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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION Euromed Unit

Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean.

This note provides some information on progress made with the Union for the Mediterranean (UMed) project and the outstanding issues.

I - STATE OF PLAY.

The plan initially put forward by the French President for a Mediterranean Union made up exclusively of countries bordering the Mediterranean has been substantially revised to finally take the form of a Union **for** the Mediterranean that brings together the 27 EU Member States and the 10 partner countries plus Albania and Mauritania, and possibly Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Monaco, and is based on the **Barcelona Process *acquis*** and ***unifying*** projects.

This approach was endorsed by the European Council of 13 and 14 March which stated:

'The European Council approved the principle of a Union for the Mediterranean which will include the Member States of the EU and the non-EU Mediterranean coastal states. It invited the Commission to present to the Council the necessary proposals for defining the modalities of what will be called "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean"¹.

1 - Timetable

The European Commission should present its proposal in the form of a communication (guideline date **28 May**) which will allow for the inclusion of a statement by the Commission with ensuing debate and vote in plenary on a resolution at the **June plenary session in Strasbourg**.

A Heads of State and Government Summit will be held on 13 July in Paris at which a political declaration will be adopted on UMed.

These next stages were suggested at the meeting of EuroMed senior officials at which the French Ambassador Alain Leroy outlined to the representatives of the 39 countries in the Barcelona Process the key projects that will be the launch pad for UMed.

2 - Content.

A total of 21 key projects have been identified covering environmental issues (for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, access to water and the sustainable management of water resources, Mediterranean solar power programme, etc.), sustainable development

¹ see Annex 1 of the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 13 and 14 March 2008.

(agriculture, tourism, urban development), university and scientific cooperation (equivalence of diplomas, Erasmus Programmes), energy and transport, etc.

Detailed project sheets exist for just 4 of these 21 key projects. An analysis of these very technical and fairly comprehensive project sheets gives rise to three comments:

- Each project **builds on what is already in place** through European and/or UN programmes. The value added that UMed would provide is either faster implementation or wider fields of action.
- Each project should be **subject to joint governance** - to promote its take-up - with respect to its design, management and execution. This joint governance will take the form of a "steering committee", "working group" or "permanent coordination structure" although the composition and prerogatives of such structures have not been defined anywhere. Whilst it may be too early to enter into this level of detail, questions may be raised about the bureaucratic burden - one of the criticisms made of the Barcelona Process.
- Once the study phase has been completed, each project should be financed by public/private partnerships by **convening a donors' conference**. There is, however, still some room for uncertainty in carrying out the type of project envisaged by the feasibility study.

Otherwise, the idea of a joint North-South Presidency that rotates every two years and is supported by a 'lightweight secretariat' seems to be the main institutional innovation of UMed. This is, however, an old idea. It was already mooted under Barcelona but never saw the light of day for two reasons: its financing and its composition. Balanced representation would, in effect, include countries in open conflict with each other. It is doubtful that these obstacles have now been removed.

II - OUTSTANDING ISSUES.

To date, the **main concerns** expressed by the different partners from the North and the South to be clarified by the Commission communication in advance of the 13 July Summit are:

- The risks of duplication with existing cooperation frameworks.
- The appropriateness of setting up even a lightweight secretariat and issues regarding its mandate, financing, composition and seat.
- The decision-making process and the role/prerogatives of the joint Presidency.
- The synergy between the future joint Presidency and the European Union Presidency.
- The parliamentary dimension (EMPA/PAM?).

It is also difficult to see how the **structural constraints** that the Barcelona Process failed to overcome can be eliminated in the short to medium term under UMed. These are:

- The persistence of conflicts (Middle East).
- The persistence of serious political tensions (Morocco/Algeria, Syria/Lebanon).
- The low level of trade and almost total lack of south-south economic cooperation.
- The authoritarian nature of regimes and their position on sovereignty.
- The type of bilateral approach adopted by countries from the south in their relations with the EU¹.

Finally, the **issue of financing** is still open:

¹ Morocco is negotiating an "advanced status", Israel is negotiating a "special status", Algeria's position remains that of an association agreement, whilst Turkey and Croatia are seeking membership of the EU.

- Everything seems possible: the mobilisation of Community funds, financing by public or private banks (EBRD, WB, EIB, Islamic Development Bank), private investment. This too would involve complex and differing commitment procedures.
- In the case of Community-funded projects, the normal procedures would be applied and the European Parliament would therefore have a say.

III - POSITIONS EXPRESSED BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

The mixed verdict presented by the French Presidency on 10 years of the Barcelona Process is not an issue for discussion. **The European Parliament**, in its recent reports on the region (Jäätteenmäki 2005, Tannock 2006, Tannock-Obiols 2007) highlights **the strategic importance of the Mediterranean** and the **need to step up relations with the coastal countries**. Emphasis was put on:

- o the need for **closer coordination between the ENP and the EuroMed partnership**.
- o the importance of **strengthening existing forms of cooperation through EuroMed**

IV - CONCLUSION

The French proposal is to be credited for having brought the Mediterranean back to the top of the European political agenda. On top of the satisfaction of having defused an internal division regarding the French plan, the time is now ripe to refocus Euro-Mediterranean relations by boosting the existing structures. This relates in particular to the common identification (north and south) of clear priorities for which follow-up at EuroMed partnership level provides undeniable value added.

Finally, the EMPA should be the embodiment of the parliamentary dimension to UMed¹ and be given a role as initiator and evaluator. Should a new legal framework be negotiated, the opportunity should be taken to strengthen the legal status of the EMPA.

EuroMed Secretariat, DC
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¹ With the new UMed-setting envisaged by the Brussels Spring Summit and as this Union may include all of the 27 EU-Member States, the "*Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean*" (PAM) seems to be logically "out of the game", given its structure of being reduced to the littoral States of the Mediterranean; nevertheless the PAM still believes to be "the" parliamentary Assembly of the Euro-Med region, has its own budget, an official seat and a General Secretariat (both in Malta). The new PAM-strategy is to seek "complementarities" with the EMPA: in looking for an (official) observer status at EMPA, including the right to speak and to organize joint meetings at Plenary and at Committees level...