

REPORTS

Democracy and Human Rights in the Barcelona Process: Conclusions of a Workshop at FRIDE, Madrid, 14–16 January 2005

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In January 2005, the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) sponsored a workshop in Madrid designed to explore ideas that could feed into preparations for the summit that will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process in November 2005. The workshop was attended by representatives from the European Union (EU), national governments and civil society, and by representatives from a number of Arab states. The focus was on issues of democracy and human rights, with the aim of brainstorming ideas on how to bring together two parallel debates: one on political reform in the Arab world, the other on the future of the Barcelona Process. The workshop produced a number of working papers, assessing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's (EMP) record during the last decade and offering recommendations for revitalising the Process.

The workshop's sessions were organized around five concerns: current plans for reforming the Barcelona Process, linked to the tenth anniversary; the nature and significance of Europe's Neighbourhood Policy; Spain's evolving relations with the Mediterranean; political trends in the Arab world, particularly in relation to political Islam; and concrete possibilities for invigorating the Barcelona Process, harnessed to the Neighbourhood Policy.

The Barcelona Process: The State of Play

It was agreed that a new sense of urgency has permeated the Barcelona Process due to the security situation post 9/11. But this has not produced any clear prioritization of a focus on political reform in Arab partners. The official discourse continues to

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claim that the Process has been a moderate success - if not in achieving reform, at least in setting up a lasting framework for interaction. Although it was admitted that the main shortcoming has been the lack of progress in the furthering of political and even economic reform, the focus proposed for the future is on education, culture and civil society in a bid to counter prevailing trends of cultural antagonism. The Barcelona Process has not resulted in an advance in democratization, but it has led to the creation of a structure of systematic co-operation with confidence building measures. It was classified in this workshop as a diplomatic rather than substantive success. After nine years in existence all agreed that the Barcelona Process should continue - although for some it has value as a channel for co-operation only because of a lack of alternatives. Some argued that expectations should be lowered, and the yardstick should be to think what would have been the cost of not having the EMP. The familiar line was still prominent that greater emphasis should be placed on the Process itself rather than immediate outcomes; Barcelona, some argued, was the catalyst rather than the instrument of change.

Some measures of Barcelona's "success" that were raised included: its status as the only forum where Israelis and a group of Arab states sit together to discuss a range of co-operative measures; its generation of new dialogue on democracy and human rights; the foundation for future influence that has been laid by the signing of association agreements with all southern Mediterranean states; and its creation of a gradual process of Europeanization, in relation to issues of identity and economic interaction. Generally recognized shortcomings included: a growing tension between the emphasis on security and immigration, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other hand; a persistent lack of popular participation on both sides of the Mediterranean; continuing problems of bureaucratic constraints; and the EMP's association with a perception in the Arab world that the EU is concerned primarily with "propping up" authoritarian regimes.

The European Neighbourhood Policy

Participants in the workshop raised the question of whether enlargement has allowed the European Union (EU) to consolidate its position in Europe and open the way for a greater focus on the South. There was disagreement on this point. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which started out as a "Wider Europe" initiative, has been subject to a compromise between those that favour a focus on the neighbours to the East and those pushing for more of a Mediterranean prioritization. It was felt by many that, as the ENP was launched because of enlargement, it could be creating false expectations in the South. The risk of new dividing lines was felt to be real. Others saw potential value in the fact that countries in the East and South will now compete for resources in accordance with their performance on political and economic reform. "Euro-Med fatigue", it was suggested, required this element of "rebranding". A "consistency trap" had been helpful for the prominence of democracy promotion: the EU either had to moderate language on democracy for the eastern members of the ENP or raise its profile in

the South. Almost inadvertently this may have led to some opening for a greater focus on democratic reform.

Some participants placed the Barcelona Process at the centre of the ENP framework, while from the South there were fears that the process will be diluted. Under the ENP the prospects are the same for all “neighbouring” states; the South is no longer a “second class partner”. Each country will proceed as far as it is willing in its relations with the EU. The ENP is a switch from broad co-operation to an attempt to link certain actions to concrete development in national domestic politics. It further opens the door to conditionality and socialization. Through the action plans it incorporates bilateralism, differentiation and a new competitive dynamic.

The workshop explored the differences between the association agreements and the ENP action plans. The latter are derived from enlargement directives and seem to give more importance to democracy and human rights issues; to leave room for political co-operation in security; to emphasize greater economic integration and provide an opening to the internal market; to be more detailed in terms of transport and energy; to develop migration issues further; and to provide the prospect of increasing aid.

In terms of human rights, the ENP is clear on the objective criteria set, but does not include specifics in the action plans in terms of benchmarks, methodologies or clear means of evaluation. Human rights and democracy are placed at the same level as issues such as trade, when some felt they should be given greater priority. But some felt there were unwarranted differences between countries. For example, in the action plans agreed with Jordan and Morocco human rights and democracy directives are quite detailed, while Israel has only two lines on human rights in its action plan and has no subcommittee on human rights. Another criticism was that the ENP action plans had been negotiated with little civil society consultation. Others raised concerns over the agreement to replace the *Mesures d'Accompagnement* (MEDA) aid programme after 2006 with an ENP financial instrument, that might lead to a reduction in the funds directed to the Mediterranean.

Spain's Evolving Relations with the Mediterranean

One session of the conference looked specifically at Spain's role in the Barcelona Process, of vital importance for a number of reasons: the country's long-standing role as the most ardent defender of the EMP; the change in government in March 2004 which has led to a dramatic change in at least the tone of Spanish foreign policy; and Spain's role together with the forthcoming UK presidency in coordinating the tenth anniversary summit in Barcelona. Participants in the conference agreed that despite the new Partido Socialista Obrero Español government's radical reorienting of many aspects of Spanish foreign policy, there has been continuity in terms of the low level of involvement in human rights and democracy issues. Notwithstanding the previous Partido Popula government's often muscular rhetoric, particularly in relation to Morocco, it in fact tended to steer clear of raising sensitive issues regarding political reform. Spain's general priority now appears to be to

reposition itself as a mainstream player in EU foreign policy forums, this compounding a reluctance in adopting forward-leaning positions on pushing for democratic reforms in the Maghreb. Spanish policy on democracy and human rights lacks formalized channels of activism and a central strategic document, as exists in many EU states. Conditionality is still not welcomed, extreme gradualism is preferred, and much aid continues to be tied to Spanish commercial interests.

Spain is probably the state most sceptical towards the Neighbourhood Policy, fearing that this may undermine the Barcelona Process. Some felt the ENP was positive, acting as catalyst for a reinvigoration of the EMP; others lamented that Spain was “personalizing” the Barcelona Process, simply because this was agreed in Barcelona under the primary influence of Spanish diplomacy. While Spain has been cautious on the Neighbourhood Policy, it perhaps stands to gain most from a more structured relationship with Morocco through the new bilateral action plan. The question was raised on the relevance to Morocco of Spain’s own model of monarchy-piloted transition, with general puzzlement as to why Spain still declined to use this in a more proactive fashion. One suggestion was that Spain could also benefit from using its own experience with decentralization as a means of pushing forward a similar process in Morocco; Spain’s apparent change of policy on the Western Sahara could inadvertently serve as a platform from which to press a much needed decentralization of the Moroccan state.

Understanding Trends in the Arab World

Conscious of gathering debate over western positions towards Islamists, the conference heard from experts from the region deeply engaged in work on political Islam. It was observed that the EU had implicitly recognized the need to incorporate Islamists through new language in its policy statements asserting a commitment to engage with “*all* non-violent groups”. Most participants in the conference reiterated the value of engaging with moderate Islamists, given the latter’s legitimacy in terms of identity, development and economic growth, and contextualizing democratic values within the Mediterranean. The EU should, it was argued, promote a comprehensive approach to reform that does not exclude any player committed to democracy, and should provide co-operative mechanisms that are open to all.

It was recognized that engagement would be difficult, on both sides. Some Islamists remain reluctant because they see the EU as largely supporting Arab governments and “like-minded” non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A gradual and multifaceted engagement was advocated, with an initial emphasis on Islamic NGOs, through administrative assistance and training rather than through overt financial support (which would almost certainly not be accepted). By engaging with Islamists, outsiders would have a better chance of influencing them. The terms of Islamists’ inclusion in democratic reform movements needed to be negotiated between the parties concerned, and the EU in this sense urgently needed to broaden its range of interlocutors.

The view was expressed that European states needed to have a more flexible understanding of political trends in the Arab world. An overly state-centred,

institutional measurement of democracy failed to capture promising dynamics at the level of social debate and discourse. There is not one single paradigm that defines democracy. With both democracy and Islam lending themselves to variable interpretations considerable space existed for Arabs to develop *sui generis* processes of reform. The most crucial need was to support the “learning” of democracy, through a society that can produce the knowledge and ethics to sustain formal, institutional democracy. Arab societies have in practice devised mechanisms to circumvent authoritarianism, through a democratization of the private sphere. It is from this basis that outsiders, and particularly the EU, should seek to support incipient dynamics of change. But so far such analysis, it was generally felt, remained divorced from concrete policy discussions in the EMP.

Proposals for Barcelona’s Tenth Anniversary

Drawing together threads from these different sessions, the conference’s final session focused on possible action points in preparation for the tenth anniversary summit. Concrete recommendations that emerged were that the EU should:

- seek synergies with the US and the Gulf countries and invite North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) representatives as observers to the next Barcelona conference;
- make a special effort in public diplomacy so that the public know what is being done in the Barcelona Process, raising the profile of the process and of the Mediterranean region;
- encourage more South-South co-operation, to foster a regional dynamic of reform in the region;
- commit to more positive conditionality for human rights and democracy;
- link incentives to the internal political dynamics of each country;
- tighten up ideas for the operationalization of ENP action plans;
- develop evaluation mechanisms that are more systematic, coherent and constant;
- consider holding an annual summit of heads of state/government from the EMP countries;
- refocus aid away from “hardware” (offices and equipment) to “know-how” (training, democratic capacity-building);
- agree cautiously to open dialogue with moderate Islamists on issues specifically related to the Barcelona Process.