

*NEW PERSPECTIVES IN EUROPEAN COOPERATION LAW: THE CASE OF CULTURAL
PROGRAMME FINANCING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN*

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Résumé : dès 1995, les Etats méditerranéens et la Communauté Européenne ont élaboré des politiques et programmes pour renforcer la coopération culturelle et académique. Le nouveau Instrument de la Politique Européenne de Voisinage représente un tournant important pour la coopération transfrontalière dans le bassin méditerranéen : institutions publiques locales, universités, écoles et entreprises privées doivent jouer un rôle actif au fin de la réalisation d'une société de la connaissance et de l'information.

Summary : since 1995, Mediterranean States and the European Community have developed policies and programmes to strengthen cooperation in the fields of culture and academic research. The new European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument marks a “new era” in the field of trans-border cooperation in the Mediterranean basin: public local institutions, universities, schools and private companies are asked to play an active role in the realization of a knowledge-based society.

Mots clés : partenaire, voisinage, Méditerranée, coopération, programme, financement.

Key words : partnership, neighbourhood, Mediterranean, cooperation, programme, financing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean basin has always represented a cradle of age-long civilizations, facing the sea as an elective means to go beyond territorial boundaries, as well as economic, social and cultural borders.

Balancing on a fine thread between peaceful co-existence and the so called clash of civilizations, Mediterranean peoples have gradually become aware of the decisive importance of a closer mutual cooperation.

In particular, in the last decades a sharp increase of inter-Mediterranean relations happened, both at a political and economic level. In fact, first of all, the outburst of bloody wars - such as the Balkan and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts - and the increased phenomenon of emigration towards Europe proved the urgent need for shared strategies and common solutions. Secondly, globalization did away with economic boundaries and restored the traditional role of the Mediterranean basin as an open door to new and promising markets.

In this perspective, new actors appeared on the stage of this millenary play, coming up beside States and diplomatic corps to strengthen trans-boundary relations.

Public local institutions, schools, universities, associations, NGOs, private companies and other components of civil society took these challenges and are currently claiming a more active involvement in this process.

Moreover, the European Community has developed specific policies and instruments in order to encourage cross-border and inter-regional cooperation between Member States and the southern Mediterranean.

In particular, European institutions have drawn a legal and financial framework within which this engagement can be translated into concrete programmes, projects and initiatives.

The first section of this paper aims at providing the reader with a general overview of the recent milestones of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, devoting an in-depth attention to the so called Barcelona Process and the new European Neighbourhood Policy.

In the last part, we will analyse the characteristics and potentialities of the

European Neighbourhood Policy Instruments, which selects the priorities of the Member States' action and sets the necessary institutional and legal mechanisms. In particular, we will concentrate on the promotion of a knowledge-based Mediterranean society, by the means of a closer economic, cultural and academic cooperation.

2. EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP: THE BARCELONA PROCESS.

2.1. A new political agenda.

In 1994, the European Council held in Essen underlined that the European Union had entered a new phase, marked by a number of significant changes. Among them, the European Union was aware of the need for a substantial boost in the management of its foreign affairs policy, considering its increasing active contribution to overcoming "*the legacy of past divisions, and promoting peace, security and stability in and around Europe*".

Besides the urgency to set up a new strategy to direct the relations with Eastern Europe and Russia, the European Council confirmed the Union's willingness to support the Mediterranean countries in their efforts to transform progressively their region into a zone of peace, stability, prosperity and cooperation.

In order to achieve these ambitious goals, the Council agreed that, as the largest international donor, the Community had to revise its priorities in the Mediterranean area and suggested Member States establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, developing appropriate agreements and progressively strengthening trade relations.

Furthermore, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs gathering in Essen welcomed the decision of the imminent Spanish Presidency to convene, in the second half of 1995, a Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference with the participation of all Mediterranean countries concerned. This Conference should have reached an agreement on a series of economic and political guidelines for Euro-

Mediterranean cooperation into the next century and would have established a permanent and regular dialogue on all subjects of common interest.

Thus, the Essen European Council clearly affirmed the political support of the Member States to a sharp acceleration of the cooperation with the Mediterranean neighbours willing to join the partnership.

Moreover, on the 8th of March of the following year, just some months before the mentioned Intergovernmental Conference, the European Commission addressed to the Council of the European Community and to the European Parliament an important Communication on the reinforcement of the Union's Mediterranean policy.

The Communication aimed at sketching some proposal for the realization of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and represented an important starting point for further reflections and foreseeable actions.

2.2. The beginning of the Barcelona process.

In this favourable context, 27 countries took part in the Ministerial Conference, which was held in Barcelona, on the 27th and 28th November 1995. The list numbered the 15 EU Member States and 12 Mediterranean non-member countries: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

The participants opened officially the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership laying the foundations of a process designed to build a multilateral framework for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the Mediterranean countries.

According to the final Declaration of the Conference, the Partnership would have been structured in a basket-base design, marked with three decisive guidelines: political cooperation; economic and financial integration; social, human and cultural exchange.

The political cooperation would have been addressed to the creation of a common area of peace and stability, founded on the promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms and on the active engagement for regional security.

From an economic and financial point of view, the Conference looked forward to the creation of an area of shared prosperity, by the means of commercial agreements and the

establishment of a free-trade Euro-Mediterranean market. These achievements would have granted the sustainable socio-economic development of the region and the improvement of the living conditions in the southern border of the Mediterranean.

Lastly, the partnership in social, cultural and human affairs would have been devoted to the development of human resources, the mutual understanding between cultures and reciprocal exchange between civil societies.

One of the main outcomes of the Conference was the setting-up of a multi-level institutional scheme, in order to grant the enforcement and the implementation these demanding commitments. Indeed, the arrangement of an institutional and procedural framework marked the difference between a *una tantum* Conference and the beginning of a long-lasting process.

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs undertook to oversee the follow-up of the Barcelona process, through yearly plenary assemblies and more frequent meetings on specific subjects. Moreover, a Euro-Mediterranean Committee was established, made up of the EU's *Troika* and a representative from each State.

2.3. The implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

As the implementation of the Barcelona work programme required a considerable budgetary commitment, in 1996 the Council of the European Union issued a regulation setting the MEDA programme, the financial instrument designed to accompany the development of Mediterranean non-member countries.

MEDA regulation enabled the EU to provide financial and technical assistance to these States and took the place of the various bilateral protocols previously existing, thus trying to ensure a higher level of effectiveness and coherence of the Union's action towards its southern periphery.

MEDA I financing was then amended in 2000, on the basis of a general economic planning. In particular, in order to achieve its objectives, the MEDA II programme was allocated EUR 5.350 million for the 2000-2006 period and took the form of:

- grants managed by the European Commission and used to finance or cofinance activities, projects or programmes that contribute to the

realisation of the MEDA programme's objectives;

- risk capital provided and managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) to strengthen the private sector, especially the financial sector;
- interest rate subsidies for EIB loans within the framework of environmental cooperation, not exceeding a subsidy rate of 3%.

The programme could involve a wide range of beneficiaries, including local authorities, and communities, private operators, cooperatives, associations, foundations and NGOs in the EU and the Mediterranean partners. In this way, every branch of the society was allowed to bring its own substantial contribution to the deepening of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership process.

It is important to underline that, in conformity with article 3 of the Council regulation, the programme was *“based on respect for democratic principles and the rule of law and also for human rights and fundamental freedoms, which constitute an essential element thereof, the violation of which element will justify the adoption of appropriate measures”*.

This negative conditionality clause resumed the need for higher standards of human rights protection in many areas of the Mediterranean basin. It has always represented – and still today represents – one of the most frequent instruments through which the EU tries to promote democracy and human rights in its external activity. In the MEDA programme, the clause subordinated the disbursement of every financial aid to the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the beneficiaries and was accompanied by a series of positive provisions encouraging political reforms and institutional choices consistent with these standards.

Nonetheless, an important knot still has to be untied. On the occasion of the 2002 Valencia Ministerial Conference, the African partners proposed the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Development Bank (EMDB), with a view to expanding the range of financial instruments available in the area. The main role of the Bank would be to foster the development of the private sector and help finance infrastructure, especially in sectors undergoing liberalization and privatization. While the Conference recognized the need to

set up an independent Bank, it postponed the initiative, adopting instead a dedicated European Investment Bank financial instrument: the facility for Euro-Mediterranean investment and Partnership (FEMIP). In contrast to the aspirations of the African partners for a completely independent body, in order to strengthen the sense of equal partnership, the European Commission pressed for the presence of a close linkage between the new instrument and the European Investment Bank, as such association could generate greater investment opportunities and grow more expediently. Despite doubts, FEMIP has been operational since October 2002 and is now a key player in the economic and financial relations between Europe and the Mediterranean, with financing operations worth almost EUR 6 billion mounted between October 2002 and December 2006.

Besides the multi-level cooperation, the Partnership has also been enriched by a bilateral dimension: actually, the European Union concluded seven Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements between 1998 and 2005 with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. These agreements are based on the three-party structure of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and provide a suitable framework for North-South political dialogue. They also serve as a basis for the gradual liberalisation of trade in the Mediterranean area, and set out the conditions for economic, social and cultural cooperation between the EU and each partner country, including the fundamental rights clauses.

2.4. Some achievements.

Almost 15 years have passed since the launching of the Barcelona intergovernmental process and further countries have gradually joined it. Even if many macroscopic objectives are still far from being reached, the Partnership has proved partly successful, as it has offered the opportunity to widen the horizons of each State. Moreover, the renewed Mediterranean cooperation has taken the shape of thousands of local projects in various fields, such as environment, culture, scientific research, academic internationalization, human rights promotion.

As far as cultural and civil society aspects are concerned, the most noteworthy achievements of the Ministerial Conferences are the Euro-

Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) and the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures (ALF).

The EMPA was launched in March 2004 in Athens, as a means to improve cooperation in democratization. It counts a total of 240 parliamentarians – 12 members from each partner and 120 from EU – who take part in committees with a mandate for dealing with the three baskets of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The Assembly can adopt resolutions and address recommendations to the Ministerial Conferences, with a view to achieving the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Even if such proposals can be adopted only by consensus and are not legally binding on the parties, the creation of this Assembly has to be considered with the due regard, because it may be read as an evidence of a new conception of the Euro-Mediterranean relations. In fact, it is gradually transforming the Partnership from inter-governmental to inter-parliamentary in nature, thus rising the political legitimacy of the Barcelona process.

The Anna Lindh Foundation is designed to contribute decisively to the development of a genuine sense of joint ownership of the Barcelona process by all its members. It is meant to disseminate and implement the goals of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in the field of social and cultural cooperation. Among the institutional objectives of the Foundation, a specific attention is devoted to its role in *“promoting exchanges, cooperation and mobility between people at all levels, targeting in particular the young and activities relevant to young people”*.

Although the ANF has been planned to play an important role, it is institutionally independent of any partner, private organization and donor and it is financed by grants from the European Commission and pre-determined contributions of each State. These resources are employed in the implementation of projects promoted by the Foundation itself, but are also destined to the financing of high-quality initiatives proposed by civil society groups.

2.5. Current strategies and the foreseeable future.

2010 will constitute an important lap for the cultural and social basket of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In fact, in 2005, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the

Euro-Med Partnership, the Ministerial Conference fixed the target to halve the number of analphabetic people and to strengthen education in the countries of the southern border of the Mediterranean within 5 years.

The imminent deadline will certainly serve as a litmus paper in order to evaluate advances and shortcomings of the efforts put in place in this branch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. On the 13th July 2008, the representatives of each State re-launched the Barcelona process – now called Union for the Mediterranean – adopting a joint Declaration at the end of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean. The Summit reasserted the central importance of the Mediterranean on the political agenda of all countries, stressing the need for better co-ownership by all participants and for more relevance and visibility for the citizens. In order to transform good intentions into actions, the Declaration moves a step further and wishes the widening of political consensus at regional level, to pursue cooperation, political and socio-economic reform and modernization on the basis of equality and mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. In fact, while maintaining the *acquis* of the Barcelona process, the Union for the Mediterranean offers more balanced governance and a commitment to tangible, regional and trans-national projects. Some of the most important innovations include the a rotating co-presidency with one EU President and one President representing the Mediterranean partners, and a Secretariat based in Barcelona that is responsible for identifying and promoting projects of regional, sub-regional and trans-national value across different sectors. The Summit identified some priorities, among which it is important to mention the inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia, a specific attention to scientific research in the field of renewable energies and the arrangement of a Mediterranean Business Development Initiative focusing on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Such priorities reaffirm the will to promote sustainable development by the means of both integration of Mediterranean economies and support to culture and scientific research.

In this context, the eligible beneficiaries of the Euro-Mediterranean project financing will benefit from new and even more appealing

opportunities to play an active role in the Partnership.

3. THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

3.1. The background.

Most of the observers believe that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership did not live up with the expectations the initiative raised when it was launched in November 1995.

There is no doubt that over the years, the Barcelona Process has come under serious reform pressure. To a large extent, this is due to the altered regional and global parameters within which EU policy towards the Mediterranean takes place. Indeed, when the Partnership started in 1995, the Middle East peace process was ongoing, the Twin Towers terrorist attack was a movie screenplay at best and the EU numbered 15 Member States. Almost 15 years later, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has collapsed and the struggle against international terrorism compels the world entire to shared efforts. But even more important for the future of EU-Mediterranean relations has been the recent enlargement process to further 12 Member States, which has even involved some previous Mediterranean partners such as Malta and Cyprus, thus causing a new composition of the EU's southern periphery. Such epochal turning-point has prompted the EU to reconsider its relations to those countries of the southern and eastern borders that would not benefit from EU accession.

3.2. The launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In 2003, the European Commission issued a Communication addressed to the Council and the European Parliament sketching an overview of the new framework of the relations with Europe's neighbours. In this document, the Commission repeated "*the Union's determination to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union*" and called for "*enhanced relations with Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the Southern Mediterranean countries to be based on a long term approach promoting reform, sustainable development and trade*". The communication suggested the EU developing a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood with a "*ring of*

friends", a series of countries with whom EU enjoyed close and cooperative relations. According to the Commission, the "*wider Europe*" scheme would have benefited from the *acquis* of the Barcelona process, enhancing and deepening Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on the ground of a benchmarking approach. Among the guidelines, a particular attention was devoted to priorities which had characterized the gradual European integration on substantive matters, such as trade, transports, communications, culture, agriculture, energy and common security. Moreover, the slogan "*Different countries, common interests*" accompanied the exhortation to develop shared policies in the struggle against poverty and in the management of emigration phenomenon.

The following year, the Strategy Paper for the implementation of the ENP was issued by the Commission. The Commission itself claimed once again that the "*wider Europe*" scheme was compatible with – and complementary to – the Barcelona process. In fact, the ENP "*should not override the existing framework of EU relations with the southern Mediterranean partners. Instead, the wider Europe would supplement and build on existing policies and arrangements*".

Therefore, the ENP was inspired by two main objectives:

- to prevent new dividing lines in Europe that may emerge through the construction and consolidation of Fortress Europe, giving rise to border areas in which interaction would be almost inexistent;
- to share the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries in strengthening stability, security and well-being.

3.3. The "all but membership" approach.

At first sight, the ENP was very much in line with the principles of EU external policies, as it aimed at increased security and stability through cooperation in various policy fields. However, range and scope of the envisaged cooperation, which was to involve significant measure of economic and political integration, somewhat represented a novelty.

Actually, at a macro-level, the aim was to foster a ring of well governed countries on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom to enjoy close relations, except membership. To

do so, the ENP was meant to be based on a comprehensive approach, which has been summarized as “*all but membership*” or “*sharing everything but institutions*”.

At the outset of the process, the Commission prepared Country Reports, assessing the political and economic situation as well as institutional aspects, to evaluate when and how it would have been possible to deepen relations with that country. Country Reports were published in May 2004 on the first seven of the ENP countries to have Agreements in force with the EU; a further five were published in March 2005 on the next countries to be included in the policy (Southern Caucasus) or whose Agreements had come into force (Egypt and Lebanon).

The next stage was the development of Action Plans with each country. These documents were negotiated with and tailor-made for each country, based on the country’s needs and capacities, as well as their and the EU’s interests. They jointly define an agenda of political and economic reforms by means of short and medium-term priorities, programmed for a period of 3 or 5 years. They cover political dialogue and reform, economic and social cooperation and development, trade-related issues and market and regulatory reform, cooperation in justice and home affairs, sectors (such as transport, energy, information society, environment, research and development) and a human dimension (people-to-people contacts, civil society, education, public health, ...). The incentives on offer, in return for progress on relevant reforms, are greater integration into European programmes and networks, increased assistance and enhanced market access. 12 such ENP Action Plans are being implemented – with Israel, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Tunisia and Ukraine since 2005 and with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lebanon and Egypt since end 2006/beginning 2007.

3.4. Monitoring and evaluating the ENP: a duplicate of the Barcelona process?

The implementation of the mutual commitments and objectives contained in the Action Plans is regularly monitored through sub-committees with each country, whose cooperation in the disclosure of any useful information and document is strongly recommended. From its side, the Commission,

as from 2006, issues yearly specific Reports for each country and then adopts a communication drawing conclusions from the various individual Reports, underlining advances and shortcomings with regard to strategic matters, such as institutional reforms, normative harmonization, promotion of human rights and socio-economic development.

The structure and the functioning of the ENP need to be weighed in the light of its similarities and differences from the mechanisms of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Actually, some observers doubt that the new European approach could represent an effective improvement of the pre-existing scheme. Others point out the incompatibility of the two policy approaches, denouncing their reciprocal overlapping, to total detriment of the Barcelona process. Nonetheless, the ENP and the Partnership are still being implemented alongside, as they considerably differ in some important key-points.

First of all, the ENP abandons the prevalence of the principle of regionality that is inherent with the Barcelona process, and replaces it with differentiated bilateralism. Certainly, the Partnership already incorporates a bilateral dimension, but it is based on rather similar association agreements with the partner countries. Conversely, the “wider Europe” scheme is an explicitly differentiated and bilateral approach. Indeed, operating on an individual basis, the ENP offers to upgrade relations to those neighbours that are politically and economically more advanced or willing to undertake serious political and economic reforms. In this perspective, the ENP no longer relies on the Partnership’s idea of an encompassing Euro-Mediterranean area, confirmed after the 2008 Paris Summit through the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean. Therefore, the Commission now acknowledges that the regional dimension of the Barcelona process is only a complementary element, limited to the promotion of intra-regional trade and sub-regional cooperation.

Secondly, the transition from the Partnership to the ENP seems to imply a shift of gears regarding the principle of conditionality. While the former introduced the principle of negative conditionality, the latter explicitly opts for a positive approach to the matter. Even if the Association Agreements under the Barcelona

process contain a clause that sanctioned the violation of fundamental rights by the partner, the EU never made use of this principle in practice. EU's lack of capability and/or will to effectively follow up on human rights issues has been widely criticized. At the same time, the advances of some Mediterranean States in the reform process did not translate into any additional funding as an incentive to proceed further in the reform course.

On the contrary, as far as the ENP is concerned, the Commission intends to move from a passive perspective to an active engagement of every neighbour: only those States that share the EU's political and economic values and commit themselves to engage in reforms will have anything to gain from the ENP.

A third difference lays on the concept of European interest: in the framework of the ENP, the EU is much more straightforward regarding what its genuine interests are. While the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership relies on the logic of region-building and frequently referred to allegedly shared values, the "*wider Europe*" Neighbourhood is unmistakably framed in terms of interests. This is, for instance, close cooperation with the neighbours in order to enable the EU to provide security and welfare to its citizens as well as the effective control of borders.

3.5. Concluding remarks.

One of the main problems related to the "*wider Europe*" scheme lays on the fact that it was primarily conceived in order to deal with the EU's new eastern neighbours after the 2004 enlargement, and here most notably Russia. Actually, the ENP also physically originated in the enlargement Department of the European Commission and was only later destined to the more appropriate Department for External Relations.

Despite this, the ENP reveals a number of potential assets as far as EU's policy towards the Mediterranean is concerned.

Indeed, the bilateral and differentiated approach may prove advantageous for both the EU and the Mediterranean partners. For the EU, dealing with the Mediterranean partners on a one-by-one basis certainly allows a far greater opportunity of exerting its political and economic influence in its southern periphery. On the other hand, in view of the high incidence of particularistic attitudes of the

political elites in those States, conducting relations on a bilateral and differentiated basis could meet more efficiently the partners' needs.

What's more, in the framework of the Barcelona process Mediterranean States repeatedly complained about the lack of sufficient consultation in the formulation of the country-specific priorities of MEDA funding. According to the introduction of the principle of the joint ownership, the new perspective tries to correct this flaw, encouraging their intensive involvement in the path to take in the Action Plans.

The cross-reference to the MEDA instrument offers us the chance to concentrate this analysis on a more specific aspect of the ENP. Actually, the implementation of the new Neighbourhood Policy required a gradual reform of the financing programmes led by the European Community, in order to rationalize the disbursement of funds, to increase the efficacy of the initiatives and to achieve more concrete outcomes. Among the new budgetary instruments, a particular attention will be devoted to the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI).

4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY: THE ENP INSTRUMENT.

4.1. Summarising several financial instruments.

The opening phase of the ENP foresaw the elaboration of programmes grounded on financial instruments already existing and investments previously budgeted.

Thus, until 31 December 2006, EU assistance to the countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy was provided under various geographical programmes, including TACIS (for our eastern neighbours and Russia) and MEDA (for our southern Mediterranean neighbours), as well as thematic programmes such as EIDHR (European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights). For the budgetary period (2000-2006), the funds available were approximately EUR 5.3 billion for MEDA, EUR 3.1 billion for TACIS and approximately EUR 2 billion in European Investment Bank lending for MEDA beneficiary countries and EUR 500 million for TACIS beneficiary countries.

The reform of external financial instruments, which took effect in January 2007, reinforced

the categorical difference between accession and non-accession countries, by rescaling the instruments from around thirty to three: the Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA) for accession States, the ENPI for neighbours and the Development and Economic Cooperation Instrument (DCECI) for developing countries. In this context, the ENPI currently replaces and summarizes MEDA, TACIS and several other programmes. It is intended to be a much more flexible, policy-driven instrument, designed to target sustainable development and approximation to EU policies and standards - supporting the agreed priorities in the ENP Action Plans.

4.2. The ENPI: general provisions.

The general provisions establishing the ENPI were laid down in the regulation 1638/2006 of the Council and the European Parliament. According to article 2 of the regulation, the scope of such financial Community assistance to the neighbour countries is to promote enhanced cooperation and progressive economic integration between the EU and the partner countries and, in particular, the implementation of partnership and cooperation agreements, association agreements or other existing and future agreements. It shall also encourage partner countries' efforts aimed at promoting good governance and equitable social and economic development. In particular, the areas of cooperation include, for instance, social development, education and training, participation in Community research and innovation activity, higher education and mobility of teachers, researchers and students, encouraging communication and improving cultural exchange.

In order to enhance cooperation in these fields and to support Mediterranean States' initiatives and reforms, for the period 2007-2013 approximately EUR 12 billion in EC funding are available, thus marking a sharp increase, if compared to the last budgetary plan.

Community assistance shall normally complement or contribute to corresponding beneficiaries' strategies and measures; it shall be established in partnership between the Commission and the beneficiaries: national, regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society and other relevant bodies. EC funding takes the shape of both country – or multi-country – programmes and

joint operational programmes for cross-border cooperation.

4.3. The key role of cross-border cooperation.

Indeed, an important aspect of the ENP is to markedly improve cross-border cooperation with countries along the EU's external land and maritime borders, thus giving substance to the aim of avoiding new dividing lines. Actually, 15 ENPI cross-border cooperation programmes have been identified and are receiving financial support of EUR 1.18 billion for the period 2007-2013.

The ENPI therefore supports cross-border contacts and co-operation between local and regional actors and civil society, addressing all territorial units corresponding to NUTS level III and coastal areas NUTS level II. In these cases, the implementation of the programmes has to be managed by a joint managing authority located in a Member State. Such joint authority could be any public or private authority or body, including the State itself at national, regional or local level, designated jointly by the countries covered by a joint operational programme, having the financial and administrative capacity to manage Community assistance and having the legal capacity to conclude the necessary agreements.

4.4. The results of the first period of implementation of the ENP in the field of cultural cooperation..

On the 3rd April 2008, the European Commission issued a communication reporting the main results of the first period of implementation of the projects financed during the transition period between the past scheme and the ENPI.

Regarding research and innovation, ENP partner countries have been very interested to increase their participation in the 7th Research Framework Programme and have strengthened their national contact points as well as their research system. Reforms in the area of research and innovation are focusing on enhancing national research capacities, so that a number of partner countries have established national research funds. Most countries started to develop a more long-term vision and dedicated research policies to support science and technology and identified national thematic priorities. Regional challenges and themes of common interest were identified

through the Joint Committees established in the framework of the Cooperation Agreements between the European Community and some ENP countries.

As far as youth mobility is concerned, a greater number of students and institutions from all ENP partner countries participated in the Erasmus Mundus (EM) programme, while mobility of students and scholars as well as academic co-operation received a significant boost from the new Erasmus

Mundus External Cooperation Window (EMECW), where mobility numbers exceeded predictions in its first year, across all partner countries. Moreover, the Tempus programme continued to support the reform of higher education across all partner countries by promoting voluntary convergence with developments in the EU deriving from the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process.

Reform of vocational education and training progressed apace in all partner countries with the design and adoption of national reform strategies, predicated on the gradual introduction of new competence-based training standards and the development of parallel quality monitoring mechanisms. Increased attention has been paid in this respect to the introduction of a life-long learning perspective and more integrated and coherent vocational education and training provision.

At a regional level, the MEDA-ETE programme (Education and Training for Employment) provided a framework for policy action on apprenticeships, self employment and microenterprise creation for youth and e-learning for training in ICT while work also continued on the Euro-Mediterranean Observatory Network in order to improve comparability of data and analytical work at regional level

All partner countries continued to promote youth mobility and informal education through youth exchanges, voluntary service, training and networking of youth workers, and other international youth activities as a means of enhancing understanding, solidarity and intercultural dialogue as well as ensuring a better social integration of young people. In this regard, initial steps were taken to develop national youth policies. Young people and youth workers from all partner countries actively took part in youth activities supported under the new Youth in Action Programme in 2007. In addition, youth exchanges, support

measures and voluntary service actions in both directions as well as between the ENP partner countries of the Mediterranean were facilitated under the Euro-Mediterranean Youth III Programme with 14 projects approved involving Israel, Lebanon, Morocco and the occupied Palestinian territory.

4.5. The Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme.

An important jointly managed programme is the Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme, whose managing authority is the Italian Region Sardinia, that was designated on the 14th August 2008 by the European Commission and the 15 Mediterranean countries involved. The general objective of the Programme is to contribute to promoting a sustainable and harmonious cooperation process at the Mediterranean Basin level by dealing with the common issues and enhancing its endogenous potential. The ENPI Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme has a budget of EUR 173 million for the period 2007 - 2013, coming from the European Regional Development Fund and from the financial allocations under the Heading 4 - EU as global partner - of the EC budget. The plan which was approved by the Commission enumerates a list of eligible territories: the participating countries/beneficiaries will have to add to the overall amount a minimum co-financing of 10% on each financed project.

The objectives previously defined for all the ENPI cross-border cooperation programmes are to support sustainable development on the two sides of the Mediterranean, to contribute reducing differences in the living conditions in the border areas, to address challenges and to seize opportunities related to the Union enlargement or those related to the proximity of regions located along the maritime or land borders. These are general objectives that need therefore to be adapted to the Mediterranean Sea Basin. To this respect, the Mediterranean Basin Programme takes into account the specific characteristics and trends of the cooperation area, as well as the strategies and projects implemented, ongoing and planned in the Mediterranean Sea.

A specific priority fitting the process of cooperation in the Mediterranean must be picked out: the *“promotion of cultural dialogue and local governance, supporting the exchange, training and professional*

development of young people and all forms of dialogue among the communities as well as improving the governance process at local level". In order to achieve this target, the Programme prompts some guideline-measures that could contribute not only to individual enrichment but also to the introduction of innovating elements which have real and sustainable impacts on local systems in an economic, cultural and social dimension:

- support to artistic creativity in all its expressions, to encourage dialogue among communities;
- improvement of the government processes at local level;
- support to mobility, exchanging, training and professionalism of young people.

At the same time, the ENPI stresses the decisive importance of a balanced and sustainable development of the eligible territories, which represents one of the main challenges of the Programme. The initiatives pointing towards this goal include support to innovation and research, by improving the technological and organisational potential necessary to guarantee a better competitiveness and effectiveness in the management of complex dynamics of local socio-economic processes. What's more, it is strongly recommended the diffusion of innovation technologies requires the promotion of a better cooperation through the setting up of cross-border networks at basin level, among production clusters, as well as the development of cooperation among companies, research institutions (universities and research centres), incubators, technology parks, public and private organisations offering financial and non financial services to SMEs and public authorities.

4.6. Concluding remarks.

To this extent, it is clear that the effective exploitation of the opportunities offered by ENPI programmes – and in particular by the Mediterranean Basin Programme – require the constant mobilisation of every actor of the civil society. Such "recruiting" shall prove essential for the improvement of living conditions in many eligible areas, by the means of more competitive economies and the guarantee of high-quality superior education and academic studies. Nonetheless, European programmes impose the partners considerable managing capabilities, the severe respect of technical

requirements and a strict audit during the follow up of the projects. This is why the training *in loco* of qualified experts and professionals must become a constant refrain for the eligible beneficiaries of the European assistance.

Furthermore, from a European point of view, 2010 will represent the core of the current budgetary period. The middle point will have to be taken as an opportunity to evaluate advances and shortcomings of the new era of the EU's Mediterranean relations.

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