

## European Alumni Association conference

### “Attempts at Partnership: The Barcelona Process and Neighborhood Policy”

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Before the end of the Cold War, the European Union directed very little of its foreign policy activities toward neighboring states that were not prospective members. Only in June of 1991 did the EU assert that promotion of democracy and human rights was an essential element of its foreign policy. In November of 1995, to deal with the prospect of instability and massive illegal immigration from North Africa into Europe, the EU created the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, commonly known as the Barcelona Process. This Barcelona Process functioned through bilateral association agreements in separate baskets for political, economic, and cultural affairs. The economic basket has been by far the most active with initiatives focusing in areas of aid and trade. The principal goal has been the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by 2010, and some progress has been made in this direction with the EU allocating one billion euros annually for aid to its Mediterranean partners in the budget cycle for 2000-2006. A significant achievement was marked in March of 2004 when an integrated market was created among Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, and Egypt. Several factors have limited the effectiveness of the Barcelona Process. EU members have shown divergent goals in their policies for the Mediterranean countries, and they have been reluctant to use conditionality to pursue these goals. More serious has been the fact that the fate of the Barcelona Process was imminently linked with the status of the Middle East peace process and as this peace process stalled, interest in Barcelona activities also slowed. A final complication was the fact that the unwieldy bureaucracy and volumes of paperwork

required by the European Union resulted in only 26 percent of the aid that was allocated being disbursed in the first five years of the Barcelona Process' operation.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union and in anticipation of the expansion to ten new members in the European Union in May of 2004, EU leadership decided that it needed to establish a policy for the former Soviet republics which would be on the border of new members such as Poland and ultimately Romania and Bulgaria. The result was the creation in March of 2003 of the wider Europe Neighborhood Policy which was designed to create positive relations and hopefully generate prosperity in the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Before the new policy was approved the southern members of the European Union successfully lobbied to include the Mediterranean states so that ultimately the wider Europe Neighborhood Policy included both the eastern and the southern neighbors of the EU. This new policy was designed to work through differentiated individual action plans of three to five years in which targets would be set and the partners would receive benefits as the targets were met. To date, seven action plans have been negotiated and are at various stages of implementation.

At the present time we can say that three obstacles impede an effective European Union program for progress and democratic reform in the Middle East. The EU and its member states have been very reluctant to push reform through making aid and trade benefits conditional on performance; the Middle East governments themselves have been very reluctant to reform; and the European democracy promotion efforts are weighted down by layers of bureaucracy.

These difficulties are further complicated by differences between the approaches of the United States and the European Union. While the European Union tends to

concentrate on North Africa and the Levant, the United States concentrates on Israel and the Gulf. The European Union uses long-term economic aid in the expectation that it will produce political reform, whereas the United States wants quicker results and uses political action and coercive diplomacy. With regard to recalcitrant or rogue regimes the EU prefers engagement, while the U.S. prefers isolation under the Bush administration's policies. Finally the EU feels reform must come from within and is likely to take generations, while the United States under its present government has experimented with enforced regime change and other forms of pressure with very limited results.