

10th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration: a deceiving balance

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The Barcelona Declaration with its redefinition of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership / Barcelona Process celebrates its 10th anniversary. The commitments undertaken in 1995 had been announced as being a new and wide route to follow in order to reach common and supranational objectives such as peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean region through dialogue, exchanges and cooperation. These goals have been followed by declarations of principles and interventions based on the adoption and strengthening of policies addressed to the respect for human rights, the sustainable and balanced social development, the promotion of economic and financial cooperation, the transfer of technological innovations and the drawing of a road map to establish a Free-Trade Area in 2010.

If we want to take stock of the actions undertaken till now, we can point out that after 10 years no real satisfactory result has been perceived. Furthermore, it is frustrating to observe the non-recognition of those few benefits obtained thanks to a few cooperation initiatives taken by some institutions that have effectively worked in the territory.

The obtained results have been modest and ineffective despite the financial support measures taken by the EU through the setting up of the two MEDA programmes were meant to reduce the economic imbalance between the two shores.

Roughly, only 50% of the total 6.14 billion euros committed have been used with a very limited impact on the territory and on the population.

If we want to justify the EU conduct, we can affirm that during the period in question the EU was devoting its energy and resources in the enlargement process involving the CEEC countries (Central and Eastern European Countries). The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership had therefore faded into the background in the tangle of the international relationship priorities.

Anyway, the basic organization of the initiatives

undertaken by the Barcelona Declaration was laying on doubtful foundations since the modest involvement of the private sector in the process of economic integration and the dispersal of grants destined to a manifold of subjects and themes that were so diversified to make more evident the ineffectiveness of the partnership process.

The impression is that the interventions realized have not had any tangible effect on the real economy or better they have not created a practical involvement of the operators in the partnership implementation. Interventions were perceived as being a series of disorganized and a little participatory works carried out through the adoption of traditional instruments and complex cooperation procedures based on the allocation of useless aids.

It should also be pinpointed that the difficulties met have been provoked by the persistence of conflicts in the region, by the search for local consensus, as well as by the lack of firmness in the application of reforms and in the management of those problems related to the economy and trade liberalization that halted the initiatives and limited the results potentially defined in the partnership process.

A few steps forward have surely been taken. For example, the association agreements have been made between Europe and the Mediterranean partners, but the process to establish a real regional market keeps presenting remarkable difficulties.

It seems that the point at issue is mainly due to commercial mechanisms, in particular in matters of agri-food products, which have not taken into account the specific and often imperfect conditions of each single market and of the real diversity of the economic context into which the respective commercial flows should develop.

The EU member-states strive not to grant too many concessions otherwise their production of mainly fruits and vegetables and in part also olive oil, would therefore be in competition with those products coming from the southern Mediterranean countries. Without considering that the EU imports coming from the Third Mediterranean Coun-

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tries represent about 6% of the total import of agri-food products, whereas, the partner countries import on average 40% of EU products. Moreover, the quota of exports towards the EU assigned to many Third Mediterranean Countries is not always completely satisfied for a number of reasons, such as the inadequate scheduling and curtailment of exports, the setting up of too tight quality standards and the lack of technological equipment for the storage and transport of perishable goods coming from Partner Mediterranean Countries.

It must be reasserted that the liberalization of the agri-food products exchanges should be advantageous for both parties since it will contribute to give rise to growth, employment and investments in services and infrastructures by implying partners and expertise of both Mediterranean shores. It is clear that the trade liberalization should not only be tackled considering the commercial aspects strictly speaking but it must also cover all the commerce-related sectors and processes, such as the rural development, the technical trade barriers, the health questions and the quality-promoting policy.

Hence, we can state that, through the concession agreements, the EU Mediterranean policy has led to a few satisfactory results as for the trade sector and the socio-economic and cultural relationships established in the Mediterranean basin.

There are clear-cut commercial and economic asymmetries between the two Mediterranean shores that hamper the process of opening markets and the creation of the advantages deriving from the integration process.

The association agreements, keeping a traditional setting, do not find any placing either in a context of co-partnership established to reach common objectives for the creation of regional integration forms, or in the implementation of multi-lateral agreements for a rebalancing of the dynamics of globalisation.

Briefly, the expectations created by the Barcelona Declaration have almost been completely disregarded neglecting that the Mediterranean represents an area of strategic interest not only from a commercial point of view but also from a cultural, social and political one. The EU remains the main commercial partner of the Mediterranean countries. More than 50% of the total exchanges of the region are made with the

European Union that also represents the destination of more than 70% of the exports of some countries. Given its proximity, the EU is the first direct foreign investor in the region and it is also the first source of tourism and the first destination for immigration. And it is exactly on the migratory flows we should reflect more to persuade the public institutions to make a wider evaluation of the economic and cultural integration process.

We should develop multisectorial forms of cooperation aiming at widening the production bases through a logic not only of commercial but also institutional regionalization and favouring those synergies and links between the civil societies and the local operators within a common project.

It is therefore necessary to abandon those old and inefficient systems of Mediterranean cooperation based on the commercial concessions and to become oriented towards those mechanisms which are able to exalt the territorial vocations by exploiting a few previously-unexpressed competition advantages and by delocalising the economic and rural activities that must be organized and managed by groups belonging to the civil society and knowing their own needs and potentialities. The Mediterranean cooperation should be given new tools that could prove to be greatly effective not only on production but also on society, culture, the environment and people integration.

The EU's attempt to compensate for previous mistakes by redefining its goals and proposals for the upcoming five-year period failed in last November's Barcelona summit. The results of the summit were modest due to the absence of the region's important heads of state, due to the generic nature of the proposals, and due to the impossibility of arriving at a programmatic intervention agreement. Security is a major concern for the the region, but a Mediterranean cooperation policy must not be further delayed. Whatever terminology is used in policy-making -i.e., "good neighbor" policy or simple "partnership"- less ambitious and more pertinent and circumscribed goals should be set - goals which adhere to the real problems and needs of the Mediterranean countries. Specific goal definition must be followed by programmatic intervention strategies which encourage more active public participation, some strategic flexibility, and less control from the top.