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**Commonalties and differences between the EuroMed partners:
challenges to the multilateral track of the EuroMediterranean Partnership**

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SUMMARY

Despite the common heritage of the Mediterranean populations, the Mediterranean remains a mosaic of cultures and a melting pot of civilizations too often characterized by divisions and conflicts. The EuroMediterranean Partnership (EMP) represents a completely new pattern in the North-South Mediterranean relations that can lead to a better mutual understanding through cooperation in the human, social and cultural fields beyond the traditional political and economic fields. Only when mutual distrust is chased away, will the main goal of the EuroMediterranean partners - stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean –be achieved.

1. The international constraints: North-South interdependence

With the end of the Cold War and then the weakening of former socialist- communist governments, the basic elements of the North-South cleavage can lead, in the worst-case scenario described by Samuel Huntington, to a *clash between civilization*. In the best-case scenario, a more rational attitude can emerge of creating a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean, being aware that to survive in the global village required a stronger actor, or group of actors.

The EMP provides the EuroMed partners with the opportunity of institutionalizing their relationships on a firm basis and commitment to face the challenges of the 21st century with a common project. At the basis of the Barcelona process there is the awareness that the threats to security require a common strategy to deal successfully with degradation of the environment; arms and drugs trafficking; terrorism; international crime; rising unemployment; religious extremism; illegal migration; racism and xenophobia.

Growing interdependence between northern and southern shores imply that the former is faced with the perceived threats to security coming from the south, and the latter needs Europe's assistance to meet serious economic challenges. In the era of interdependence, political crises and declining economic and social conditions in the south lead to Islamic revival and determine flows of disaffected populations to Europe. However, aid to the economic development in the South is not meant only to reduce the

prosperity gap with the North, but it is also a necessity to face the vicious circle which affects the southern Mediterranean countries. It is a sort of loop: rising demographic growth leads to the increase of young labor forces requiring more employment (which cannot be offered due to the current economic situation) then determining more migration flows and a brain-drain effect, eventually provoking more impoverishment.

The international constraints imposed by the globalization do not leave much space for improvisation or autonomous policies; they impose instead co-operation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. NAFTA, ASEAN, MERCOSUR: these are the international trends which are giving way to closer institutionalization in several areas of the globe and the EuroMediterranean area cannot escape. The EU and the Mediterranean countries have the opportunity of strengthening their position and creating a bigger market, with common strategies and scale economies. The Mediterranean developing countries can either keep high barriers to protect their weak economic systems or try to strengthen their economies by means of more internal liberalization, and by making some alliances with their neighboring countries. Did the worst case scenario of fragmentation and isolation succeed, the Southern Mediterranean states would play an even more marginal role on the international scene.

However, focusing upon economic issues only is risky. Most of the economies of the southern Mediterranean countries are fragile and the opening of their markets must be accompanied by structural interventions, including strengthening of private economic actors and social development. Therefore, the EMP adopts a comprehensive approach by taking into account at the same time political, economic and social issues. But apart from the international constraints that push in favor of cooperation, there are some cultural challenges that might slow down or even block the process. Then, once it is agreed that there is no choice but to create a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean based upon cooperation, exchange and dialogue between the partners, some of the most critical issues leading to mistrust and misperception between the partners are here recalled.

2. The comprehensive approach of the EMP: focusing upon the *human dimension of security*

The EMP was launched in November 1995 with the adoption of the Barcelona Declaration by the 15 EU member states plus 12 Mediterranean partner countries (MPCs)¹ with the objective of “turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and co-operation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity [a goal which] requires a strengthening of democracy and respect of human rights...”². As it is clearly stated, political dialogue and development of a sustainable economy must be achieved by developing human resources, promoting understanding between cultures, and exchanges between civil societies. Then the latter become the preconditions to reach the ultimate goals of stability and prosperity.

The EMP relies upon the coexistence of a bilateral track (based upon the stipulation of Mediterranean association agreements between the EU and the MPCs not eligible for full EU membership) and a multilateral track, whose main aim is to foster South-South cooperation through the creation of regional networks (most of regional programs require at least two partners from Southern countries)³. This comprehensive approach aims at counterbalancing political tensions through the promotion of social and democratic values, and the enhancement of economic growth by creating a EuroMediterranean free trade area by the year 2010. But a viable free trade area can only rely upon some bases of common understanding, as economic and financial co-operation without mutual understanding is a short-sighted strategy. To speak the same language is the pre-condition to embark on viable economic processes and major security achievements. Then the strategy must not be to transpose western models of development, but rather to adapt some development models to the partners' needs and grant their direct involvement not only at the implementation stage, but also at the

¹ The MPCs are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Malta and Cyprus.

² Preamble to the Barcelona Declaration. The Formal Conclusions adopted by the Chairman of the Third InterMinisterial Conference which took place in Stuttgart on 15-16 April 1999 recall the strengthening of democracy and the respect for human and basic social rights as basis for the achievement of peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean.

³ The main budget line of the EMP is MEDA, 90 per cent of which is devoted to bilateral initiatives. For the period 1995-99 budgetary resources of the EMP mounted to 4.685 billion ECUs. Together with these grants for the same period there are 3.996 billion ECUs loans from the EIB. MEDA II is currently negotiated and foresees a slight increase for the years 2000-2006.

planning stage. Moreover, to have a real partnership, where all parts are involved on the same footing, the flow of cultural exchanges should go in a two-way direction.

Together with the intergovernmental cooperation, within the EMP the importance of non-governmental cooperation is acknowledged and supported. As a matter of fact, along with the interministerial conferences, EuroMed Civil Fora have been organized in Barcelona first, in Malta and Naples in 1997, and in Stuttgart in 1999. Some EuroMed programs based upon decentralized co-operation are also envisaged.

The fact that in Barcelona an entire section was devoted to soft security issues, aspects of cooperation that traditionally are labeled as “minor” ones, proves that the participants in the Barcelona conference were fully aware of the cultural barriers and mistrust still existing in the Mediterranean. No major issues of the social, cultural and human dimensions are neglected in the Barcelona Declaration: from dialogue between cultures and religions to human and youth exchange; from respect for fundamental social rights to strengthening of civil society; from support to democratic institutions to respect of the rule of law. Moreover, cooperation is meant to face migration, terrorism, drug trafficking, international crime and corruption. Nevertheless, misperceptions and misunderstandings persist and menace the achievement of the common goals. Therefore, specific actions have to be adopted in the cultural and human dimension fields to spill-over into substantial achievements in the political and economic fields.

The basic assumption of the Barcelona process is that consensus on the cultural level leads to a more productive interaction in other areas. This is not just wishful thinking that a spill-over effect will be produced, but a ‘must’; a necessary ongoing process to clarify and chase away, by means of dialogue and exchange of views, the misunderstandings which might paralyze the entire process.

History has proved that aid and trade alone cannot succeed in transforming the Mediterranean mosaic into a politically, economically and culturally homogenous area. Therefore, *ad hoc* innovative Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)⁴ are to be adopted to remove the curtain of prejudice and misperception which still split the Mediterranean along the North-South divide. The EMP is a tool in the hands of the partners and their political will is necessary to strengthen the process and make it successful. The

⁴ The typology of CBMs is quite variegated. It includes also the training aspect (through exchanges of trainers and trainees) and the now well institutionalized ‘Euro-Med Information and Training Program’ for junior diplomats funded by the EU which is organized twice a year in Malta.

EuroMed partners can succeed in integrating but this should not be taken for granted, because there are some strong critics to the EMP coming from the south. The inclusion in the Barcelona Declaration of the partnership in social, cultural and human affairs certainly represents a step forward in a long-lasting North-South co-operation process which aims at achieving an area of stability and prosperity through inter-cultural exchange.

3. Putting the EMP in the political picture

The EMP has distinguished itself from other multilateral initiatives involving Mediterranean countries⁵ for having survived the recent period of incertitude and stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) after the enthusiasm experienced in this respect in the early 1990s. As it is mentioned in the Barcelona Declaration and then repeated in the following documents, the EMP has been influenced since its inception by the atmosphere of reconciliation between Israel and its neighboring countries sanctioned by the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference⁶.

Despite the tensions due to the slowing down and eventual freezing of the implementation of the Oslo agreements, the EMP has proved viable and succeeded in remaining the major forum of discussion between the EuroMed partners. While broad economic initiatives are dormant, such as the Summit of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), or specific ones such as the Euro-Arab dialogue have been abandoned, the EMP with its three chapter structure represents an active framework of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation.

The comprehensive approach of tackling simultaneously the political, the economic and financial, and the socio-cultural and human fields within the same process had

⁵ For a comprehensive description of the Mediterranean diplomatic initiatives see Alberto Bin, *Multilateral Diplomacy in the Mediterranean: A Comparative Assessment*, in 'Mediterranean Quarterly', vol. 8, no. 3, Summer 1997, pp. 57-75.

⁶ The comparison between the Helsinki process and the Barcelona process is suggestive, but it should be stressed that the European partners were culturally much more homogeneous compared to the Mediterranean partners. The 1995 Barcelona Declaration refers to the land-for-peace principle; the Conclusions adopted by the Chairman of the 1999 Stuttgart Conference clearly mention the importance of the immediate implementation of the Oslo agreement and Wye Plantation Memorandum.

already proved successful within the CSCE/OSCE⁷. It is the identification of three different areas of co-operation, interrelated, but at the same time distinct, that has allowed a step-by-step successful strategy. Once it was clear that in the first years of the EMP the achievements were lower than expected, the partners have adopted a pragmatic approach and endorsed the principle that when it is possible to identify an area where agreement exists, they must go on without being blackmailed by the MEPP stalemate.

The third chapter is one of these areas. Even though the current political difficulties have prevented the adoption of the Charter for Peace and Stability and yet in Stuttgart only the guidelines have been agreed upon by the 27 partners, on the multilateral track even countries such as Syria are actively involved in the cultural programs funded by MEDA (but with the condition that Israel is not a partner in the same project). It is meaningful that co-operation in the third basket dealing with 'low politics' has not been prevented by disputes on security issues.

But still a technical constraint stemming from the ongoing political conflict is given by the difficulty of holding meetings in non-neutral territory. This is one of the reasons why in 1996 and 1997 only less than 15 per cent of the meetings were held in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries⁸.

4. The Mediterranean Sea: more than an inner sea, less than a region

The definition of the Mediterranean as a unit of analysis is quite a controversial question. The Mediterranean is not just characterized by the common destiny and unity stressed by Fernand Braudel. It is also made up of different civilizations and cultural traditions. Which are today the distinctive traits of the *mare nostrum*? It is a mixture of conflicting and cooperative patterns.

In the earliest antiquities the Mediterranean was the center of international relations. The unity of the Mediterranean under the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans is still evident today in the common heritage that is to be found from Lebanon through Greece to Italy. During the Middle Ages, trade was a way of cultural exchange and

⁷ For a detailed comparison between the EMP and the OSCE see Dimitris Xenakis, *The Barcelona Process: some lessons from Helsinki*, Department of Political Studies, University of Catania, JMWP 17/98, <http://www.fscpo.unict.it/vademec/jmwpen.htm>

⁸ The data are provided by Maria-Àngels Roque, *Introduction, Intercultural Dialogue in the Mediterranean*, EuroMed Civil Forum, Malta, Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta, 1997, p. 20.

Italian maritime republics played an essential role in keeping contacts between East and West, South and North. After 1492, the Mediterranean started losing its centrality due to the passing from a Mediterranean-centered international system to a euro-atlantic system. It was a long process which was complete by the break-out of the Thirty-Years War in the early 17th century. Then along the centuries the Mediterranean was characterized by colonization and exploitation of raw materials.

Historically the Mediterranean has been the cradle of civilizations and a melting pot of cultures characterized by a certain homogeneity (e.g. the Hellenistic era or the Roman Empire). But when talking about regions according to long-standing patterns of political, economic and cultural integration, the Mediterranean cannot be defined as a region⁹. However, two culturally homogeneous groups can be singled out: the EU countries and the Arab countries¹⁰. The other partners of the Barcelona Process are countries such as Malta, Cyprus and Turkey which share the same destiny of European applicant states (though Turkey's application for the moment has been rejected¹¹) and Israel, which is a very special case of a culturally 'western' country among Arab states.

5. The cultural dimension of the EuroMediterranean Partnership

Despite the underestimation of some analysts, the third chapter of the EMP is one which, together with the economic one, is producing successful specific regional co-operation programs, relying upon the strategy of involving the grass-roots in the partnership. And the result is even more positive, considering that the cultural dimension in the EuroMediterranean relations is relatively new. It did not exist in the first phase of the Mediterranean Policy of the EC, as the Global Mediterranean Policy adopted by the EC during the Paris Summit of 1972 focused mainly upon cooperation in economic areas. Then the Renewed Mediterranean Policy launched in 1990 included a

⁹ For an analysis of the Mediterranean according to the theoretical implications of regionalism see Stephen Calleya, *Navigating Regional Dynamics in the Post-Cold War World*, Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1997.

¹⁰ This is an operational distinction based upon cultural homogeneity for the purpose of the paper of exploring the major cultural differences between EuroMed partners. It goes without saying that neither the EU countries nor the Arab countries constitute a completely coherent block. On the contrary they often express different interests. In the EU there is a clear different approach towards the Mediterranean issues between northern and southern Mediterranean countries. Among the Arab world the difference is evident between Maghreb and Mashrek.

¹¹ The Turkish situation is quite critical. Its association agreement with the EC goes back to the early 60s and the application was formally presented in 1987, nevertheless, the Commission's opinion was not in favor of Turkey joining the EU due to the low respect of minorities' rights.

cultural dimension of development dealt with by the Med-programs. Med-Urbs, Med-Media and Med-Campus, among others, were based upon trans-Mediterranean networks of public and private social actors (which is the essence of decentralized cooperation).

The decentralized cooperation concept introduced by the Renewed Mediterranean Policy has been incorporated in the EMP; in that way the EMP goes beyond the intergovernmental level of cooperation and take place also at the grass-roots level. Non-governmental bodies have then become official actors of the partnership. Cooperation programs involving practitioners and members of civil society can be long lasting and more effective than a top-down process as they imply direct personal cultural exchanges.

The cultural heritage is the starting point of the cultural partnership. At the 1996 Bologna Conference the Ministers of Culture decided to focus upon the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage. The 'EuroMed Heritage Program' is the first regional cultural program launched in the framework of the EMP and operational since September 1998. Apart from the activities of cataloguing, databasing of archeological sites and preservation of old manuscripts, it aims at enhancing the public awareness of heritage through information and cultural activities. There are also important economic and touristic effects due to itinerary exhibitions, museums with no frontiers, and networking popular festivities.

To foster new forms of co-operation between the EuroMed partners in the audiovisual sector, in 1998 the Commission launched 'EuroMed Audiovisual'. This regional program supports projects in the fields of radio, television and cinema. The aim is to stimulate technology and expertise transfer, cooperation between networks, and to facilitate investments. Through audiovisual tools, the mutual understanding between Mediterranean peoples is fostered and the common values and richness of the region highlighted.

Due to the importance which is attached to the exchange of views and experiences of life, with the conviction that the future generations will be able to establish closer co-operation between the EuroMed partners, the Commission has launched the 'EuroMed Youth Action Program'. Young people are then offered the possibility of making exchanges with youngsters living in another country (according to the North-South exchange principle) to experience integration in the social life of another country. As

the central goal is to improve mutual comprehension and cohesion between young people across the Mediterranean, through the integration of the young generations, diversity and plurality should be developed. In this case, the civil society is represented by the youth organizations which act as *trait-d'union* between young participants and the EU bureaucracy.

In April 1998, three of the decentralized co-operation programs which had been suspended at the end of 1995 upon request of the Court of Auditors due to cases of mismanagement, were reactivated: Med-Urbs (to improve living conditions of people in urban areas), Med-Media (to create media and journalistic networks) and Med-Campus (to foster university networks). Through these decentralized co-operation programs co-operation between civil societies acting in these specific sectors take place.

Direct co-operation between representatives of civil society represents one of the most innovative aspects of North-South cooperation contained in the Barcelona process. The recommendations adopted by the Human Rights network during the Stuttgart EuroMed Civil Forum offer a wide definition of civil society referring to associations, media and individuals acting out of any state institutions to protect with peaceful means the exercise of freedoms and support the autonomous rising of a pluralist collective identity based on the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

However, the concept of civil society is quite critical¹². In the West it is often associated with high level of democracy and it is regarded as a tangible example of freedom of association and expression. But civil society does not necessarily have an easy life in MPCs, where NGOs are often seen as a threat to the stability of the political system. Then, NGOs, voluntary organizations and associations are not in all countries granted with a large *marge de manoeuvre*. They are often controlled by central governments, directly or indirectly. A typical indirect control, for example, is the visa policy, or there can be restrictions to freedom of movement through control of passports. Bureaucratic procedures can also be used to exert a sort of control over civil society, when civil initiatives are compelled to comply with lengthy permissions and authorizations. Even worse, sometimes civil society is regarded as a 'western product' acting to spread 'western values'.

¹² See the theoretical implications of the concept of civil society, with specific reference to the Islamist and secular view, in Annette Jünemann, *Democratization- Reflections on the Political Dimension of the*

6. The third basket: how to deal with 'hot' issues

In principle, cultural cooperation does not imply the imposition of certain values on other peoples. Respect for different values and exchange based upon mutual tolerance are goals continuously recalled among the basic principles of the EMP. But then critical concepts and issues have to be faced. Apart from co-operation in the fields of common heritage; audiovisual; youth exchange; media; universities and urban development, dealing with the third chapter of the EMP implies tackling sensitive issues such as religion, values or ideals which are often interpreted as divergent. For example, religious pluralism or equal opportunities for men and women are typical western values; Islam does not foresee conversion to other religions, and women in the south do not necessarily act for equal roles in society, or react against polygamy.

If one of the common goals of the EMP is to avoid any clash between the Arab world and the western world, then the cultural dialogue acts to develop the mutual understanding that in some respect is still missing. As a matter of fact, Arab and European views differ sharply on issues such as the relationship between state and religion, human rights, democracy, terrorism, and - as already explained - civil society.

Among the most critical activities supported within the EMP there is the dialogue between religions. The Mediterranean is in this respect unique, because it is the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and it is in the name of religion that most wars have been fought in this area – even in recent times, e.g. the religious connotation of the war in Bosnia, or between the Arabs and the Israelis. It is to promote tolerance and foster the Euro-Islam dialogue that meetings and conferences have been taking place since 1995 with the financial support of the Commission. The limit of these activities is that researchers or intellectuals must not solely be involved in the comparative study of religions. To really go beyond a mere intellectual exercise, this process must be rooted in the society.

In the past centuries Western Europe has experienced the laic revolution between politics/state and religion. Christianity has been faced with the challenges of modern society and forced to adapt its convictions to the progress of science long before the

EuroMediterranean Partnership, in P. Xuereb (ed), *The Mediterranean's European Challenge*, European

Islam. The Catholic church had been fighting the secular forces for centuries. Yet at the beginning of this century, in European countries the affirmation of the separation between state and religion had taken place. However, the concept of laic state or the separation between politics and religious faith are not shared by all the MPCs.

The common origins from which the monotheistic religions originated are often overshadowed by barriers of misperceptions. But a real inter-religious dialogue is only possible if freedom of thought and of conscience are granted. A much more fruitful approach would imply some critics to admit with a revisionist analysis the mistakes and injustices committed in the name of religions. But a 'modernist' approach in the Islamic world is quite difficult, for modernity is often regarded as the product of colonial domination and the modernist view is still minoritarian¹³.

Another very hot issue is represented by the concept of democracy, which is one of the pillars of the EMP structure. As a concrete measure, in 1996 following an initiative of the EP, the program 'MEDA-Democracy' was launched to promote human rights in the MPCs. Projects financed so far implied, for example, the strengthening of civil society, human rights and democracy in Turkey; a public education campaign on women's rights and the setting up of a family counselling centre in Jordan.

Even though the Europeans openly declare their support for more democratic political systems and more open regimes, in reality, history is full of contradictions between the rhetoric of the declaratory stage and the stage of action. Lack of democracy in one partner country rarely imply sanctions from EU governments to isolate the undemocratic regimes. Moreover, democracy is not implemented without contradictions in the EU itself.

One of the main differences between the EuroMed partners is represented by the strong dilemma between individualism and collectivism, which can be translated in the different attachment to values such as the individual freedoms vs family ties or the tribal belonging, the interests of the individual vs the interests of the state. While the western society is extremely individualistic, in the Arab world the group-belonging is still strong.

Documentation and Research Centre, University of Malta, Malta, 1998.

¹³ On the dialogue between religions see Mohammed Sahir Janjar, *Inter-religious dialogue and the ethics of tolerance*, in *Intercultural Dialogue in the Mediterranean*, EuroMed Civil Forum, Malta, Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta, 1997.

As mentioned earlier, another divergent view concerns civil society. In European countries civil society is a very strong pressure group counterbalancing the governments, then it is regarded as an important tool of democracy. In the MPCs civil society is in the making in countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Turkey and Jordan, but quite often it clashes with the governments, who are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of non-governmental groups acting in society which might have a destabilizing effect over the social order.

If the long-term goal is the creation of global transnational values, then it is important to work hard to find a common denominator, which should not be felt as imposed, but rather agreed to by both sides. In this respect, the involvement of all parts in the very first planning stage, and not only at the implementation stage, is of utmost importance. Meetings, workshops and symposia of researchers and think-tanks together with the involvement of non-governmental actors, such as environmental associations, industrialists, trade unions, local communities, etc. in the implementation of the co-operation programs, must offer an input towards change to authoritarian governments.

7. The cultural cleavage: misperceptions or constructed misinformation?

Being a cross-road of civilizations since the earliest antiquities, the Mediterranean peoples have the possibility of enriching themselves from the different cultures. But often the common Mediterranean heritage is darkened by parochial interests and local conflicts are likely to paralyze any possible co-operation. As a matter of fact, history has witnessed serious wars and conflicts between Christianity and Islam; between colonizers and colonized countries; between the haves and the have-nots. As rising mistrust is recorded on both shores, intercultural activities must play a strategic role to encompass different approaches and views in respect of the diversity. And only real knowledge of the other can eradicate the cultural stereotypes that prevent a pluri-cultural dialogue and lead instead to rising xenophobia¹⁴.

Contesting the Braudelian view of unity and coherence of the Mediterranean, Dominic Fenech stresses the historical origins of the cultural cleavage between the two

civilizations: the Christian West and the Muslim East¹⁵. Antagonism between Christianity of the Middle Ages and the Arab-Muslim Empire was based upon a conflict of interest in terms of political and economic hegemony. Since the rivalry between the Spanish Empire of Charles V and Philip II in the West, and the Ottoman Empire of Suleiman the Magnificent in the East, in the Mediterranean there was a confrontation that had the nature of a cold war. Later on the European colonial ethnocentrism led to a cultural resentment generated among the colonized nations, producing in the Mediterranean a sort of overlap between this East-West confrontation and the North-South cleavage.

Then, to have a successful cooperation process (a real 'partnership'), it is essential that any perceptions of new-colonial relationship are chased away. This risk is high, due first of all to the pivotal role of the Commission, charged of the EMP administrative function, and due to the too often negative attitude towards the EMP of the MPCs, which complain about being treated as second class partners, the PECO countries being the main EU partners in terms of grants and loans¹⁶.

A very popular idea among the MPCs is that the EU is not very interested in the EuroMediterranean cooperation. MPCs also complain about the complexity of the procedures to be followed. As a matter of fact, MPCs do not accept the expenses of the lengthiness of the EU bureaucracy, nor to be affected by EU domestic problems such as the question of transparency. In this respect, the suspension of the Med-program decided by the Court of Auditors in late 1995 provoked a serious loss of credibility of the EU. MPCs are rarely familiar with the complex EU decision making process, which is often difficult to understand even in EU member countries. It is not easy to have a clear perception of the real origin of the delays (most of the time due to bureaucracy), which are often regarded instead as political ones (i.e. to lack of a political commitment).

The dialogue between the European and Islamic civilizations has unfortunately been characterized by several misperceptions which instead of uniting the Mediterranean

¹⁴ One important issue raised within the EMP is the question of the image of the other, in particular as it is presented by media and in education systems (e.g. school texts) of both shores.

¹⁵ Dominic Fenech, *East-West to North-South in the Mediterranean*, in 'GeoJournal', 31.2. 1993, 129-140.

¹⁶ It should be noted that rarely are the EMP financial resources compared with the allocation of the EU Mediterranean policies before the Barcelona Process started.

peoples too often tend to separate them along the cultural/religious divide. Media can influence both Northern and Southern peoples offering a sensational partial vision on the other. So that in northern media the Arab world is too often linked to illegal migration and terrorism, while the Western world is seen as the 'corrupted North made up of evil worshippers'. Misconceptions and prejudices are on both sides, in the 'materialistic atheist and imperialist North' and in the 'illiterate undeveloped South'. If on the one side there is the fear of the 'Islamic threat to the European order', on the other there is the reject of the 'Western cultural invasion/imperialism'. This is clearly not the path towards tolerance and respect for the diversity.

The Arab reaction to western sensationalism then is a total refusal and boycott of movies such as 'The Siege', which by a simplistic interpretation might spread the wrong idea that all the Arabs living in the West are terrorists (even though in other parts of the world a similar reaction was never registered against the famous movie on the Sicilian mafia 'The Big Father'). Instead of stimulating a debate, such an event can provoke a firm reaction of separation and boycott against the West. It is to correct these wrong images of the other that several initiatives have been launched within the EMP. With specific projects of co-operation and the creation of networks in several fields the EMP aims at eradicating some distortions and redressing a correct balanced vision of the others. This is exactly the creation of *confidence building measures*.

8. To conclude: the human dimension of security as the key to stability and prosperity

In the Information & Technology era of satellites, digital television and internet, thanks to fast telecommunications and means of transport, exchanges between cultures have become easy and open to the wide public. But to what extent does the message which is offered through the media correspond to the real values and traits of a society? The EMP points out that intolerance, racism and xenophobia require concrete actions. Eagerness against the European colonial powers supposedly exploiting raw materials and human resources without just compensation, on the one hand, and increasing intolerance against migrants on the other, are serious prejudices which have to be

redressed. It is necessary to add some meaning to a Mediterranean identity which at the moment is not only lacking but even contrasted by disparities and misperceptions.

Pluralism and the coexistence of different cultures and compatibility between the mosaic of Mediterranean cultures are the only ways to eventually develop a more integrated political, economic and cultural region. But some MPCs, instead of accepting the cultural diversity, act to maintain the unity of the state. It should be stressed that within the EMP no one wants the Mediterranean as a monotonous, homogeneous area, but rather a dynamic area rich in historical and cultural traditions where differences coexist in the name of tolerance and mutual respect.