



BUILDING A EURO-MEDITERRANEAN AREA

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EU enlargement and the unification of Europe call for fresh debate and action aimed at promoting the co-existence and cooperation of different peoples and cultures, and reinforcing our strategy for the regions on the fringes of Europe. Of these regions the Mediterranean is a priority for us.

As I have said before, to try to build the new Europe while neglecting "the cradle of civilisation" would be a grave mistake. But any Mediterranean strategy must tackle a number of issues:

- **The long-running conflicts that divide the region** (especially, but not only, the Israel-Palestine conflict)
- **The need to organise the new political and historical state of affairs in Iraq** and throughout the region
- **The need for a common European-Mediterranean approach**

Whatever we do, we clearly cannot treat the Mediterranean as merely a security issue or peripheral region. That would be short-sighted because it would fail to recognise the human, social and historical processes under way in the Euro-Mediterranean area, and ineffective because it would not get to grips with the root causes.

What we propose for the Mediterranean

What we propose is to make the **Mediterranean a major area of cooperation and integration** where we would establish special relations in the framework of a broader proximity policy.

Such a policy is an open-ended, cooperative response to the question of what to do about Europe's borders. It provides us with a new strategic framework.

For when we look south and eastwards it is very difficult to define Europe's new borders.

The issue of Europe's borders arises for two reasons:

1. **We cannot go on enlarging the Union indefinitely.** We must stabilise Europe's institutions and policies around a core group of countries (the new members, the remaining candidates and the Balkans).



2. We must offer our **Mediterranean partners a policy that opens new prospects for them** (on the basis of a true common agenda), and provides **incentives** (crucial for encouraging difficult domestic reforms), and **new instruments of cooperation** (more flexible and tailored to different national and regional circumstances).

- We would not be offering full integration but a way of enabling Europeans and the Mediterranean partners to work together on an absolutely equal footing for the purpose of identifying common objectives and stepping up our cooperation in all sectors where it would be useful and relevant: economics and trade, culture, research, training, the environment, energy, transport and a clamp-down on illegal activities.
- Of course, we do have something to build on. The Barcelona process is the first - and at the moment, only - attempt to establish structured and multilateral Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. This process must be reinforced and developed through new incentives and greater flexibility.
- Our new strategy puts more emphasis on the idea of co-ownership, which will be stepped up in the Euro-Mediterranean area. We have already made two substantive proposals: the Euro-Mediterranean Bank and the Foundation for dialogue between cultures.

The Euro-Mediterranean Bank could help give a decisive fillip to economic cooperation in the area and create value-added on activities we are undertaking, not only in economic terms but also, and perhaps above all, in qualitative/political terms. It will also be an important instrument for promoting subregional cooperation between groups of countries (the Maghreb, for example).

The job of the Foundation for dialogue between cultures will be to promote intellectual and cultural exchanges and facilitate an ongoing cultural debate (through television, radio, the press and the internet), sponsor major cultural events, and highlight the role of activities carried out under Barcelona and the proximity policy.

Again with the aim of promoting dialogue and mutual awareness, I took the initiative of setting up a high level group which is working to identify new forms of action that could be taken by the Commission, governmental and non-governmental partners, and the Foundation itself.

It is crucial that we focus on awareness of diversity and acceptance of the "other", especially among the young.

Within the Union we must look for new solutions - solutions that are positive - for dealing with the problem of immigration. We must link the issue of immigration and relations between different cultures to the fundamental values of European citizenship. We must reach out to the workplace and schools, and get our message across in the media.



In North-South relations the dialogue could also promote the **growth of civil society**, which is fundamental for progress towards democracy in many countries of the South.

I very much hope that progress will be made in setting up the Foundation and re-opening the debate on the Euro-Mediterranean Bank under the **Greek** (meeting in Crete end of May) and later the **Italian Presidencies** (above all the meeting in Naples in early December).

Something else we have to build on is **the network of association agreements** (Syria being the only odd man out), which can be used to promote modernisation in our Mediterranean partners, which has been rendered more urgent and necessary by globalisation.

Even this process the EU regards as a matter of common interest.

For we are the Mediterranean countries' leading trade partners and we must step up our efforts to create a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area that will be the springboard for a new type of economic and political cooperation in the region.

This project could also benefit cooperation initiatives of groups of countries in the South, an example being subregional cooperation in the Maghreb, extended to embrace Libya, and the Agadir initiative (liberalisation of trade between Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia).

The euro can play a key role by fostering closer economic and trade relations in the region and by facilitating these countries' access to international capital flows.

The fight against poverty must be won. How can we achieve our objectives if 30% of people in the southern Mediterranean are still living on less than $\text{€}2$ a day?

But we cannot discuss the Mediterranean and not refer to the situation in **Iraq and the Middle East**.

The European Union is in a unique position and has what it takes to act in the Middle East.

We must therefore insist that, whatever the recent difficulties, the **Road Map** for peace receives the clear and decisive support of all the parties involved.

Looking further east, the EU should **develop a new regional strategy that embraces Iraq, Iran and Syria**. Only this kind of approach can lay the foundations for lasting stability and security.

On the subject of **Iraq**, I should point out that it is not simply a question of material aid for reconstruction (though the Commission has already mobilised significant amounts of humanitarian aid).

The most important thing is to rebuild the morale of the Iraqi people. Here the key role must be played by the **people themselves** and the **United Nations**. The Iraqis must be able to decide on their own political future and regain control of their country's resources.



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This is why I hope that **UN Security Council members will rapidly reach agreement on a UN mandate for Iraq** that satisfies these conditions.

Multilateral legitimisation is fundamental and is in the interests of the United States, Europe and the Middle East. Legitimacy would help ease the Iraqi people's tensions and fears, and pave the way for a **fresh political start in the whole region east of the Jordan**.

Peace and security can only be secured in the region and in the world by **strengthening relations between Europe and the US** on the basis of equality and mutual respect.