
Revisiting euro-mediterranean cooperation in an age of uncertainty

Introduction

November 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the first Euro-Mediterranean Conference and the adoption of the Barcelona Declaration, which launched an extensive cooperation programme between the European Union (EU) and the countries of the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Despite the on-going efforts to establish a Euro-Mediterranean partnership for regional collaboration and exchange, the Barcelona process and its rejuvenated versions have failed to achieve their declared objectives. Since the mid-1990s, collaborative visions for Euro-Mediterranean partnership have fallen short in the implementation process. Today more than ever, the Mediterranean region is hampered by economic crises and political instability, putting into question the prospect for future regional integration.

This conference aims to explore the challenges, tensions and contentions involved in the processes of policy inception and implementation of a Euro-Mediterranean partnership and the potentials for future regional cooperation and integration.

Until the late 1980s, the Euro-Mediterranean policy followed a traditional approach based on trade concessions and financial cooperation. The Barcelona process represents a turning point in the Euro-Mediterranean relations that laid the foundations for a new regional partnership, broader in scope, structured around three main areas: political and security dialogue; economic and financial cooperation; and social, cultural and human dimensions. This new Euro-Mediterranean partnership was supported among others by the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), launched in 2004 along with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to help the EU support and foster stability, security and prosperity in countries located closest to its borders. The ENP provided countries in Eastern Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region access to financing in return for political, social and economic reforms. However, the top-down governance approach and bilateral dynamic that characterised the ENP overshadowed Mediterranean co-development and the co-ownership principles as envisaged in the Barcelona process. Cooperation continues to be framed by the EU and ultimately conditioned by its internal dynamics, processes and procedures.

Over the years, the Barcelona process evolved towards the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an institutionalised initiative constituted of all EU Member States in addition to 15 neighbouring countries. The UfM was established to revive the Mediterranean process of cooperation and to strengthen the relations between the EU and the countries in the *Mashriq* and *Maghrib* region with a view to increasing the potential for regional integration and cohesion. Stressing for a 'better co-ownership by all participants and for more relevance and visibility for the citizens,' the remodelling established a North-South co-presidency of the UfM and an orientation towards the support for major regional and sub-regional structuring projects in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The recent review of the ENP in 2015 highlighted the EU's political will to further strengthen the UfM as the expression of co-ownership in the management of common issues in the Mediterranean. However, dependent on the ENP for financing and facing multiple power relationships in the region and various strategic state interests, the UfM has since struggled to address common Euro-Mediterranean challenges and increase the potential for regional integration and cohesion. Meanwhile, the Arab uprisings and political unrests, coupled with the influx of refugees and the EU reception crisis created a culture of antagonism rather than cooperation and witnessed the return of the sovereignty debate, the rise of xenophobia and exclusionary ideologies in many countries of the Mediterranean region.

The Sommet des Deux Rives (Summit of the Two Shores-STS), which culminated in Marseille in June 2019, was the latest effort to relaunch the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation through collaborative regional projects. The inclusion of civil society in the consultations was an encouraging shift in the regional policy-making process. However, governments continued to be masters of ceremony, and the Euro Mediterranean partnership has once again fallen short in the implementation process. The process envisaged to rejuvenate Euro-Med regional dynamics showcased the symptoms of its shortcoming. Yet again, the imbalanced power relations between the North and South of the Mediterranean overshadowed the longed-for collaboration and cooperation. Moreover, the limited avenues of communication between the EU and countries of 5+5 in the inception and the consultation process towards the Summit further highlighted the potential tension between EU mandate and the ambitions and interests of certain member states notwithstanding the internal EU tensions at the administrative and operational levels. Whereby the EU claims to have a comprehensive vision for the region, trade and economic cooperation continue to take precedence alongside security over questions of democracy and human rights reflected in the tension between the various divisions.

Beyond Europe, the situation on the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean has seriously deteriorated since the Arab Spring, hindering the prospect of subregional South-South cooperation and ultimately larger Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. A civil war menaces the very existence of the Libyan State. Authoritarian regimes are prospering in Algeria, Egypt and Turkey. Syria is far from recovering from a ten-year civil war, and nobody sees a light at the end of the tunnel for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while recent conflicts over natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean are threatening the stability of the entire region.

This raises questions to whether Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and partnership, at least in its current form, is possible at all and eventually to which extent and on which basis? Is it enough to rely on trade and economic cooperation to promote regional integration? Should political decision-makers have a more-firm stand on democratic values and human rights? What other alternative prospects of regional cooperation can be envisaged, and how can their potential be leveraged?

Assuming that lack of South-South cooperation is one of the main obstacles for an established Euro Mediterranean partnership, how can these obstacles be overcome? What mediatory role can the EU play in this process; What strategies can be adopted (national, national, multilateral) and with which instruments? How can these strategies be combined in such a context? In fact, does the EU mandate allow it to act as a fair mediator, especially in light of the EU and some member states' interest in the region? What are the conditions conducive to a successful mediation process and South-South cooperation? What role can other States play in this process?

About the call for papers

The Euro Mediterranean cooperation has been exhaustively discussed in academic and policy spheres. Several policy-oriented studies and conferences discussed good practices and successes, while others reflected on the reasons for the failure to achieve the objectives of the Barcelona Process. This conference aims to introduce a different angle to the discussion. Rather than debating what worked, and what did not work, the contributions are expected shed light on what this cooperation means and how it functions at multiple levels: political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental, including specific items related to security, migration, economic trade, investment, and sustainable development.

Specifically, the call invite academics and experts to reflect on the relational processes, practices and forms of knowledge through which first, the partnership was developed and shaped as an idea, policy and intervention and, second the way international commitments, policies and plans were translated and implemented in practice. The contributions are expected to reflect upon and shed light on both internal EU mechanisms and dynamics and the relationship between the EU and the countries of the *Mashriq* and *Maghrib*. The call also asks contributors to reflect on the challenges in the process of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and the possibilities to address these challenges and transforming the Euro-Mediterranean

partnership. Selected papers will serve to inform the debates and discussions with other experts and EU and regional policymakers.

Research themes and questions

The call invites researchers to submit proposals for papers related, but not limited, to the following themes as a means to inform the policy debates:

1. Narratives of cooperation

- a. Euro Mediterranean Cooperation: what does it mean?
- b. What are the narratives behind the Euro Mediterranean regional cooperation? How were they envisaged? What forms of knowledge inform these narratives and its implications on policy inception and implementation?

2. Inclusive/ exclusive policy inception process

- a. How a process of cooperation is conceived and policy is developed? Who are the actors, and what relational practices are involved in this process? What role is played by countries of the South, their civil societies and the private sector?

3. Policy coherence

- a. What are the challenges, contentions and tensions involved in achieving a policy consensus at the EU and regional level?
- b. How is it possible to ensure policy coherence between the EU efforts to promote democracy and human rights on the one side, and trade and security on the other side?
- c. In which way, the work of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Agencies has been coordinated (or not) with the input of political decision-makers and diplomats? Where can we find policy (in)coherences? What can we learn from successes, and how can we address pitfalls?

4. Challenges and opportunities for policy implementation

- a. How are policies translated into concrete programmes and projects on the ground, both at the national and regional level? What are the challenges involved in the process of policy translation and implementation? How are policies adapted to the recent changes and challenges in the region?

5. Obstacles to south-south cooperation

- a. What are the barriers to South-South Cooperation? How can these obstacles be overcome?
- b. What strategies can be adopted (national, bilateral, multilateral) to overcome these obstacles and with which instruments?
- c. What role can, and should the EU play in this process?
- d. What are the conditions conducive for South-South cooperation?

6. The EU as a mediator

- a. How can the EU mediate a process of a transition from bilateral cooperation to a regional/multilateral one?
- b. What can we learn from the Agadir agreement, in terms of policy and implementations, including tensions and contentions?
- c. Can the EU mediate a South-South cooperation, and how?

7. Perspectives

- a. Is the current institutional model of Euro-Mediterranean relationships relevant to achieving the official, stated, objectives of the cooperation?
- b. How can the EU build on UfM and its action plans to leverage regional cooperation?
- c. What other alternative prospects of regional cooperation can be envisaged, and how can their potential be leveraged?

The selected contributors will have the opportunity to engage in a conversation with other academics and policy-makers on the challenges, tensions and contentions involved in the realisation of the Barcelona Process, and to reflect on the potentials for future regional cooperation and integration.

The 2-day conference is planned to take place at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, in April 2021.

Depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference may be held in a dual online and in-person format to accommodate health and safety guidelines.

Submission process

The submission for the Call for Papers is open until 30/1/2021.

To participate, please submit your application to euromedconference@graduateinstitute.ch

The application should include the following:

- Your CV, list of publications and contact information;
- An extended abstract (500 – 1000 words), outlining the main issues, arguments, focus, case studies to be considered, and structure of the paper.

Organising institutions and scientific committee

The conference is organised by the Centre on Conflict Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva (IHEID), in partnership with the Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano (USI), Middle East Directions Programme and the Robert Schuman Centre of Advanced Studies at European University Institute, and in close collaboration with the Swiss Federal Office of Foreign Affairs and regional Civil Society.

Organising Committee:

Dr. Souhail Belhadj, Dr. Ibrahim Saïd, Prof. Riccardo Bocco (IHEID) and Dr. Federica Frediani (USI).

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