

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean
— implications for regional and local authorities’**

(2008/C 325/08)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- underlines the importance of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* initiative which has put the Mediterranean at the top of the European agenda and stimulated discussions and thinking commensurate with the stakes involved;
- is convinced that initiatives from either side of the Mediterranean that focus exclusively on a diplomatic approach will not achieve sustainable solution for as long as local democracy is not put at the heart of the debate, in terms of both strengthening it and of direct cooperation between regions and towns on both sides of the Mediterranean under the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*;
- recalls that the territorial level is an level of governance from which solutions may be devised simultaneously adjusting to and responding to the challenges posed by globalisation, in close cooperation with other institutional levels. Local and regional authorities, particularly in Europe, have increasingly asserted themselves as a valid link in devising such solutions;
- consequently repeats its call for local and regional authorities to be recognised as key partners in the Barcelona Process and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation;
- resolves to promote the establishment of a **Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)**, made up of a number of members of the Committee of the Regions, representatives of European and international associations engaged in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, and an equal number of representatives of regional and local authorities from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, as a permanent platform for dialogue, exchange and cooperation, and calls for its recognition as a consultative body within the future governance of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*, on the pattern of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly with regard to national parliaments.

Rapporteur-general: Mr Isidoro GOTTARDO, Member of the Sacile Municipal Council

Reference document

Referral from the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union on the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean — implications for regional and local authorities* and the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*

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I. GENERAL COMMENTS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. Underlines the importance of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* initiative which has put the Mediterranean at the top of the European agenda and stimulated discussions and thinking commensurate with the stakes involved; hails both the pragmatic nature and the political vision of the project launched by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union and supported by 16 partner countries from the southern and eastern Mediterranean;
2. Welcomes the success of certain measures and initiatives that the *Barcelona Process* has thus far produced; regrets, nevertheless, the lack of significant progress in the area of peace, security and human and social development, as well as the lack of involvement of local and regional authorities;
3. Emphasises that the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*, in its new guise, should enable what was a purely intergovernmental cooperation system to become a project for dialogue between the citizens of the three shores and in particular for cooperation between the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, bringing together their local and regional authorities in a framework of practical and agreed projects as part of an overall strategy based on citizens' needs and on solidarity;
4. Considers that one of the conditions for successful cooperation between Euro-Mediterranean countries and for a stronger partnership through the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* is that new catalysing issues be identified in order to make the practical benefits comprehensible to citizens by turning declarations of principle into tangible measures, which entails strong involvement of local and regional elected leaders and clear, active communication;
5. Notes that stronger action on the part of local and regional authorities and civil society in public policy is often limited by the weakness of local democracy and the lack of any real process of decentralisation in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries;
6. Similarly, notes that decentralisation and participatory local governance do not always go hand-in-hand. In some States, both within the EU and beyond its borders, local and regional authorities share the challenge of increasing participation in elections and of promoting public participation and involving the associative sector in drawing up strategies and in developing major urban or regional projects;
7. Is convinced that initiatives from either side of the Mediterranean that focus exclusively on a diplomatic approach will not achieve sustainable solution for as long as local democracy is not put at the heart of the debate, in terms of both strengthening it and of direct cooperation between regions and towns on both sides of the Mediterranean under the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*;
8. In this spirit, welcomes the declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, meeting in Paris on 13 July, underscoring 'the importance of the active participation of civil society, local and regional authorities and the private sector in the implementation of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*';
9. Nevertheless, considers that it would not be appropriate to give equal status to those who hold democratic legitimacy, such as local and regional authorities, and those who do not, such as civil society and the private sector;
10. Also agrees with the Heads of State and Government of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership that to 'increase co-ownership of the process, set governance on the basis of equal footing and translate it into concrete projects, more visible to citizens' will allow relations between the three shores of the Mediterranean to be made 'more concrete and visible through additional regional and sub-regional projects, relevant for citizens of the region';
11. Expresses the willingness and commitment of local and regional authorities to enrich the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*;
12. Recalls experiences with introducing European policies, most of which require the commitment, resources and action of local authorities in order to implement them, and also highlights the solid experience and know-how of European local and regional authorities in tackling and management urban and rural matters concerning the environment, energy, transport, civil protection, migration, economic development and many other priorities for the *Barcelona Process* which remain valid, such as intercultural dialogue, education and the human and social dimension; therefore regrets that the development projects accompanying the conclusions of the Paris summit were not subject to prior consultation with the regional and local authorities, in spite of their necessary involvement in the future implementation phase, and emphasises the need in the future to correct this intergovernmental approach through the clear involvement of all the levels of governance concerned;

13. In keeping with earlier opinions on this subject, stresses the importance of involving local and regional authorities not only during the implementation phase, but throughout the cooperation process, from crafting strategies, implementation and through to monitoring and evaluation of results. This applies in particular to fields where local and regional authorities have broad and direct powers, such as urban and spatial planning, water management, waste management and treatment, the environment and the local impact of climate change, local economic development, the management and enhancement of the cultural and historic heritage, local tourism development, basic public health, integration policies and social cohesion;

14. Welcomes the imminent launch of the new CIUDAD programme within the existing European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, which seeks to promote cooperation in urban development and dialogue in the Mediterranean region; agrees that the priority areas include environmental sustainability, energy efficiency, sustainable economic development and reduction of social disparities, fields where local and regional authorities have broad and direct powers, and where solid experience and know-how can be provided by the European local and regional authorities;

15. Points out that the financial aspects of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* have not yet been specified and that local and regional authorities can serve as technical and financial as well as political partners in framing and implementing strategies and projects that meet both the real needs of citizens and the objectives of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*; also notes that the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* makes no changes whatsoever to the programming or financial aspects of the Mediterranean dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

16. Recalls that the territorial level is a level of governance from which solutions may be devised simultaneously adjusting to and responding to the challenges posed by globalisation, in close cooperation with other institutional levels. Local and regional authorities, particularly in Europe, have increasingly asserted themselves as a valid link in devising such solutions;

17. Consequently repeats its call for local and regional authorities to be recognised as key partners in the *Barcelona Process* and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation;

18. Recognises the role and experience of the various networks and associations of local, regional national, European and international authorities engaged in decentralised Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, as well as their know-how

and on-the-spot knowledge⁽¹⁾. For this reason, efforts must be more shared and the objectives of decentralised cooperation projects must be brought closer into line with those of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in order to maximise the results;

19. Restates its support for the declaration of the representatives of the local and regional authorities of the Mediterranean and Europe, meeting on 23 June 2008 at the Forum of local and regional authorities of the Mediterranean in Marseille;

20. And against this backdrop, shares the willingness of local and regional elected representatives and their representative associations to create an institutional instrument ensuring that they enjoy permanent political representation and can contribute actively to the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*, a powerful instrument for territorialisation, thus reiterating the call made by the Committee of the Regions in earlier opinions on the subject;

21. Intends in consequence to set up a Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) made up of members representing, on an equal footing, regional and local elected representatives of the European Union and of the Mediterranean partner countries, on the pattern of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) created to represent the parliamentary dimension;

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

22. Urges the governance bodies of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* not only to grant political recognition to local and regional authorities, but to incorporate them formally and effectively into the cooperation process and into the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*;

23. Therefore calls for the definition, in the new working documents, of the role of local and regional authorities as full partners in the cooperation process under the newly relaunched *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*;

24. Strongly urges that local and regional authorities, alongside central governments, take part if possible from an early stage in preparing association agreements, strategic documents and action plans that are conceived on a bilateral basis between the European Union and the southern and eastern Mediterranean partner countries, and in particular within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

⁽¹⁾ Numerous networks, associations and centres are involved in practical actions, studies and research on the Euro-Mediterranean countries and cooperation. Their work should be catalogued so that it can become known and lessons be drawn from it, in order to build all new initiatives on the basis of these achievements. One example would be the 'World Report of United Cities and Local Governments on decentralisation and local democracy', describing the situation in the partner countries of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*.

25. And therefore calls upon the Euro-Mediterranean governments to set up mechanisms for structured national dialogue and consultation with sub-state (regional and local) agents, the social partners and civil society, by bringing in networks and associations of local and regional authorities;

26. Resolves to promote the establishment of a **Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)**, made up of a number of members of the Committee of the Regions, representatives of European and international associations engaged in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, and an equal number of representatives of regional and local authorities from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, as a permanent platform for dialogue, exchange and cooperation, and calls for its recognition as a consultative body within the future governance of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*, on the pattern of the EMPA with regard to national parliaments;

27. Urges the European Commission to harmonise, coordinate and closely link the new approach with the various Community programmes, projects and instruments ⁽²⁾ and with the existing Euro-Mediterranean counterparts ⁽³⁾ in order to harness the relevant experiences, avoid duplication of activities and accumulate progress;

28. Proposes a feasibility study on adjusting existing structural support instruments to the Mediterranean setting, which would essentially comprise a policy of economic and social cohesion through which cooperation between the local and regional authorities of the European Union and of the Mediterranean countries would be based on a territorial dimension;

29. Urges the governance bodies of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* to take this opportunity provided by the renewal of this process to move ahead with the reform of

local governance and decentralisation in certain countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, and to initiate decentralisation process in others;

30. Proposes that priority be given to strategies for the institutional reinforcement of local and regional authorities and that administrative modernisation programmes and local and regional human resources training projects be introduced;

31. Considers that giving greater responsibility to local and regional elected representatives will contribute to the emergence of multi-level governance bringing together different institutional levels in the process of deciding, preparing, implementing and evaluating public policies and development policies;

32. Suggests that local human, technical and academic resources be mobilised when implementing projects, and that public participation be maximised, so that they take ownership of the cooperation process and the ensuing projects;

33. Considers, lastly, that the dynamics of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean* could offer all the actors at the various levels opportunities for learning, for new relations and for new means of mutual recognition, at the same time helping the various actors involved (central and decentralised administrations, local and regional authorities, civil society, etc.) to get to grips with a new approach to development and local democracy, and;

34. instructs its president to submit this opinion to the French Presidency of the EU, the Co-Presidency of the Union for the Mediterranean, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and to the Heads of State of the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.

Brussels, 9 October 2008

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE

⁽²⁾ For example, interregional cooperational funds, and EU enlargement policy towards candidates for accession such as Croatia and Turkey.

⁽³⁾ For example, the European Neighbourhood Policy, Community programmes such as Erasmus Mundus or the Framework Programme for Research and Development; the 5+5 dialogue between the Mediterranean countries of the EU and the Maghreb countries.