

# Barcelona 2005: The Democratic Issue Comes into the Picture

Keys

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From the point of view of Euro-Mediterranean politics, 2005 was almost entirely marked by the Barcelona Summit and its preparation. During the last twelve months, the Neighbourhood Policy was analysed and discussed, from the need to attain Barcelona's objectives. During the Mediterranean year the most important issue was that of political reforms even though the Summit did not come to an agreement – and was far from it – on necessary measures to take in order to establish a Community of Democratic States. Nor any measure was taken towards the resolution of conflicts in the area which cause enormous distress and complicate the inclusion process. In the Palestinian-Israeli case, the Barcelona Summit even assumed deterioration with respect to previous declarations made in common. The objective of making the Summit the turning point from which to relaunch the Barcelona Process and overcome the enormous difficulties which it was going through was not achieved, mainly due to the absence of almost all State leaders from Southern countries and to not having approved the common declaration on the Partnership's future. Despite this, the Summit took a step in the right direction, since it reinforced the community dimension of the Barcelona Process as a long-term experience and increased its multilateral legitimacy thanks to the approval of a five year work program as well as that of an Anti-Terrorism Conduct Code. Paradoxically, it could be that the most meaningful aspect of the Summit was its preparation process and the debates it caused both at political and civil society level – these have to be maintained.

## Political Reforms at the Centre of the Debate

Barcelona's Summit took place seven months following Syria's departure from Lebanon and five months after the Lebanese elections, at the time when the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in Morocco was debating the human rights violations committed during the regime of Hassan II. The central issue discussed then was not, as in 1995, how to reach economic stability and development, but how to encourage political reforms and democracy. Let's not forget that the Mediterranean is at the centre of a worldwide strategic debate. Since the 11th of September, the Mediterranean region remains the priority of the United States Government causing the tragic consequences which everyone is aware of. Edgar Morin defines the region as "the tinderbox of the world", where the crisis in Iraq and its transformation lured by radical movements, has to be added to the Palestinian issue, which still does not seem to resolve itself. Paradoxically, the United States Government, which previously contributed in placing political reforms on the international agenda, by subsequently justifying its intervention in Iraq in the name of democracy, cast a dark shadow of incoherence and unilateralism on the support measures for transition processes. Given the context, the Summit intended to find a common path to encourage the democratic transformation process in Southern countries, resolve the conflicts that prevent the attainment of the fixed peace and inclusion objectives and to face the problems deriving from social inequalities. This basically meant demonstrating that it was possible to extend the use of soft power to the South in order to include diversity, which lies at the base of the success of the European Enlargement Policy, including Turkey. The EuroMeSCo report's proposal, which considered it necessary to attribute maximum priority to achieving the democratic objective of the Barcelona

Process, was pointing precisely in this direction. The proposal was accepted by various countries, but the scepticism of some European States and the opposition of a great number of Southern countries, prevented the definition of a clear goal in order to concretise the project involving the creation of a Community of Democratic States. Nevertheless, despite everything, today the democratic issue is part of the Euro-Mediterranean agenda. The work program approved in Barcelona includes the establishment, by the European Union, of a financial body responsible for providing a significant support to political reforms. And, although with respect to this mechanism no clear reference to democracy was made as the European Union wished, following the Barcelona Summit the EU holds multilateral legitimacy to support those political reform processes which comply with the democratisation objectives. This is, without doubt, one of the Summit's most important achievements, if not the most important. Now this mechanism, needs substantial resources; this will depend on the quotation assigned to it by the new Union Budget and on the number of Southern States interested in its task. Moreover, it is important to point out that the work program sets dialogue on human rights as a priority and that the Code of Conduct binds the fight against terrorism to the protection of fundamental rights. Despite this, the program promoting democratisation, which includes free elections taking place and the protection of human rights, lacks concrete objectives – *benchmarking* – which is not what the EuroMeSCo report was suggesting. This was not possible due to some Arab countries' objection, as they continue privileging the stability and development strategy.

### **Civil Society Involvement and Intentions to Conduct it**

The procedure leading to the Summit allowed attainment of further insights into the Barcelona Process, which became the object of analysis and interest for different sectors of Northern and Southern societies. One of the most significant aspects of this process was the collaboration of a great number of civil society organisations in preparing the Summit. Throughout 2005, numerous articles, studies and reports were published and dozens of congresses took place on how to relaunch the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. This debate contributed in defining an intellectual

*acquis* which, essentially, was trying to answer the question: Is it possible to extend the area of peace and democracy to the South through inclusion? The EU Council of Ministers commissioned EuroMeSCo and FEMISE to elaborate two reports which were discussed by senior officials and were the object of many observations.

As for the role of civil society, 2005 leaves behind a contradictory overview. On one part, it made clear that one of the best practices of the Barcelona Process is to reserve a role for civil society, an objective crystallized in the organisation of the Civil Forum under the Luxembourgian presidency of the EU and the creation of the non governmental platform Euro-Med. Moreover, the importance of civil society was also promoted by the majority of governments on both shores, which, in April 2005, supported the creation of the Anna Lindh Foundation. However, the emergence of civil society and the increase of its level of autonomy were accompanied by some countries attempting to interfere in the appointment of its legitimate representatives; this practice worries some analysts and civil society representatives, who christened it *top down*. A good example of *top down* is represented by the Anna Lindh Foundation's election process, in which some countries' official bodies stole the role of leaders of civil society's national networks. Nevertheless, there is still reluctance to accept that the independence of civil society is one of the keys to its success in the Euro-Mediterranean inclusion process. Moreover, the country's image and its ability to take advantage of the opportunities offered by globalisation are increasingly dependent on civil society's autonomy. Some countries do not realise that for the successful and peaceful accomplishment of political transition process it is necessary to open up public space to civil society without restricting it in any way for any ideological reasons. The need to affirm the autonomy of civil society and its role within the Barcelona Process was one of the main subjects of negotiation reported on the final documents of the Summit. However, as some Southern States managed to impose a restrictive definition of civil society by including the expression "in accordance with national legislation" – a legislation that, as is known, in some countries difficults the creation of independent institutions – maybe it would have been better not to make any reference to civil society at all. Given the circumstances, the issue of civil society and its role within the Partnership comes at a critical time, which requires our best care.

## European Union: Is this the Beginning of the End of the Status-quo Policy?

Despite the failure to reach a broad agreement in order to concretise the Partnership's democratic objective, the development of the European position has to be reported. At the start of 2005, a great number of European governments were still reluctant to take on a democratic agenda and clung onto their old policy of maintaining the status quo. Although this was a burden for the Barcelona Process, in the second semester of 2005 the awareness of the need to carry out political reforms prevailed. Amongst the facts favouring the EU's change of opinion was that various countries on the Southern Mediterranean shore started abandoning authoritarianism and opening up public space to Islamist movements.

During the meetings preparing Europe's position within the Ministerial Conference in Luxembourg, there were contrasting opinions on whether it was appropriate to state very bluntly that, in order to succeed, the Partnership has to be a long-term alliance between democracies. A considerable number of states supported the proposal – laid out by EuroMeSCo – to emphasise the potential objective of the Barcelona Process: the establishment of a Community of Democratic States; for others this was an utopian and “even dangerous” practice, while a third group believed that the task involved a financial commitment which they were not prepared to take on. Finally, the most conservative participants feared that an ambitious integration program with the South would oblige them to open their borders to immigration. Because of the European hesitations and the opposing position of some Southern governments, the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting in Luxembourg ended up reintroducing the old strategy, which prioritised the objective of establishing an area of peace, security and stability. The European Commission issued a Communication against this old strategy; here, for the first time, it affirmed clearly and unequivocally that “advancing political reform towards human rights and democracy is key to achieving sustainable security and stability”. With this Communication the Commission abandoned the strategy the EU has followed for a decade, which was based on the idea that the most effective means to achieve security and stability was development. Moreover, the fact that the Commission pointed out the need to take into consideration the Islamic political activity, is unprecedented in EU documents and is highly significant.

Finally, the Commission was questioning the basis of the policy preserving the status-quo: the fear of the Islamist alternative. In tune with the Commission, the European Parliament issued a resolution underlining the need to pay more attention to human rights' violations. It is worth mentioning that amongst the tasks of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, established in 2005, there is that of encouraging dialogue on human rights and democracy.

During the British presidency of the EU, as a consequence of the development of the European attitude, the objectives to encourage democracy and the Rule of Law and specifically, the need to guarantee judicial independence, were reflected clearly and perceptibly in a Common Declaration proposal – named “common vision” – which ended up being rejected. However, despite the scepticism of some, in the second semester of 2005, the EU finally developed a new approach: prioritise political issues and, in particular, within the framework of the Barcelona Process, political reforms and respect for human rights. During the Barcelona Summit, some European government leaders, such as President Zapatero for example, stated these priorities clearly and unequivocally. Also, the importance that European countries assigned to the Euro-Mediterranean sector was reflected in the great attendance of State leaders and European Union government officials at the Summit.

However, the Union was not the only organisation introducing – although timidly – support for democratic reforms on its agenda. Some member states, such as France for example, maintained a firm attitude towards Syrian policies in Lebanon, especially after the murder of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which forced Damascus to end an occupation which lasted since 1976. This firm policy caused the alienation of President Assad, who received unequivocal signs that he was not welcome in Barcelona. The tougher attitude of some countries in the Union is particularly evident in their way of approaching the nuclear crisis caused by Iran. In fact, the anti-European reaction expressed by some Arab countries – Syria and its Lebanese allies in particular – during the cartoon crisis, was in response to the EU's change of attitude. In Gaza, the attack on the office representing the European Union was not perpetrated by Hamas, but by the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a radical group associated to Fatah, which was largely defeated in the last Palestinian elections. On the other hand, is the fact that, before Hamas' victory, the Union would have ended up adopting an

approach very similar to that of the United States. In particular, Javier Solana declared that “one cannot expect European contributors to finance violence”, which anticipated the suspension of aid coming from Brussels even if this contradicted the idea that it is necessary to hold elections in order to guarantee peace. In any case, Hamas’ victory should help Europe to perceive that Islamist movements are inevitable interlocutors. In this framework, the increasing Turkish interest for the Partnership since the beginning of the process to gain EU membership, is of particular significance; this was crystallized by the presence of its Prime Minister in Barcelona. The Turkish example, whereby an Islamist party rose to power and contributed to the country’s democratisation, is being studied with interest by the entire region.

### **The Triumph of Positive Differentiation**

In the most positive overviews carried out for the 10 years of the Barcelona Process, it is accepted that, until today, there has not been much cooperation in terms of politics and security. The main cause is the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the Israel-Syria-Lebanon axis. However, it is worth mentioning that in 2005 there have been timid signs of it opening up: Lebanon regained its autonomy and Syria did not systematically stop all debates concerning security issues. It allowed to begin a discussion on the possibility of organising a congress on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to establish the first steps for laying out a European Security and Defence Policy. A signal of this development is represented by the approval of the Anti-Terrorism Code of Conduct during the Summit. However, despite this new climate, no cooperation initiative was suggested with regards to security during the Summit. Also, it was confirmed that the rhythm and scope of political reforms during 2005, presented enormous variations from one country to the other. For this reason, it has been long argued, both in the North and in the South, that the only way to overcome the political blocking was, to combine common objectives with different path for its materialisation. In other words, slower countries cannot have the option to veto decisions made by those wishing to intensify their relations with the Union and undertake the necessary reforms for this purpose. The Neighbourhood Policy recognises differentiation and institutes a multi-bilateralism which favours

those countries prepared to implement a program of reforms. In 2005, within the Neighbourhood Policy framework, Action Plans were agreed with Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and, in Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Moldavia. The EuroMeSCo report informed on the need to integrate these plans’ objectives in/with the Partnership, and more specifically that the Partnership should introduce as its own objective that Southern States should receive access, even if only partial, to the European single market. This issue was not resolved in Barcelona, and the EU’s decision to include its Mediterranean and Eastern European neighbours in the same budget quotation, increases the risks of fragmenting and dissolving the multilateral Euro-Mediterranean project. Multi-bilateralism, at the same time, can turn relations with the European Union, in a necessary alternative for regional cooperation in Maghreb and the Middle East. However, whatever happens, positive differentiation represents a step in the right direction and has already been approved by most states in the region. This is demonstrated by the inclusion of a democratic mechanism, which has a significant differentiating character and, therefore, from the neighbouring policy, within the five years work program.

### **Summit’s Overview Summary**

The Summit was organised through a collaboration – which is unusual for events of such importance – between the British Presidency and another Member State, Spain. The experience provided positive results in many aspects, as it allowed to combine British pragmatism with the sensitivity, the commitment and the friendliness of Spain in the Mediterranean. In front of the Summit, the British suggested declaring education as the main objective within the social sector, and this is, in fact, the only area in which clear aims were set: the eradication of illiteracy by 2010 and the guarantee of equal access to education for boys and girls and access to primary education for everyone by 2015. Nevertheless, this collaboration did not manage to attract State leaders from Southern countries to the Summit. Some believe this absence is due to the irritation present in some countries’ public opinion against Tony Blair, because of the British Prime Minister’s policy in Iraq. However, regardless of this, even though there could have been a certain contagious effect, each case is independent and the main reason for the absences appears to be the

disagreement of many Southern governments with respect to the content of the European Union proposals. This could have been because of its clear affirmation of the democratic objectives of the process or even its negative aptitude towards adopting a firmer position with regards to Israeli policy in the region. During the Summit, the intransigence of the Israeli Government was almost total, to the point of preventing the realisation of a common declaration. The representatives of the Tel Aviv government – at the time Israel was undergoing an electoral campaign – adopted a particularly firm position and would not accept that the common declaration included the recognition of the importance of the UN resolutions on the Palestinian issue or the need to accept the borders established before 1967, which both come down to the same thing. This is even though these conditions were already approved during the Ministerial Council in Luxembourg. At a certain moment, Tony Blair's government believed that the necessary conditions were not met in order to adopt the Anti-Terrorist Code of Conduct and the common declaration, which caused the irritation of the Spanish government. Fortunately, the Summit was finally saved, mainly thanks to Mahmoud Abbas and to the Arab intention of avoiding the failure of a Summit, in which Spain was involved. In order to avoid the failure of the Summit, the Arab governments ended up accepting an Anti-Terrorist Code of Conduct, where there is no mention of the right to resist (referring to the Palestinian people).

The Summit did not resolve the institutional deficit of the Partnership, this was reflected in the press briefing which presented the conclusions made. This was attended by Blair, Zapatero, Barroso and Solana but there was no leader from the Southern countries.

With regard to political cooperation and the ability to face the short-term crisis, the political and security problems which affect the Mediterranean, the Summit's overview is quite poor. The same can be said for immigration, where priority was once again

given to controlling flows policies. The proposal presented by Spain, France and Morocco pointed in this direction; there was no alteration in order to introduce policies centred on what emigrants could offer to the economic and political development of the area. As for long-term policies, which could be referred to as the community dimension of the Barcelona Process, a program was approved for the next five years which is clearly pointing in the right direction and is legitimised by the existence of a multilateral context. Progress is expected in the areas of south-south integration, justice, internal security and support to political reforms. As it has been proved in the past ten years, the problem is that political and security issues and, more specifically, south-south conflicts make the Euro-Mediterranean integration process difficult and put the possibility to reach in 2010 the goal of creating a free trade area and the even more ambitious project of establishing a Community of Democratic States at risk.

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