

CONSTANTIN STEPHANOU

MULTILATERAL DESIGNS IN THE EU'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS: THE EASTERN PARTNESHIP AND THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

Adding a regional dimension to EU cooperation with Eastern European countries corresponded to what already existed in the Mediterranean context. The two multilateral designs complement advanced bilateral relations and bear some resemblances, such as the ideas of variable geometry and differentiation. Nevertheless, their prospects appear to differ. While they are both recent in time, the Union for the Mediterranean aims at resuscitating a process which failed due to the lack of interest and antagonisms of its partners, while the Eastern Partnership is a promising multilateral design, not the least because of the almost unqualified support of the interested nations.

INTRODUCTION

The present essay aims at comparing the two multilateral partnerships governing EU relations with its periphery: on the one hand, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) branded as the Barcelona process, and recently re-branded Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and, on the other, the recently launched Eastern Partnership. Both appear to serve the same purpose, i.e. ensuring stability in the EU's periphery; moreover, they are complementary to the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2003, as well as to bilateral relationships based on Association Agreements with Southern Mediterranean countries and Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Eastern neighbors. Although the aforementioned multilateral initiatives have been highly promoted by their sponsors, their added value and prospects of success are debatable. The evaluation that follows aims at comparing the limits and possibilities of the two initiatives, by focusing on the attitudes of their participants.

1. THE EUROMED PARTNERSHIP

1.1. REGIONALISM VERSUS BILATERALISM

At regular intervals the EC/EU has reinvented its Mediterranean policy in order to promote the goal of stability in its Mediterranean periphery. It is far from certain, however, that the EC/EU's policy has helped reduce the main threat to stability, i.e. the economic, social and cultural divide between North and South. The latest attempt at bridging this divide was the Barcelona process launched in 1995. The process was based on the diffusion of norms and standards, such as democracy and human rights from the North to the South, at a time, however, when most Southern regimes had to curtail freedoms in order to combat radical Islam. Moreover, the

Barcelona process may have been adversely affected by the launching of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2003. Karen Smith [2005] noticed the shift from normative regionalism to normative bilateralism reflected in the ENP action plans and the positive conditionalities therein and, similarly, Michelle Pace [2006; 2007] argued that in its role as a norm entrepreneur the EU had shifted from EMP to ENP. In the words, however, of Christian Franck [2006] the ENP seems to be more the continuation of the same trend under a new label than a new stage in the approximation of the two sides of the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, and notwithstanding the negative conditionalities therein, the needs of South Mediterranean countries were adequately addressed through existing bilateral relationships, as well as EU financial instruments, including 8.8 billion euros through the MEDA instrument during the period 1995–2006 and 10 billion in loans from the European Investment Bank / FEMIP during the period 1995–2007. In the case of Morocco and Tunisia, successful cooperation under the ENP action plans and progress towards more advanced relationships with the EU entailed reduced interest in the regional approach.

Regionalism was, however, given a new chance with the adoption of the Paris Declaration on the Union for the Mediterranean at a meeting of the Heads of State or Government convened on 13 July 2008 by the French presidency of the European Council. The Union reflected the traditional intergovernmental logic of cooperation, but the Declaration aimed explicitly at redirecting the Euro-med Partnership (EMP) into a Union of Projects. Project-based functional cooperation would thus rely on shared interests rather than shared values. Moreover, the partnership, which until then had been guided by the EU and, essentially, the European Commission, was to be based on the principle of co-ownership by the 43 signatories of the Declaration. It was to be co-driven by the Northern and Southern countries and co-chaired by a minister from each side. For the first time, the Southern countries were given the opportunity to shape the Partnership's policies and projects, although participation would be on a variable geometry basis. Co-ownership is not, however, synonymous of effectiveness. The output of the first 18 months since the Union's inception has been disappointing due to delays in the setting-up of the organizational structure. Yet the projects as well are likely to suffer from prolonged negotiations. The central question is whether the Northern and Southern partners will set aside their differences on politically sensitive issues and work together in the new project-oriented framework.

1.2. ATTITUDES OF PARTNERS

1.2.1. Diverging views between Northern and Southern partners

(a) Migration

Demands of Southern Mediterranean countries aimed at the liberalization of migration flows have been continuously ignored. On the other hand, illegal migration remains a serious challenge to Northern Mediterranean countries such as Greece,

Italy and Malta. On its part, Spain has been pushing for progress on legal migration. Actually, a very small number of persons, such as researchers, are eligible under EU law for entry and limited stay in the Union. There are no EU provisions allowing larger categories of persons, such as seasonal and posted workers. Moreover, cyclical migration of professionals has remained an area of academic debate, without practical steps in implementing the concept.

(b) Democracy and human rights

The EU and its partners agree on the need to combat radical Islam but differ on the appropriate policy-mix. Divergences remain on issues such as allowing opposition parties and civil society to flourish. These issues receive some attention at the joint consultative bodies which operate at the parliamentary level and that of local and regional authorities. A consultative status is sought by the network of Economic and Social Councils. Many blame the limited success of the Barcelona process on the lack of involvement by civil society and other non-state actors. There have been, however, some successful civil society projects, not least those sponsored by the Anna Lindh Foundation for Intercultural Dialogue.

Democracy and human rights are relegated to general commitments in the Paris Declaration. Two distinguished colleagues from Barcelona rightly point out that “UfM economism neglects the normative dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean acquis...one can wonder to what extent the UfM fits in the EU Mediterranean policy (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, European Neighborhood Policy).” [Barbe and Soler I Lecha 2009:99]

1.2.2. Rivalries among partners

(a) Rivalries among Northern partners

The Northern Partners pursue their national agendas. They have been competing for political and economic influence; France and Spain have been competing in Morocco, France and Italy in Tunisia etc. Moreover, Franco-Spanish competition on the branding and the seat of the new institutional framework ended in a compromise, with the final branding of the new partnership as Union for the Mediterranean (without reference to the Barcelona process) and the establishment of its seat in Barcelona. Competition is likely to be more open-ended regarding participation and funding of joint-projects. Germany and other EU member States are likely to project their technological capabilities and secure pole positions for their business entities in specific projects.

(b) Rivalries among Southern partners

Leaving aside the Israeli-Arab conflict, the most troublesome relationship among Southern partners is the one between Algeria and Morocco, the former being accused of providing support to the autonomist movement in the territory of

Western Sahara claimed by Morocco. Moreover, Egypt and Algeria have been competing for influence in the Arab world and international bodies, rendering uncertain their cooperation in the Union for the Mediterranean.

1.3. THE STALEMATE IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

There is no fundamental disagreement between the EU and its Arab partners regarding the settlement of the Middle East conflict. There is, however, disagreement on the ways and means to reach a settlement and, more specifically, how to deal with the recent radicalization of Israeli policy.

(a) Attitudes towards Israel

Israel enjoys special treatment as an EU partner. The EU has concluded an advanced association agreement with Israel which, upon the latter's insistence, also applies to illegally occupied territories. The EU's standard procedures for dealing with ENP countries do not apply to Israel. No political conditionalities are laid down in the ENP action plan for Israel, beyond a vague reference to human rights.

The EU, and the rest of the world for that matter, has been witnessing the radicalization of Israel's policy on the Palestinian issue. The erection of the wall separating Israel from occupied territories and the expansion of Jewish settlements in these territories have generally been perceived as additional impediments to the settlement of the Palestinian issue. In contrast, however, to the wall, which aimed at satisfying Israel's security needs, the expansion of Jewish settlements lacks any legal or moral justification. The latest move on behalf of Israel to partially freeze the expansion of Jewish settlements is unlikely to attract much sympathy. The vicinity of East Jerusalem is excluded from the freeze and Palestinians will continue to be displaced by force from their homes in this area.

The EU has gradually been losing its credibility in the Arab world. Gone are the times of the Venice declaration (1980) when the ten-member EC was the first major international actor to call for the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Gaza military operation and, more significantly, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements have inflamed Arab public opinion and undermined the credibility of moderate Arab governments in the minds of their citizens. While witnessing the radicalization of Israel's conduct, the EU has limited itself to condemnations and calls for redress. Steps such as the freezing of the Israel's association agreement with the EU, recommended after Israel's military operation in Gaza, carried out in January 2009 would, however, be counterproductive at this point in time and create divisions among EU Member States.

(b) Impact on the Union for the Mediterranean

Due to Arab misgivings, the Union for the Mediterranean launched in July 2008 remained for a time a theoretical exercise. Following the Gaza operation, the inter-governmental meetings were suspended and the organization failed to be staffed.

The procedural deadlock was lifted on July 7, 2009 when Ambassadorial meetings resumed; on March 4, 2010 the appointment of a distinguished Jordanian diplomat as Secretary General finally took effect. Nevertheless, the frustration of Arab countries resulting from Israel's conduct and the EU's complacency undermined progress in the implementation of the Union for the Mediterranean.

In view of the above, it seems appropriate for the EU to review its position regarding the participation of Israel in the Union for the Mediterranean. In the past, Arab states maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel were happy to cooperate with it in the Euro-med framework. In the current context, however, these states, not to mention the rest of the Arab world, are unwilling to establish or pursue cooperation with Israel and consider region-building in the EMP context as irrelevant. The EU is losing a lot from the EMP stalemate, while Israel would lose little if its participation in EMP was provisionally suspended. As things stand today, there seems, unfortunately, no other alternative to overcome the impasse and to hold a meaningful Euro-Mediterranean summit during the Spanish Presidency.

2. THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Its origins are very recent. They can be traced back to a meeting of the foreign ministers of Central and Eastern European Members of the EU held in Warsaw on November 24, 2008, upon the joint initiative of Poland and Sweden. The Eastern Partnership was officially launched at a special meeting of Heads of State or Government convened by the Czech presidency of the European Council on May 7, 2009 with the participation of EU members, as well as Ukraine, Moldova and the three Caucasus republics. The initiative was generally perceived as complementing ENP and re-balancing the EU's relations with its periphery, following the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean. While perceptions and aspirations of EU members and partner countries differed a lot, there was almost unqualified support for the initiative as such. In fact, a further indication of support was the early establishment of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

2.1. ATTITUDES OF EU PARTNERS

The EU members behind the original initiative, Poland and Sweden, were major foreign policy players, with experience in regional cooperation – in the case of Poland the Visegrad group and, in the case of Sweden, the Nordic Council. Most other participants were EU members bordering the Eastern partners. At the Prague Summit the common concern of EU members was to enhance stability in the EU's Eastern neighborhood and to allow for more differentiation in ENP. Attitudes over the longer term prospects of neighboring countries differed a lot. For Poland, the Eastern partnership would serve as an intermediate stage on the road to accession for neighbors such as Ukraine. For other prominent supporters of the partnership, such as Germany, the partnership could serve as a viable substitute to accession. For most EU members the partnership did not in any way prejudice accession.

2.2. ATTITUDES OF EASTERN PARTNERS

The declining American involvement in Ukraine and Georgia and the abandonment of the plans for the accession of these countries to NATO created favorable conditions for deepening relations with the EU. Eastern European countries were still feeling uncomfortable with the big Russian neighbor. Any means of enhancing their relations with the EU, whether bilateral or multilateral, had a direct bearing on their sense of security. Ukraine, on its part, had made known publicly its aspiration to become a member of the EU and viewed the Eastern partnership very much like Poland. At any rate, the Prague Declaration explicitly provided that “The Eastern Partnership builds on and is complementary to existing bilateral contractual relations. It will be developed without prejudice to individual partner countries’ aspirations for their future relationship with the European Union. It will be governed by the principles of differentiation and conditionality.” Actually, differentiation applies to both membership of the partnership and future links to the EU. Interestingly, the Eastern Partnership does not include all ENP members of the former Soviet Union.

CONCLUSION

Adding a regional dimension to EU cooperation with Eastern European countries corresponded to what already existed in the Mediterranean context. The two multilateral designs complement advanced bilateral relationships and bear some resemblances, such as the principle of differentiation, already present in ENP. Nevertheless, their prospects seem to differ. While they are both recent in time, the Union for the Mediterranean aims at resuscitating a process which failed due to the lack of interest and rivalries of its partners – and lack of involvement of civil societies, while the Eastern Partnership is a promising multilateral design, not least because of the almost unqualified support of the interested nations and the early involvement of civil societies.

REFERENCES

- Barbe, E. and E. Soler i Lecha (2009): What Role for Spain in the Union for the Mediterranean? Europeanising through Continuity and Adaptation, in D. Xenakis & P. Tsakonas (eds.), *Union for the Mediterranean: National and Regional Perspectives*, *Hellenic Studies (Special Issue)* 17(2): 85–102.
- Franck, Ch. (2006): A Major Challenge for the EU’s External Action: The European Neighbourhood Policy, in C. Stephanou (ed.), *Adjusting to EU Enlargement. Recurring Issues in A New Setting*, Cheltenham U.K., Edward Elgar
- Pace, M. (2006): *The Politics of Regional Identity: Meddling with the Mediterranean*, London, Routledge
- Pace, M. (2007): Norm Shifting from EMP to ENP: The EU as a Norm Entrepreneur in the South?, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20(4): 659–675.
- Smith, K. (2005): The Outsiders: The European Neighbourhood Policy, *International Affairs* 81(4): 757–773.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Köz-Gazdaság – Economic Theory and Policy is a bilingual quarterly journal, published by the Faculty of Economics of the Corvinus University of Budapest. The editors consider all received papers for publication in the field of economic sciences, which contributes to the development of Hungarian economic thinking.

The following guidelines should be observed when preparing a paper for submission:

- The paper must be written in either Hungarian or English.
- We only accept electronic submissions, sent to balazs.szentivanyi@uni-corvinus.hu in MS Word (doc) format
- The length of a paper should not exceed 40,000 characters (bibliography included). We kindly ask our authors to observe this upper limit to the greatest extent possible.
- The paper must have a short abstract (with a maximum of 100 words).
- Chapter headings must be indicated using Arabic numerals. In case of subsections, the number of the main chapter must also be given: 1., 1.1., 1.1.1, 1.2.2, etc.
- Figures and charts must all have titles, and must be numbered with Arabic numerals. The content of a figure or chart should be interpretable without the knowledge of the main text. In all cases the source of the data should be given below the figure or chart.
- Equations and formulas should be indicated with Arabic numerals in brackets at the right side of the rows: (1), (2), etc.
- Notes and references:
 - References should be given in the main text in square brackets in the format [author year]. E.g.: [Szentes 1999]
 - In case of full citations or exact data, the page number should also be given in the format [author year: page number]. E.g.: [Szentes 1999: 312]
 - Footnotes are used to supplement the main text, please use as few as possible.
- Bibliography: the paper must contain a complete list of cited works in the following format:
 - Books:
Author (year of publication): *Title in italics*. City of publication: Publisher
E.g. Szentes T. (1999): *World Economics*. Budapest: Aula
 - Book chapters:
Author (year of publication): "Chapter title in quotation marks". Editor (ed.): *Title of the volume in italics*. City of publication: Publisher.
E.g. Stern, N.-Stiglitz, J. (1997): "A Framework for a Development Strategy in a Market Economy". Malinvaud, E. (ed.): *Development Strategy and Management of the Market Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - Journal articles:
Author (year of publication): "Title in quotation marks". *Title of the journal in italics*. Volume (issue): page numbers
E.g. Kickert, W. J. M. (2008): "The Study of Public Management in the Netherlands" *Köz-Gazdaság* 3(2): 63-84.
 - Internet resources:
Author (year of publication): *Title in italics*. Complete URL. Date of retrieval
E.g. Rodrik, D. (2006): *The Disappointments of Financial Globalization*. [http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~drodrik/The Disappointments of Financial Globalization \(November 2006\).doc](http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~drodrik/The%20Disappointments%20of%20Financial%20Globalization%20(November%202006).doc). Queried: 2007. 03. 13.

