

OLD AND NEW CHALLENGES OF THE BARCELONA PROCESS

by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

I am delighted to be here in Naples at a time when the 35 Euro-Mediterranean partners involved in this cooperation initiative between the two shores of our common sea are preparing to relaunch this partnership unequivocally and to give a firmer practical basis to the Barcelona Process, of which the 6th Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference is part.

I feel it is also important to stress that the event on 2 and 3 December takes place in the context of a future enlarged Europe and as part of the European Union's new "neighbourhood policy". This policy presents, in a coherent manner, our concept of external relations with the Union's neighbouring regions, the Euro-Mediterranean region having always been a high priority to Europe.

The new century has not so far been an easy one for the Barcelona Process. In 2000 we were faced with the failure of a project for ultimate peace between Israel and Palestine and the emergence of the second Intifada. In September 2001, the terrorist attack against New York changed the world's perception of security – how it was regarded by the United States, obviously the prime target and victim, but also by us in Europe. In 2002 and 2003, the conflict in Iraq, war and the slow path towards a stable peace have drastically changed the strategic situation in the Middle East.

Some could say: what good is the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation process when confronted with such events? Conceived as an area of cooperation anticipating peace, it is in fact an area riven by conflicts.

Barcelona – I attended its difficult birth – was supposed to intensify the spirit of peace between Israelis and Arabs which existed after the Madrid Conference and which is now struggling to get back on track. Barcelona was supposed to enable the two shores of the Mediterranean to share a common view of security that was to be enshrined in a Charter for Peace and Stability but which has been put on hold. Barcelona was to be a model of North-South cooperation, limited to the shores of our Mediterranean, but able to incorporate a revival of relations with the whole of the Middle East. The challenge is even more difficult now with Iraq – and the Persian Gulf as a whole – in search of peace and stability.

.

For all that, must Barcelona be seen as a failure? Certainly not. For at least three reasons. We are working better together. We are working more together. We have already identified the future projects to be worked on.

In less than ten years, Europe as a body has developed contractual relations with virtually all its Mediterranean partners. The cooperation projects accompanying these association agreements have given rise to frustrations. A review of their management, thanks to efforts by the Commission and the associated States, is now bearing fruit. In terms of both quantity and quality, there are few cases of bilateral cooperation which can claim to be doing better. Europe is assuming its natural role as a partner of the Mediterranean countries.

The range of this cooperation has expanded. The principle of free exchange has been established and implemented. But the partnership does not stop at goods and services. From now on we are discussing together the other aspects of the process: a political dialogue which is growing richer. There are no taboos when we refer to terrorism as a shared risk. Discussing the best way of managing together the challenges of migration has become topical.

The challenges of the future have been clearly identified. The first, which has already been identified but will become a reality as from May 2004, is the enlargement of the European family. Barcelona succeeded in making more Mediterranean the 15 Member States of the EU which signed this commitment to good-neighbourliness. It will be the same with 25, with even greater opportunities in both North and South.

The second challenge has already been taken into account: confirming the people's ownership of this process. We shall achieve this particularly through our Parliaments, the European Parliament and the Parliaments of the nations taking part in this project. That is what we are doing, and we shall continue to do so through a cultural and social dialogue open to civil societies.

The third challenge is the hardest but must not be abandoned, let alone forgotten. It must be to put into practice the principle of collective peace. We have already started with the easiest part: explaining to our partner countries in the South what our new security and defence policy means. Some had perceived it – wrongly – as the effective construction of a new border.

The European Security Policy has provided proof, through past and present events in Africa and in the Balkans, that it does not aspire to threaten or to exclude, but – quite the opposite – to involve. And this involvement will in particular include our Mediterranean partners in the future. Making peace with each other and contributing jointly towards peace is not only possible, but an option on which we must work for the future. In the Mediterranean region, too many old conflicts persist, from the crisis between the Israelis and the Palestinians and Arabs to the Cyprus problem or Western Sahara.

All these issues call for a joint effort. In other words, even though the agenda of the Barcelona Process is at times demanding, it remains full. I am certain that a forceful message concerning our cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region will issue from the Naples Conference.

Brussels, 28 November 2003

911 words

