcelona Process had been designed in such a way as to achieve the harmonious development of the political, economic and social agenda.

A second structural problem affecting Euro-Mediterranean relations is the asymmetry of leadership between north and south and, consequently, the Mediterranean partners' weak identification with the Barcelona Process. These patterns shape a relation that, despite being initially designed in terms of equality, in practice ended up adopting a donor-recipient approach. In the field of security this resulted, on the one hand, in an agenda tailored to the needs and concerns of the European countries and, on the other hand, in a widespread perception of the Southern Mediterranean countries as territories in which the EU could delocalise some of its EU security policies (e.g. detention camps for irregular migrants).

2. From the Barcelona Process to the Union for the Mediterranean

The UfM is not just a name given to a new phase of the Barcelona Process but is an attempt at revitalisation and reform. It is also an evolution of the initiative proposed by Nicolas Sarkozy,

which moved further away from the European logic as a result of pressure exerted on him by actors such as the European Commission, Italy, Spain and Germany, in particular.

One of the most significant changes relates to the new institutional setting (i.e. the creation of a co-presidency and a permanent secretariat). The aim of this reform is twofold: to increase political dialogue and to achieve a more egalitarian relationship between the EU countries and the Mediterranean partners. In order to meet this goal, regular Euro-Mediterranean summits and more frequent ministerial meetings should be held. Alongside this, a new co-presidency will enshrine a greater balance between the EU and its partners. It was also agreed that a secretariat for the UfM be set up, outside the communitarian framework, with its headquarters in Barcelona. This secretariat should play an important role in raising funds for a new type of cooperation project.

The cooperation projects will focus on six areas: solar energy, civil protection, higher education and the Euro-Mediterranean university, de-pollution of the Mediterranean, business development initiatives and maritime and land highways. Unlike the traditional Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the UfM invites its members to opt for flexible multilateralism (not all the countries need to be involved in every single project) and they are supposed to find new sources of finance, be they public or private.

These changes in the functioning of the UfM reflect new priorities. While energy became more important, other dimensions of the Barcelona Process, such as the promotion of democracy, the safeguard of human rights or the enhancement of the role of civil society have remained in the background. In other words, the traditional emphasis on economic cooperation still prevails over any other aspect of the action plans. Obviously, this has an impact on the attention given to security issues.

3. The Union for the Mediterranean and security issues

The original idea put forward by Sarkozy to set up a Mediterranean Union overlooked security and defence issues. The speech given in Tangiers on October 2007 is an example of this. In this speech, the elected President of the French Republic pointed to sustainable development, energy, transport and water as the spheres in which it was necessary to put the greatest efforts, but there was no mention of security. In fact, some of the initial approaches intending to exclude the Middle East countries from the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean went along the same lines: to minimise the impact of regional conflicts, especially of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Nevertheless, security issues were cautiously uploaded onto the UfM agenda. Firstly, the foundational text of the UfM not only mentioned the goals set by the Barcelona Declaration but ratified the aspiration to promote disarmament processes, a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and the implementation of confidence-building measures. However, as in the Barcelona Process, there is little hope of overcoming this challenge and moving from rhetoric to action.

Secondly, in line with the Barcelona Process, it included cooperation in civil protection as the only project related to security issues. As the text mentioned above, this is a less politically sensitive issue than disarmament or regional conflict. Nobody questions the fact that the achievements in cooperation concerning civil protection, for example through an early warning and response mechanism at a Euro-Mediterranean level, could have a positive impact on the daily security of citizens within the Euro-Mediterranean area. Moreover, this field can easily lend itself to the development of multilateral and flexible projects that do not necessarily involve every partner of the UfM. Hence, this fits in with the new UfM working methodology.

Thirdly, we observe that UfM texts condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, referring to the Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism, established in

2005. Nevertheless, no significant progress has been made in reaching a consensus on the definition of terrorism. This does not seem to be a priority in the UfM's dialogue framework.

Fourthly, it is worth recalling that many analysts interpreted the French President's proposal to create a Mediterranean Union as a platform to push for greater cooperation in the fight against irregular migration. However, there has not been any substantive step in that direction; migration control is almost absent from the UfM debates and the Paris summit recently confirmed the need to promote an orderly and managed legal migration, in order to combat illegal migration and foster links between migration and development through a comprehensive, balanced and integrated approach. Thus, there is no significant evolution in the treatment of migration compared to the approach of the Barcelona Process. This does not mean that the EU members do not try to push their southern neighbours to tighten the control of their borders. It simply means that European countries prefer to express these demands through bilateral channels rather than within a multilateral framework.

Fifthly, it becomes clear that the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a serious obstacle for the development of the UfM. Forms of flexible multilateralism as foreseen in the UfM could contribute to bypass certain difficulties. However, the reinforcement of political dialogue and the enhancement of the new institutional structure, especially the co-presidency, expose the UfM to the ups and downs of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Gaza crisis towards at end of 2008 or the announced suspension of Istanbul's meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers' (scheduled in November 2009) illustrate the increased vulnerability of the UfM.

4. Guidelines to foster cooperation in the domain of security

Many believe that currently – with the open and long-lasting Arab-Israeli conflict – Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the domain of security is unlikely to achieve any substantial results. Members of the UfM therefore have four different options: (1) to abandon any ambition in this field; (2) to try and go to the root of the problem, (3) to try to bypass the current obstacles and explore new ways of cooperation or (4) to continue with the current ambiguity.

We believe that the first and the fourth options are detrimental to both the EU's long-term interests and contradict the spirit of the European Security Strategy, which points to the need to continue the “engagement with Mediterranean partners, through more effective economic, security and cultural cooperation in the framework of the Barcelona Process”. However, the European Security Strategy also affirms that “the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe” and that “without this, there will be little chance of dealing with other problems in the Middle East”. Thus, it seems that the EU itself acknowledges that there is a need to go to the root of the problem.

At this point, we are facing the crux of the matter: do the EU and its member states have any capacity to change the course of the events in the Middle East? The EU is aware of the fact that it does not have the capacity to go it alone or much less deal with divergent points of view within the EU, as was the case during the war in Lebanon in 2006 and the offensive in Gaza in 2008-09. However, if the EU holds a common and coherent position and achieves a transatlantic consensus and roadmap on this issue, it can make an effective contribution to the resumption of the Middle East Peace Process.

If this peace process remains deadlocked, the EU and the Mediterranean partners should at least explore how they can keep the channels of communication open. Since this is the most likely scenario, this paper concludes with the following specific recommendations:

- *Keep multilateral dialogue alive.* Even if the UfM is unlikely to obtain results in the field of security and is facing the same problems as the Barcelona Process, it is nonetheless a valuable framework. It should be kept in a state of semi-hibernation, ready to be used again if the circumstances in the Middle East permit it.

- *Preserve valuable aspects of the Barcelona acquis.* Among these aspects one could note general orientations, such as the idea that parallel progress is needed in the political, security, economic and cultural arenas. Also sectoral elements such as cooperation in civil protection or the comprehensive approach when tackling migration should be preserved.
- *Be aware that the most sensitive issues in the domain of security will be discussed and implemented at a bilateral or subregional level.* This is particularly true if the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to block regional-scale dialogue. However, even if this were solved, the most delicate issues would continue to be discussed in smaller and more informal fora, where secrecy prevails.
- *Preserve the core values that the EU is supposed to protect and project.* The EU and its member states should keep in mind that cooperation in the domain of security with third countries' authorities will only be useful if ordinary citizens benefit from it and it does not compromise the rights and liberties of the citizens of either the EU, or the partner countries.