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Northern European Perceptions of the Barcelona Process.
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The positions adopted by northern member-states of the European Union in relation to the Euro-Mediterranean Global Partnership have attracted little interest to date. Entirely justifiably, more attention has been paid to the 'motors' of the Barcelona process, Spain and France, while a lot of discussion has focused more generally (and often at an excessive level of generality) on the obstacles to, and prospects for, an effective north-south partnership across the Mediterranean. Yet the northern Europeans' positions, when they exist, clearly need to be taken into account by those who are committed to the Partnership. For while the process has been joined relatively late by the north, and with numerous reservations, the northern states are today effective partners in the Euro-Med process, with the same rights and at least as much influence as the Mediterranean countries themselves. For whatever happens in the way of future EU enlargement, geography dictates that the Union will remain 'essentially a northern-central European entity' in which Mediterranean states are a minority (Pace, 1996: 110), and this is a reality that the Barcelona process cannot escape from, given the role of the EU as its initiator. No doubt, some of the southern European states will continue to make the running, as they have until now, but crucial decisions affecting EU Mediterranean policy will continue to need northern European support; in addition, it is the north that can also play a decisive role in promoting interest in the southern Mediterranean in the world of private capital.

It is important at the outset to acknowledge that it is not easy to discuss the northern European states *en bloc*. They have differing levels of interest, and different interests, in the Mediterranean and by no means always do they agree on what should be done there. France, which in the present context must be considered both northern and southern European,

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has had the most extensive involvement in the area in recent history, but British involvement has been substantial, too. Although a certain deference to France has existed in the formulation of EC Mediterranean policy (at least until the present decade), French policy towards Algeria has been the subject of a restrained controversy in northern just as in southern Europe. Virtually no other country expressed solidarity with the hardline policy advocated by the former interior minister Charles Pasqua, which sought a military triumph over the Islamist insurgents. France subsequently criticised Germany, Britain, and the USA for being excessively 'liberal' in their treatment of 'fundamentalist' refugees (Spencer, 1996a: 137-8; *The Times*, 27 January 1995). It is also true to say, notwithstanding traditional Anglo-French regional rivalry, that historically the northern European countries have shown interest generally in different parts of the Mediterranean, and that the broad tendencies in the present century are for France to be preoccupied with the Maghreb, Britain much more with the Middle East, and Germany (in peacetime) with Turkey and the Balkans.

Of course, one also needs to differentiate when discussing southern European perspectives on the Mediterranean (Gillespie, 1996: 204-5). Nonetheless, so long as the appropriate qualifications are made, it is legitimate to focus on northern (or southern) European countries collectively when considering the prospects of the Barcelona process, for in the past (at least) there has been a clear north-south difference with regard to EU member-state preferences *vis-à-vis* European support for North Africa. As one newspaper succinctly put it, 'In the case of North Africa, south Europeans tend to stress the need for financial support, knowing this would come mainly from northern Europe, while north Europeans stress the importance of market access, knowing that it is south European farmers who would suffer most from north African competition' ('South of Europe', *Financial Times*, 27 November 1995)¹. These differences were visible even during the gestation of the Euro-Mediterranean Global Partnership, when during internal EU discussions about the guidelines for negotiating the new association agreement with Morocco the northern European states wanted to give commercial concessions to certain Moroccan food products while the southern Europeans maintained that aid should be used to help Morocco become self-sufficient in food: in other words, Morocco should be encouraged to meet domestic requirements rather than export more to Europe (Marquina Barrio, 1995: 49). While this kind of divergence has been much reduced and the discussion now hinges more on an aid/trade 'balance' than on stark alternatives, the claim that the aid versus trade dilemma has been resolved through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is surely something of an exaggeration. Although a compromise was reached and approved at Barcelona, lingering northern and southern preferences remain as a backdrop to future decisions on disbursements under the MEDA programme and to the overall development of the partnership project. It is possible also that as the Barcelona process unfolds, northern/southern European divergence may become a feature of other discussions, including possibly the 'postponed' debate about political change in North Africa.

While the European Union was able to present a united front at Barcelona and has clearly made considerable progress towards a consensus on Mediterranean issues, the inter-governmental basis of much EU policy-making will ensure that national interests and standpoints will remain in evidence in the foreseeable future. This diversity will influence the future of the Euro-Mediterranean process. Meanwhile, the capacity of the EU to retain its cohesion in relation to southern regional policy will be a major test of its potential to develop a common foreign and security policy.

THE NORTH'S APPROXIMATION TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

Before expanding on some of these points, it is worth considering how and why northern European countries have become more interested in the Mediterranean in the 1990s. For although it is true that there is still something of a 'tendency in northern Europe to see Mediterranean co-operation as an unnecessary luxury' (Hooper, 1995), this tendency has been in decline in the 1990s, as the EU's demonstration of unity at the Barcelona Conference indicated. Certainly, northern European countries were responsible for reducing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership funding package –from the original Ecu 5.5 billion sought by commissioner Manuel Marín to Ecu 4,685 million– by arguing in favour of trade concessions and emphasizing the role of the private sector in providing investment funds (Spencer, 1996b: 9). However, in agreeing to this package they were making an increased commitment of resources to the Mediterranean; in effect, they started to contemplate Europe's relations with its southern neighbours on a much more long-term, open-ended basis than ever before.

What brought about this change in northern attitudes was essentially a combination of events and trends in the southern Mediterranean and political lobbying by southern Europeans. The northern Europeans' recognition of instability in the area is not new: conflicts in the Middle East formed the backcloth against which new uncertainties arose as a result of the end of the Cold War. The main catalyst of European attention in the early 1990s was the outbreak of violence on a huge scale in Algeria following the suspension of the electoral process in 1992. The Islamist challenge in Algeria and signs of unrest in other Arab countries led some northern Europeans to give expression to phobias about 'Islamic fundamentalism', best exemplified by former secretary-general of NATO Willy Claes's controversial statement about the phenomenon being 'at least as dangerous' as the former Soviet threat. However, many northern Europeans have shown the same

healthy scepticism as Mediterranean states have in rejecting Huntington's thesis about a "clash of civilisations". The predominant response has been that the Islamists may threaten certain Mediterranean regimes but do not constitute a direct threat to Europe².

Nonetheless, there has been a growing awareness in northern Europe that the conditions that have fuelled the radical Islamist movements are not part of some distant overseas malaise, rather that these conditions affect the European Union as a whole. From initial perceptions that the problems of North Africa affected only certain EU member states (mainly those bordering on the Mediterranean) there has been a gradual realisation that the Maghreb, in particular, is of importance to the entire European Union (Mortimer, 1994: 120; House of Lords, 1995). Various European countries, north and south, have experienced the problems of North Africa indirectly through, for example, receiving immigrants and refugees, the appearance of Islamist terrorist groups or support networks and the arrival of new drug-trafficking cartels (Spencer, 1996b: 6). It is worth noting in this context that, during the EU association agreement talks with Morocco, both the Germans and the Dutch voiced complaints about the number of illegal Maghrebi immigrants (Hooper, 1995).

Along with the experiences of individual member-states, Spain has undoubtedly played a major role in persuading the EU that the problems of North Africa are European, and not merely southern European, problems. In its self-appointed task of constant lobbying on the need to reinforce the Mediterranean policy of the Union, Spain was able to work harmoniously with France, which itself underwent something of a conversion, being persuaded by the dimensions of the Algerian crisis that a European response was required, even if it meant a diminution of French protagonism in relation to the Maghreb. The Spanish role was not simply that of a lobbyist, however; Spain was a tough negotiator, using coercion as well as persuasion to ensure that a real EU commitment was made to a Mediterranean partnership. Here, as Manuel Marín pointed out, 'the only country which [could] launch a realistic attempt to rebalance Europe's relations with its neighbours [was] Germany' (*Financial Times*, 20 October 1994). The decisive breakthrough came in the European Council meeting at Essen in 1994, 'thanks to the personal commitment of Chancellor Kohl', and this was made only after pressure had been applied by the European Commission through the Marín document, and after Felipe González had threatened to block progress towards the eastern enlargement of the EU unless a semblance of balance between east and south was introduced into the EU's external relations ('El forcejeo con Alemania', *El País*, 20 November 1995; Commission of the European Communities, 1994).

Also helping to bring the northern member-states on board was the degree of flexibility of the pro-partnership lobby: the extension of the original 'Euro-Maghreb' formula of 1992 to the eastern Mediterranean certainly made the project more interesting to countries such as Britain, which argued that stability could hardly be worked for in the Maghreb in isolation from developments in the Arab-Israeli context. Equally, the (reluctant) readiness

of Spain to exclude Libya from a seat at the Barcelona Conference showed sensitivity to the attitudes of both the British and French authorities, still pressing for the extradition of Libyan subjects accused of responsibility for the Pan Am and UTA plane bombings.

Essentially, then, the 'export' to Europe of north African problems and their consequences, as addressed in Commission documents, together with policy trade-offs within the EU, account for the recent growth in northern interest in the Mediterranean. There is little indication that a further, hypothetical factor may have been persuasive: namely, the lure of economic advantage. Certainly, an appeal to materialistic motives was made in the Commission documents that called for a 'rebalancing' of the EU's external relations: the neighbouring Mediterranean states represented a market of 304 million consumers (compared with 116 million in the east); they also had a higher combined GDP and greater energy dependence on the south. In a similar vane, although with entirely different motives, a Spanish critic of the Barcelona Conference argued that Spain stood to benefit far less from the projected free trade area because its share of EU exports to the Mediterranean non-member countries lagged behind the share of Germany, France and Italy, and even of the UK, Belgium and Luxembourg³. However, neither in northern nor in southern Europe is there any real evidence of economic gain having been an important stimulus or consideration behind the Euro-Mediterranean project. The EU's economic interests in the southern Mediterranean were comparatively unimportant in relation to other areas of the world (Niblock, 1996). German, British and Scandinavian priorities continued to relate to central and eastern Europe. Nonetheless, northern concern about the Mediterranean area grew, fuelled by warnings from France, Spain and Italy and reinforced by an increase in domestic problems related to instability and crisis in the south. Northern European states endorsed the Euro-Mediterranean initiative with some doubts regarding its viability and, although somewhat unsure where it would lead, were convinced at least that the EU needed to take concerted action in relation to a peripheral area containing threats to the stability of Europe.

NORTHERN INVOLVEMENT IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PROCESS

Although it has been primarily in response to perceptions of risk and threat that northern European countries have endorsed the Euro-Mediterranean Global Partnership, they have not approached it with a view to pursue security by military means. On the one hand, the northern Europeans share the southern Europeans' analysis of the threats to European stability emanating from instability in North Africa: that these arise fundamentally

out of socio-economic problems that require first and foremost an economic response to help the region acquire the financial wherewithal to satisfy the demands of its peoples. This is why the European Union was deemed a suitable vehicle to respond to Mediterranean problems (conversely, the northern countries would not see it as the job of the EU to create a security framework) (Spencer, 1996: 7-8). The northern states are, however, prepared to consider new initiatives in the strictly security domain, but there is a strong belief here that enough exist already, and that, indeed, there are too many security structures for European states to use (Fenech, 1997): new ones, it is thought would simply increase an existing tendency to duplication. This was one reason why the Hispano-Italian proposal for a Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), in 1990, met with a cool northern response –although the grand scope of the proposed CSCM was also seen as problematic. Note, however, that in late 1996, rather curiously, the United Kingdom canvassed the possibility of a CSCE-type organisation for the Middle East⁴.

Northern member-states of the EU have shown some interest in the security dimension of the Barcelona process, with France laying considerable emphasis on a ‘stability pact’ and the United Kingdom echoing the same slogan (*The Guardian*, 1 May 1995). However, the predominant domain of northern interest has remained the economic dimension, within which the main British contribution at Barcelona was an insistence on the need to stimulate trade and investment. As announced by Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, the problems surrounding economic liberalisation in North Africa would be the subject of studies conducted in the UK and by the Commission, leading to a conference which it was hoped might provide a point of departure for the mobilisation of private capital⁵.

Presumably, northern European governments including the Tory government in Britain and the Kohl administration in Germany would claim some credit for the economic doctrine behind the Barcelona process which is emphatically neo-liberal in its belief in the economic efficiency of market mechanisms. Paradoxically, the economic principles pioneered by that arch- Eurosceptic Margaret Thatcher have influenced the orthodox belief system of the European Commission, which of course has had a huge input into the detailed proposals concerning the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. When it comes to practice, however, the defence of vested interests has led some of the northern European governments into contradictions. While collectively they have expressed a preference for ‘trade rather than aid’ measures to support the development of the southern Mediterranean countries, several of these governments defend the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (that is, in those countries where this protectionist policy serves the interests of the domestic agricultural sector) even though it constitutes an impediment to north African export growth. The inconsistency of certain northern governments was highlighted on the very eve of the Barcelona Conference. Whereas earlier these governments had argued with their southern European counterparts about the need to make commercial concessions to the Maghreb countries, in autumn 1995, during the difficult negotiation of the EU-

Morocco association agreement, the Dutch, Germans and Belgians expressed last-minute concerns about the effects on their producers of increased Moroccan exports to Europe of cut flowers, tomatoes and potatoes (Marks, 1996: 19).

Among EU policy-makers who defend economic neo-liberalism, there has been a tendency to assume that political liberalisation in the Mediterranean area will follow automatically from economic liberalisation. Beyond this article of faith, no political strategy has been conceived either by the European Commission or by the pro-Mediterranean lobby to ensure that EU support for democratisation in the area is actively pursued. The political aims of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership were not discussed at Barcelona, evidently to avoid the controversy that would have arisen from drawing attention to the democratic deficit in the Middle East. Since then, various conferences and seminars have been held, often involving a combination of academic experts and policy makers. When the inter-relationship between the economic and political objectives of the Barcelona process is discussed, the conclusion is invariably that it is actually exceedingly complex and not amenable to easy generalisations. Nevertheless, northern Europeans are showing an interest in the linkages between the economic and political processes that the Barcelona process seeks to foster. For example, Israel and Turkey have been cited in one article to support the contention that political liberalisation can make a valuable contribution to both political stability and economic development (Gould, 1996: 125-26). On the other hand, with Algeria's frustrated political reform experience so fresh in the memory, it is recognised that, even if in the long run political liberalisation may be conducive to political stability, in the short run it may be conducive to destabilisation. Of course, this is a concern that certain North African governments are only too keen to exploit in their dealings with the EU.

For northern European policy-makers, support for political liberalisation in North Africa is linked both to a desire for stability in the region (which is required, among other things, to make the area more attractive to private investment) and to a domestic need to justify to public opinion a significant commitment of resources to North Africa—a region that typically accounts for less than one per cent of the overall trade of the northern countries. While the economic agenda of Barcelona—by far the most defined outcome of the Conference—has been pushed much more forcefully by the EU as a whole, the insistence upon political liberalisation and human rights (which receive direct mention in each of the Euro-Mediterranean association agreements) should not be seen as mere rhetoric. There is a general conviction that the effects of measures taken in any one of the 'baskets' of co-operation agreed to at Barcelona will have an impact on the effectiveness of measures taken in the other baskets.

It may be the case, though, that the northern Europeans will press more openly than some southern European countries when it comes to the political objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean process. On the one hand, the northerners have to justify their support for an initiative that is less central to their national economic and security

interests than the Barcelona process is in the case of the southern Europeans; on the other hand, given that they have relatively less at stake, the northerners may feel that they can afford occasionally to upset non-EU Mediterranean governments by criticising human rights violations. While national governments invariably proceed with great caution on this issue, the European Parliament, in which the greater weight of northern member states is a fact, has been prepared to upset Mediterranean neighbour states such as Turkey and Morocco (Attina, 1995: 88-89), even against opposition from member-states. This happened in January 1992 when aid to Morocco and Syria was vetoed notwithstanding Spanish alarm at the possibility of retaliation by Rabat⁶.

Of course, north-south differentiation can only be taken so far in this discussion, for Greece has often been in the forefront of European Parliament condemnations of human rights violations in Turkey. Clearly, no country has a monopoly on virtue in these questions, even if some are more outspoken than others. In the view of some southern European officials⁷, northern European censure of human rights violations in the Maghreb at times can be just a pretext for avoiding aid commitments which there is a reluctance to fulfill. Meanwhile, the whole of the EU is seen as hypocritical in human rights matters by many people in the Mediterranean partner countries. While certain southern and eastern Mediterranean states are singled out for European condemnation for human rights abuses, the accused are not always the worst or the only offenders. European credibility in these matters has suffered hugely from the selectiveness of EU posturing, which has been particularly tolerant of human rights violations by governments in Algeria, Tunisia and Israel, and perhaps too quick to deny human rights abuses in western Europe.

Nonetheless, some of the northern European states (including Britain) are taking an interest in the political dimension to the Barcelona process, and are trying to steer a course between trying to impose their values concerning political options and human rights observance on Mediterranean partner states, on the one hand, and political disengagement from the region, on the other. Those who express optimism about the possibility of political liberalisation in the Maghreb, encouraged by a constructive European role, point not only to the commitments entered into by the partners at Barcelona but also, just as crucially, to the support for liberalisation at the level of civil society within North Africa (Gould, 1996).

CONCLUSION

To southern European governments, including the Spanish, the level of commitment of the northern Europeans to the Barcelona process inevitably remains somewhat disappointing. If France is considered southern European, there has been

little to report in the way of northern activity apart from the British work in relation to the encouragement of private investment. The slowness of Euro-Mediterranean developments since Barcelona may be attributed in part to northern priorities relating to eastern-central Europe, and in part to the cumbersome nature of the European Union. Agreements can take several years to be ratified, prior to implementation, and collective decision-making has not been made any easier by Britain's defence of the need for unanimity in decisions relating to EU external policy⁸. The southern Europeans have thus found it necessary to revive the lobby that they formed during the gestation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, with France and Spain agreeing upon permanent strategic consultations on Mediterranean issues, and inviting Italy to work with them (*El País*, 11 June 1996). Both strategic orientation and concerted pressure within the EU will certainly be needed if the Barcelona process is ever to become and remain a top European priority.

However, northern European interest and involvement will remain the object of this lobbying, whose effectiveness in the last few years has been demonstrated in the growing tendency of the northern states to develop a global approach to Mediterranean policy and to think less in terms of compartmentalised sub-areas. While the hesitancy and reservations of the northern Europeans have been reflected in this article, and much more sceptical viewpoints could be cited⁹, the member-states of the north have taken the crucial step of accepting a degree of symmetry between the eastern and southern neighbouring states of the EU when it comes to the formulation of external policy.

Yet differences of perception and interest remain within the EU with regard to its relations with the southern partners. Although these are fundamentally national differences, it has been suggested here that the northern/southern European dimension must also be considered in any analysis of EU Mediterranean policy, not least because it provides a potential fault-line along which European disunity could develop. Perhaps the best counter-force to north-south divergence within the European Union is the ambiguity of France, straddling the divide. However, France is also one of the countries with strong interests in the Mediterranean area, displaying a distinctive (although some would say mistaken) policy towards at least the major parts of it. This has made it increasingly hard for the EU to accept French leadership in the development of the Union's Mediterranean policy, and a growing number of member-states have expressed their own views on the subject. There will certainly be more scope in the future for France, Spain, and Italy to concertedly influence the EU policy agenda, but the follow-up mechanisms of the Barcelona process guarantee that, in order to be effective, they will need to carry with them other member-states and of course the Mediterranean partners. The northern member-states may well be in the rearguard of this process, but they form an integral part of it.

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Notes

1. In the case of Britain, increased trade has been preferred to aid because the UK share of EU aid to North Africa (16 per cent) has been proportionally much higher than the British share of EU exports to the region (just 3 per cent, rising to about 10 per cent of EU exports to the Mediterranean as a whole), partly owing to the nature of British export credit policy (Ian Black, 'Britain Seeks Trade Not Aid Strategy', *The Guardian*, 25 November 1995). Former foreign secretary Douglas Hurd commented: 'Aid, all too often, trickles away into the sand' (*The Guardian*, 1 May 1995), although this was before the launch of the Barcelona process, within which the monitoring of aid to the non-EU states appears to be much more rigorous than in the case of EC Mediterranean policy in the past.
2. See, for example, "NATO's Claes War", editorial, *The Times*, 9 February 1995.
3. This was based on data for 1994, when Germany led the field with 23 per cent, followed by France with 22 per cent and Italy with 20 per cent, while Spain and Portugal were the only countries with trade deficits with North Africa ('Los reyes del Mediterráneo', *El Mundo*, 25 November 1995).
4. During 1996, the UK consulted the USA, Jordan and Egypt concerning the possible creation of an Organisation for Co-operation in the Middle East (OCME) whose objectives would be to resolve conflicts and build confidence beyond the scope of the existing peace process (*The Guardian*, 5 November 1996).
5. UK sequels to Rifkind's announcement included a major seminar on 'Political and Economic Liberalisation in North Africa' at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in January 1997, a project on economic liberalisation based at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, and the announced conference on 'Opportunities for Investment in the Mediterranean Region', in London on 6-7 March 1997.
6. Spain's fears were borne out when the European Parliament vote led to major difficulties affecting the access of Spanish fishermen to the rich fishing grounds off north-west Africa.
7. This remark is based on several personal interviews in the early 1990s with Spanish diplomats who must remain anonymous.
8. In January 1996 the MEDA budget was blocked by the UK in the Council of General Affairs of the EU. Malcolm Rifkind reportedly defended as a matter of principle the idea that any suspension of aid in response to human rights violations should be agreed by unanimity rather than by majority vote (*El País*, 30 January 1996).
9. For example, a report in *The Economist* ("A New Crusade", 2 December 1995, p. 27) referred to the aims of the Barcelona Conference as 'waffle', while journalist Martin Woollacott (1995) doubted that any of the real problems had been addressed at the event, comparing the participants to 'ghost ships of international diplomacy', avoiding a real encounter and just being 'glimpsed briefly between banks of fog'