

Democracy Activity Brief
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FRIDE Conference

FRIDE
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Ten Years of Human Rights Policies in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

About FRIDE

FRIDE is an independent think-tank based in Madrid, focused on issues related to democracy and human rights; peace and security; and humanitarian action and development. FRIDE attempts to influence policy-making and inform public opinion, through its research in these areas.

On 2 March, 2006, FRIDE welcomed Marc Schade-Poulsen, Executive Director of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN). The EMHRN is the most prominent organisation monitoring human rights policies under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP or Barcelona Process), and coordinates the largest network of human rights bodies from the EU and the countries of the southern Mediterranean. In his presentation and the subsequent debate, Mr Schade-Poulsen made a number of points related to the recent development of democracy and human rights policies within the EMP:-

- The Barcelona Process has had little impact on political change in the southern Mediterranean. Civil society partners conclude that even where some reforms have been implemented this has been due almost entirely to internal, domestic factors. Morocco is a good example of this.
- An increased focus on human rights was registered in the Barcelona Process immediately after 9/11, as European governments suddenly felt the need to 'find Arab

democrats' to quell radicalism. However, from 2004 this new momentum subsided. The new European Commission has been weak on democracy and human rights, its senior external relations figures demonstrating little conviction on political reform issues. Arab partners in the Barcelona Process now feel they have a renewed 'carte blanche' for tough security approaches.

- An apparent setback for civil society cooperation was suffered at the tenth anniversary summit of the Barcelona Process in November 2005. At this summit, EU governments bowed to Arab states' pressure to include language that formally limited civil society cooperation to officially registered NGOs. As a result, some of the EMHRN's partners have already had to withdraw from a number of activities. While some participants in the ensuing discussion felt this setback was not serious and simply reflected the de facto reality already prevailing, most felt it could serve as a dangerous precedent.
- Civil society initiatives supported by the EU continue to suffer well-known weaknesses. The issue of women's rights has been addressed only through a few ad hoc conferences. Much hope has been invested in the new Anna Lindh Euro-Med Foundation, but this is proving to be extremely unwieldy and oriented towards civil society participants chosen directly by governments. Civil society has been given formal involvement in the Barcelona Process, but its recommendations have never been taken up by governments.
- The European Neighbourhood Policy could represent a positive development, but it also reflects one of the most serious problems of EU policy: namely, a tendency to 'reinvent the wheel' every few years, constructing new and ever more elaborate policy frameworks that simply add confusion, divert attention away from instruments that already exist, and serve as a fig leaf for a failure to tackle the real politics of reform imperatives in the southern Mediterranean.
- A key outstanding problem has been the lack of any official deliberation or analysis of the impact on human rights of MEDA funding made available for economic reform and social projects under chapter two of the Barcelona Process.

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