

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS

At the time of writing this introduction it is still unclear whether the Union for the Mediterranean Summit programmed in Barcelona for November 21 will take place or not, after its postponement under the Spanish Presidency of the EU. The hazardous existence of the UfM is another worrying sign of the fatigue that afflicts Euromediterranean relations. However, the Mediterranean is a natural partner for the EU and has always ranked high in its external relations. While the stakes are high and clearly transcends narrowly defined economic issues, like long term security concerns, the EU has mainly deployed economic incentives and policy tools in order to address such strategic challenges.

These economic policy measures have not always reached their goals, but it would not be fair to blame exclusively the Barcelona Process. The Mediterranean is probably the most complex region in the world in geopolitical and geoeconomic terms. The Mediterranean is plagued with huge economic disparities among its southern and northern shores, political and cultural discontinuities, resource competition, opposed demographic dynamics and hard and soft security threats. Rather than asking what else could have been done (or what should have not), probably the most relevant question is where will the region be today in the absence of the present cooperative framework, whatever their significant shortcomings. Since the 1995 Barcelona Conference, Southern Mediterranean economies have transited from volatile to sustained growth, from macroeconomic unbalance to resilient macro figures and prudent policies, from protectionism to timid openness and, yes, from state interventionism to moderate market liberalisation.

It is true that poverty has not been eradicated, but in several countries it has been significantly reduced. The economic institutional framework remains deficient, but some progress has been experienced in certain countries. Human development is low, but Southern Mediterranean countries are doing comparatively well in achieving the Millennium Goals. Microeconomic reforms lag behind macro stabilisation, but at least there has been an increasing consciousness in Southern Mediterranean governments on the importance of embracing key reforms. Foreign investment is still low by international standards, but some countries like Turkey, Egypt and Morocco have succeed in attracting significant amounts of investments. Its participation in the international economic system remains affected by specialization in raw materials and traditional products, but some clusters have been developed and productive integration achieved in sectors like electronics, the automotive industry and short fashion industrial networks. While these economic results may be mixed, they are by far better than the ones attained at the political level.

The articles included in this issue deal with Mediterranean economics in different but complementary ways. The first two articles adopt a more global approach, while the last two articles follow a sectoral view by concentrating on agro-industry and energy. The article by Wai Mun Hong, Alejandro Lorca and Eva Medina, focus on the way to attain economic development in the region through international trade, foreign direct investment and migration. It offers an overview of the impact of Southern Mediterranean countries higher economic interdependence with the rest of the world, and is a good starting point for the rest of the articles. While recognising that some positive results have been obtained in the Mediterranean, the comparison with Asia

or Latin America shows that the potential of such engines of growth have not been entirely realised. Gonzalo Escribano and Laura Rodríguez offer an analysis of the evolution of Euromediterranean relations, from the Barcelona Process to the UfM passing by the European Neighbourhood Policy. Their contribution mainly concentrates on the analysis of the UfM from a political economy perspective and highlights the general lack of consistency that affects Euromediterranean relations' different institutional frameworks. The main conclusion is that the EU is in desperate need of identifying and providing more relevant economic incentives to Southern Mediterranean countries, a better sequencing of its policies towards the region an a more pro-poor targeted approach.

After having dealt with those general matters the following contributions offer a more sectoral-specific approach. Eva Gálvez contributes with an article on the potential role to be played by agroindustrial clusters in the region as a more sophisticated and value added-generating manner to exploit Middle East and North African comparative advantages. The article analyses the different strategies pursued in the region to develop agro-food technopoles, and offers some recommendations if this goal is to be achieved. Finally, Beatriz Muñoz and Enrique San Martín deal with the role of Turkey in the European energy space as a key corridor for the development of Trans European Energy Networks. They conclude that there is a lack of consistency between this role and the ambiguities that surround EU's attitudes towards Turkey's accession.

All together, the four articles offer a panoramic view of the economic challenges faced by the Mediterranean region as a whole and the policy responses implemented by the EU. They illustrate the nature of the economic issues at stake in the region and provide some policy insights. But they also represent examples of the significant academic corpus that has emerged on the Mediterranean region since the 1995 Barcelona Declaration. Scholars have been attracted by the complexities of the region and the way by which the EU has tried to project itself towards its southern vicinity. This growing academic capacity cannot be compared with the one that existed a few years ago. In this respect, it is also a tribute to a whole generation of European scholars that, like Alejandro Lorca, taught us to reflect on the political economy of the Mediterranean and to assign the region the attention it deserves...whatever the Summits take place or not.