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Europe of Many Circles: European Neighbourhood Policy

SHARON PARDO

Dimitris K. Xenakis and Dimitris Chryssochoou, *The Emerging Euro-Mediterranean System* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2001).

Marc Maresceau and Erwan Lannon (eds), *The EU's Enlargement and Mediterranean Strategies: A Comparative Analysis* (Houndsmill: Palgrave 2001).

The Mediterranean gave birth to some of the world's great civilisations, religions and cultures. Europe and the Mediterranean are joined by both history and geography. The Mediterranean is also a sea of cultures, languages and religions that binds the peoples of its shores. A growing number of EU residents have their roots in the Mediterranean, a region that affects Europe to an increasing extent. Hence, as Romano Prodi, the president of the European Commission, stated, 'It does not seem conceivable to the Europeans that new Europe could be constructed by neglecting its "birthplace", the Mediterranean.'¹

Yet today, and especially since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States and 11 March 2004 in Spain, the Mediterranean countries, primarily the Arab-Islamic countries, embody the concept of 'otherness' for Christian Europe. Nonetheless Europe and the Mediterranean are not doomed to conflict and Europe's strength lies in a diversity of traditions underpinned by common, universal values that also prevail in the aspirations of the peoples surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

Therefore, on 11 March 2003, exactly one year before the deadly terrorist attack in Madrid, the European Commission adopted a new Communication, *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*² (hereinafter referred to as 'European Neighbourhood Policy').

The Emerging Euro-Mediterranean System by Dimitris K. Xenakis and Dimitris Chryssochoou and *The EU's Enlargement and Mediterranean*

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Strategies: A Comparative Analysis by Marc Maresceau and Erwan Lannon constitute a major source for understanding the complex Euro-Mediterranean relations, which remain an under-researched area of the EU and previously, the EC's foreign relations. While Xenakis and Chrysochoou provide a critical historical analysis of EU–Mediterranean relations, Maresceau and Lannon's book is a compilation of articles that explore the possibility and implications of creating a wider Pan-European Mediterranean Area (PEMA). Both volumes are original in their scope and in the comparative and multidisciplinary analysis of the EU's Mediterranean policy. They provide a comprehensive and scholarly overview of the past and present system of relationships between the EU and the Mediterranean countries and bring new perspectives through which we can evaluate the future. If the European Neighbourhood Policy is more than a gesture to Europe's immediate southern neighbours, these two books will undoubtedly become instrumental for EU policy makers in articulating and implementing this key policy. Their contribution to the literature in this field can transcend the boundaries of academic discourse.

The Case for a European Neighbourhood

The European Neighbourhood Policy sets out a new framework for relations over the coming decade with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the southern Mediterranean, countries that do not currently have prospects for membership but subsequent to the May 2004 European enlargement share a border or two with the EU. Maresceau and Lannon suggest the establishment of a wider PEMA encompassing almost the same countries.

Globalisation and the creation of transnational economic frameworks and civil society underscore the importance of regional and intra-regional integration. Xenakis and Chrysochoou and Maresceau and Lannon demonstrate that, instead of trying to establish new dividing lines, deeper integration between the EU and the ring of friendly countries will accelerate mutual political, economic and cultural dynamics towards partnership and development. Therefore, the European Neighbourhood Policy proposes that over the coming decade the EU should endeavour to develop a zone of prosperity and cooperation – a 'ring of friends' from Russia to Morocco. Like the PEMA proposal made in Maresceau and Lannon, the European Neighbourhood Policy suggests that, in return for concrete progress in implementing political, economic and institutional reforms, the neighbouring countries should be offered a stake in the EU's internal market. This should be accompanied by further integration and liberalisation to promote the 'Four Freedoms': free movement of persons, goods, services and capital.

Based on past experiences, European Neighbourhood holds that the EU and neighbouring countries are already mutually dependent when it comes to

achieving security, stability and sustainable development within the EU respective borders. The policy is an ambitious vision towards which relations with the eastern and southern neighbours should be heading over the coming decade. The European Commission argues, therefore, that several measures to enhance integration and liberalisation should be implemented gradually and progressively.

Some of the contributors to Maresceau's and Lannon's book suggest that ultimately the European Economic Area (EEA) model could constitute a workable scenario for a geopolitically coherent PEMA. This is exactly the long-term objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy: moving towards an arrangement whereby the EU's relations with the neighbouring countries ultimately resemble the close political and economic links currently enjoyed with the EEA. This implies that the partners undertake considerably deeper and broader obligations, specifically concerning alignment with Community legislation. The new policy would not override the existing framework for EU relations with its neighbours (the Barcelona Process in the case of the Mediterranean countries). Instead, it would supplement and build on them. In other words, the European Neighbourhood Policy is an attempt to instil new dynamics into the existing framework of relations with neighbouring third-party countries.

While the EU should aim to ensure a more coherent approach, the two books suggest that offering the same opportunities across the wider neighbourhood and asking in return the same standards of behaviour from each of the neighbours is not necessarily desirable. Differentiation between countries should therefore be the basis for European Neighbourhood Policy. The principle of differentiation applies to the means, conditions and time needed to achieve the final objectives of the Policy. According to Flaesch-Mougin, contributors to Maresceau's and Lannon's book, differentiation can be a double-edged sword acting as both an incentive and deterrent for greater PEMA involvement.

Unlike previous frameworks for relations outlined by Xenakis and Chrysochoou and as proposed by Maresceau's and Lannon's book, European Neighbourhood would be taken forward via country-specific Strategic Action Plans developed by the Commission in partnership with the neighbouring countries. Action Plans would be qualitatively different from the Common Strategies (for Russia, Ukraine and the Mediterranean region). They would have a variable time frame and would be tailored to the interests of the EU and the country in question. The Action Plan is a programme of political and economic reforms designed to enfranchise the neighbour concerned by giving it ownership over its contours, substance and pace of implementation. In an attempt to move beyond the logic of the Barcelona Process, critically examined extensively by Xenakis and Chrysochoou, under the European

Neighbourhood model, the EU will not impose the Action Plan on the Mediterranean partner. Instead, the two sides would actively explore and identify areas of mutual cooperation.

Regarding integration and liberalisation in contractual relations, European Neighbourhood also opens the prospect of a new 'Neighbourhood Agreement' that could come at a later point in time to supplement existing contractual relations. Neighbourhood Agreements could take a number of different forms – but would inevitably entail undertaking new legal obligations. Both the timing of their introduction and their content would depend on the particular situation and political will of the country in question.

More than a Partnership and Less than Membership

European Neighbourhood Policy does not presume to redefine EU boundaries, nor does it endeavour to either scout out candidates for accession or shut certain countries out. Any decision regarding further EU expansion is subject to extensive debate on the ultimate geographic limits of the EU. The new policy does not, in the medium term, include an invitation to EU membership or even a role in the EU's institutions. However, Maresceau and Lannon and, to a lesser extent, Xenakis and Chrysochoou, suggest that although European Neighbourhood does not start with the promise of membership, it does not exclude the possibility of eventual membership.

A New Framework for Relations with the Mediterranean Partners?

Though European Neighbourhood is a fairly new policy and currently it does not appear to contain a lot of substance, at this point in time we can learn about the EU's vision for European Neighbourhood and the Mediterranean region from several statements made by EU officials, primarily President Prodi, over the last two years. Prodi holds that because the Mediterranean region is 'still unable to develop its own personality in the world stage', the European Neighbourhood Policy, 'which is a prelude to a new form of political and economic regionalism', should be called in.³ The policy offers the Mediterranean countries an opportunity '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'.⁴ Unlike its predecessors, European Neighbourhood is a policy that opens new prospects for the Mediterranean countries on the basis of a true common agenda and provides crucial incentives for the adoption of difficult domestic reforms. European Neighbourhood initiates new instruments for cooperation that are both more flexible and better tailored to difficult national and regional circumstances.⁵ Prodi explains that Europe

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 cooperation in all sectors where it would be useful and relevant: economics and trade, culture, research, training, environment, energy, transport and clamp down illegal activities.⁶

For President Prodi the policy is based on the principle of ‘sharing everything with the EU neighbours but institutions’. Prodi insists that the policy aims at extending the Mediterranean ‘a set of principles, values and standards which define the very essence of the EU’.⁷ The idea of sharing everything but institutions itself ‘applies to existing EU institutions’, but like the proposals set out by both books, Prodi does not exclude ‘developing new structures’. European Neighbourhood would ‘put the Mediterranean at the heart of the new area of cooperation’.⁸

Finally, as the Barcelona Process has already been active in the Mediterranean for almost nine years, the question arises as to what type of relations will exist between European Neighbourhood and Barcelona. It may be that the European Neighbourhood Policy is a way to slip out of Barcelona’s multilateral dimension and revert to the traditional pattern of Euro-Mediterranean policy, outlined extensively by Xenakis and Chrysochoou, which rests on bilateral relations with individual third-party states. Yet, as currently there is not a lot of operational substance to the European Neighbourhood Policy, this conclusion is premature. Despite falling short of the high expectations it initially generated, the Barcelona Process represents a genuine attempt to establish structured, multilateral Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. In implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy, Prodi suggests that the Euro-Mediterranean partners build on the Barcelona Process to set into motion a new regional framework. The two books reinforce this view, arguing that the Barcelona Process must be improved and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership should be developed through new incentives and greater flexibility. Unlike Barcelona, European Neighbourhood places an emphasis on the idea of co-ownership in the region’s future.

Europe is the ‘Cosmos’ and the Mediterranean is ‘Chaos’

It may be claimed that European Neighbourhood is based on a metaphor in which the EU is the ‘cosmos’ and the rest of Europe and the Mediterranean ‘chaos’. EU enlargement is a way of organising part of the ‘chaos’ and making it part of the ‘cosmos’. The corollary is that the remainder of the ‘chaos’ has to be kept at bay, not to close and not too far. The best which could be achieved is keeping it separate but friendly. In this context, in light of the European Neighbourhood Policy the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership provides for the

broadest possible cooperation with regional and sub-regional 'chaos' but does not envisage the Mediterranean countries fully-fledged integration with the EU.

While the idea may be exciting for political analysts in the EU it does not stir much emotion in the Mediterranean. There are good reasons for this. On the one hand, and as the two books tell, the idea itself is not new and was already discussed during the late 1980s. On the other, at present European Neighbourhood is still only a sketchy flirting with a huge objective problem. To become politically and intellectually operational, as was the case with the Barcelona Process, European Neighbourhood must be given some tangible substance and its objectives and mechanisms should be articulated in detail.

The participation of Russia and the eastern countries in European Neighbourhood is another central factor. If the Mediterranean countries finally accept European Neighbourhood they will be confronted with another difficult dilemma. More integration will threaten to turn the policy into an EU–Russian Partnership, which is less attractive for the Mediterranean countries.

As was the case with the Barcelona Process and the earlier policies of the 1970s and 1980s, the two books teach us that an extremely important element of success of the European Neighbourhood Policy would be monitoring and ensuring progress in achieving its goals. The Action Plans must be prepared in close cooperation with the Mediterranean partners. The issue of providing the appropriate incentive for change is very important. The EU's position about what should be expected by the Mediterranean partners after they meet the criteria set should be clear and the ultimate goal tempting. The EU's ultimate goal must be as attractive. Particular attention should be given to the labelling, since symbolism may prove a very useful tool and incentive to promote sustainable reform. The principle of differentiation should also be applied to the issue of labelling.⁹ For its part, the EU needs to provide the means for its ambitions, and adequate structures to be able to manage an undertaking of this kind.

To conclude where I began, the two books possess the rare quality of being both informative and thought provoking. They tell their readers all they could wish to know about Euro-Mediterranean relations. At the same time, they also raise a number of important questions that take readers beyond the scope of historical analysis. The two books are thus precious instruments for those involved in policy and decision making on all sides of the Mediterranean, trying to implement the European Neighbourhood Policy, as they provide an accurate description of the important theoretical, normative and practical issues at stake in the Euro-Mediterranean domain. These books allow us to learn and draw inspiration from past experiences and current proposals for the future. Last, but not least, students studying Euro-Mediterranean relations can appreciate of the two books, which map out particular aspects of a very compelling and complex relationship between regions and nations.

NOTES

1. Reported by Agence Europe, 'EU/Algeria: Mr Prodi Calls for Rapid Ratification of Association Agreement and New Reports between Mediterranean "Neighbours" and Refers to Euro-Mediterranean Bank', 2 April 2003, 8434 Bulletin Quotidien Europe 11.
2. European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003) 104 final (Brussels: European Union 2003).
3. R Prodi, 'Europe and the Mediterranean: Time for Action', speech at UCL Université de Louvain-la-Neuve, Louvain-la-Neuve, 26 November 2002, *EuroMed Report* 52/5.
4. R Prodi, 'Building a Euro-Mediterranean Area', speech at the Opening of the 22nd Giomatedell'Osservanza, Bologna, 17 May 2003.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Prodi, 'Europe and the Mediterranean' (note 3).
8. R Prodi, 'The Mediterranean Islands at the Heart of Europe', speech at Sardinia Regional Council, Cagliari, 23 January 2003.
9. T. Giannitsis, 'Statement by Alternate Foreign Minister T Giannitsis, President in Office of the Council, to the European Parliament, on Wider Europe/New Neighbourhood Initiative', 14 May 2003, European Parliament Plenary 3.