The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
Pros and Cons

An Arab View
Dr. Hani Habeeb

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To My wife Naifa,
To My children Khalida,
Khaledoun, Hussein and Samer,
And To Their Generation and To The
Generations That Follows..
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The negotiations surrounding the Barcelona Declaration and the work of the political and security committee and the Euro-Mediterranean committee were at once the most difficult and enriching experiences of my political and diplomatic career.

The period of these negotiations spread across the years 1994 to 1995, the year that witnessed the birth of the Euro-Mediterranean project. To be more precise, the negotiations for the preparation of the Barcelona Declaration and its adoption by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs took place between the 24th June 1994 and the 28th November 1995.

The political and security committee and the Euro-Mediterranean committee meetings were held successively to enable everybody to participate. A total of 28 and 29 sessions were held respectively.

In parallel to the committee meetings, bilateral negotiations on the partnership agreements took place between the Mediterranean countries and the European Commission.

Co-ordination meetings were held consecutively to the committee meetings between the members of the Arab Group at ministerial, ambassadorial and senior official level. Algeria presided over the Arab co-ordination meetings between the 24th June 1995 and the 4th June 1998 when they were replaced by
Lebanon until the 31st December 1998, the date that Syria took the helm of its current presidency.

In account of my position, I insured the presidency of the Arab co-ordination meetings at ambassadorial and senior official levels, and had the responsibility for the negotiations with the European party in the political committee meetings of the Euro-Mediterranean committee and of the meetings between the heads of delegations.

I cannot pretend that this mission was easy and that I didn’t occasionally stumble upon its difficulties. However, I would like to point out here that in spite of all of the complications and the obstacles levied by the contradictions of a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as an Arab group we generally shared a common political discourse that expressed a clear and precise position. This indicates that we were a group with harmonious and convergent positions unified by our future destiny and common national questions, which in itself constitute a triumph that makes me proud and gives us hope for the future.

This feeling of pride generates energy and love between brother ambassadors and the heads of Arab delegations with whom we have worked to tackle delicate questions that seemed difficult to resolve and that touch Arab identity, Arab existence and the future of the Arab Nation. At full force, these questions threaten to savagely remodel the Arab world into unprecedented forms and moulds, that whilst appearing humane and legal, would eventually provoke grave outcomes for Arab identity, Arab existence and the future prosperity of the Arab world.
I recognise the fact that in spite of our doctrinal differences, intellectual capabilities, different working methods and our political, diplomatic and organisational competence and experience, I learnt a great amount from those charged with the European Presidency. I refer particularly to:

Ambassador G. BUSQUETS, Ambassador M.A MORATINOS (Spain), Ambassador A. BADINI (Italy), Ambassador E. RYAN (Ireland), Ambassador R. Van BEUGE (Holland), Ambassador FALTZ (Luxembourg), Ambassador R. EDIS (Great Britain), Ambassador M. CALLIGARIS (Austria), Ambassador H. HONSOWTZ and Ambassador C HEUSGE (Germany), Ambassador G. CASTREN (Finland), Ambassador P. BARBOSA (Portugal), Ambassador J.P COURTOIS (France) and Ambassador L. BJARME (Sweden).

I felt either total solidarity for, or complete comprehension of the positions of a certain number of these ambassadors, remaining neutral in the case where it was impossible to take any just or balanced position.

Therefore, I aimed for this book to be an accurate and precise portrayal of the continuing efforts of the Euro-Mediterranean partners and of the positions and decisions taken in the framework of the project for a Euro-Mediterranean partnership since our work began on the 24th June 1995.


Hani Habeeb
INTRODUCTION

Uninterrupted throughout history, the repercussions of Arab-European relations and the surveillance and rupture that Europe has bequeathed to the Arab world provokes precautionary questions surrounding the motives of European initiatives, demanding whether they are co-operative or strategic.

The failure of Arab-European dialogue was accentuated with fears and doubts questioning whether these initiatives were truthfully founded upon principles of justice and equality or upon domination and a return to the time of European interference into the internal affairs of the region.

The Euro-Mediterranean partnership initiative intervened during a period of regional and international upheaval. The dualistic world order had been supplanted by a monopolistic one that offered total assistance to Israel and laboured for its integration within the regional Mediterranean environment (via multilateral and Eastern-Mediterranean negotiations), in the aim of reaffirming its inclusion and supremacy.

This has led to the formation of an image in the Arab memory of the Europe of the crusades and Balfourists, a Europe that created Israel and under competitive pressure from its friendly rival, the USA, is looking once again to find a footing within the Arab world.
Despite these worries, the Arab countries have taken it upon themselves to research the underlying motives of the initiative, knowing that the reversal of the balance of international forces struck at the centre of Europe and contributed to the apparition of the star of the European Union (EU). These were placed within the framework of a new international dialogue as a great power aspiring to a regional Mediterranean role on the basis of equality, the mutual exchange of strategic interests, (whether political, economical or security), without any ideological influences, but with a secure belief that the two banks of the Mediterranean constitute a space of the most vital importance. The partnership initiative grew in complement to the future European strategies for expansion and integration. These were prepared by the EU in order to contain Central and Eastern Europe, and extended south towards the Mediterranean basin, where a confrontational situation of the great powers continued to play battleships.

The Arab world geographically occupies the heart of the ancient world and holds two thirds of the world's oil reserves, a product strategically attributed to the development and evolution of its peoples.

The European Council decided upon the project for a Euro-Mediterranean partnership as a contractual framework between itself and the Mediterranean States during a session held in Essen in 1994.

The project called for the active creation of a partnership “based upon the strengthening of democracy and the respect for human rights, the two things that constitute one of the fundamental factors in the relations between Europe and its Mediterranean neighbours.” The project adopted the “declaration of principles concerning matters of internal and
external stability” for the establishment of a state of justice, democracy, regional integration, peace, and regional stability.

The partnership project aspired to the realisation of development and the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean space based upon free trade and the principles of the market economy, within the framework of political, economic and social bilateral partnership agreements between the EU and its Mediterranean partners. The free trade zone, economic reform, and adaptation to the European economic system, (including the participation of civil society in political, civil, and cultural activities), constitute an essential element of the partnership.

In its first document “The Barcelona Conference for the countries of the European Union and the Mediterranean – A Comprehensive Document”, the EU was unable to forget its historical beliefs and practices of domination as it adopted a new geographical classification separating the North from the South at the heart of the Arab world, and dividing the North into the Maghreb and the Machreq.

Persistently denying the existence of a national Arab identity, the EU considers Israel as a “Mediterranean State” from the point of view of its adhesion within the new geo-political framework, disregarding national Arab links, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the commitments of Arab countries to the agreements and conventions signed within the framework of the Charter of the Arab League.

The document ignored the principles of equality and justice and dedicated the regional co-operation relations, the opening of borders, and the diplomatic trust, to the political and economic integration of Israel into the Arab region.
This European outlook is essentially due to a desire to divide the Arab world and to reinforce the elements of the split on the basis of Sykes-Picot. It is also due, in the sense of the commercial Europe of the Crusaders and Balfourists, to the aim of establishing a multinational regional system and a new international league. Damaging the national Arab system and the Arab League, the new system of East-Mediterranean identity will install itself in the place of Arab identity.

In all evidence, it is possible to say that the partnership can only be complete if it involves all of the Arab countries, including the Arab Gulf countries, the veritable economic conglomerate.

Together, the occidental ideas and plans aimed at the Arab world regardless of their different origins have a common denominator that aims to exploit its natural and human riches and potential, and to make radical transformations within the Arab political and national conception.

However, from the point of view of equality and justice, it is possible to say that the position of the EU has progressively evolved with regards to the Arab-Israeli conflict, distinguishing itself from the position of the USA known for its unconditional support of Israel.

The Gaullists took the lead in defending a general strengthening of Franco-Arab and Euro-Arab interests. The Arab-European dialogue, which started in 1973, showed hope for the pursuit of these interests. However, the dialogue was suspended after pressure from America on the Arab and European parties in order to prevent the Europeans from opening themselves up to the Arabs and from moving towards a European oil policy independent of American policy.
This positive European position continued to evolve to a point where the EU, in the aftermath of the Florence Summit (21-22 June 1996) and the Berlin Summit (24-25 March 1999), declared their support for the UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 425 and to the international terms of reference devoted to a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The European Summit clearly denounced the illegality of the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories and demanded that Israel stop any expansion of existing settlements or the construction of new settlements. It also demanded the recognition of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinians, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within Palestine.

Common Arab interest united towards national progress required co-ordination at the different levels of the Arab group within the framework of the negotiations relating to the European document. This co-ordination was seen as an urgent national need to confront Europe’s game of alliances and their voluntary ignorance of the historical, civil, religious and cultural unity of the Arab world.

In spite of the difficulties involved in carrying out this task, the Arab countries proved themselves to be capable of uniting their ranks, defending their interests, and commanding the respect and recognition of their existence and their rights.

The negotiations involved in the preparation of the Barcelona Declaration were played out in very unequal conditions. On the one hand there was the EU, with its unified political and economic identity set in its contemporary jurisdictional and political framework with well-determined objectives and aspirations. On the other hand the Mediterranean side,
comprised of eight Arab countries, Turkey, Malta, Cyprus, and Israel, the latter forced into participation with the Arab group without the slightest former link with them. In fact quite the opposite, with its aggressive practices and its refusal of a just and comprehensive peace based upon International Legality and its relevant resolutions.

Driven by the hope of constructing a partnership founded on objectivity and a balance and equality of relations, the negotiations began. However, the hopes of the Arab States and their sincere desire for co-operation did not prevent them from searching for the truth, in order to avoid the risk of falling into a trap.

From the very first meeting, Syria underlined the absolute necessity of achieving a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the International Legality and its relevant resolutions, including the principle of land for peace. This was primarily aimed at launching the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and turning the Mediterranean basin into a common league over which the principles of security, stability and prosperity will reign.

In view of the global character of the negotiations and of their participation, Syria deemed it necessary to invite all of the Arab States and the Arab League to join the negotiations. We demanded a complete revision of the European draft document, to be based upon interdependence, equity and equality, the strengthening of democracy, respect for the law, and respect for the regional unity of the States and of their civil and cultural particularities.

Syria stressed the importance of turning the Middle East into a region devoid of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, whilst at the same time pointing out the link
between security in this region and international peace and security. We also asked for gradual transformation and economic adjustment to be taken into consideration in order to contribute to the realisation of sustainable economic development and to consider the right held by the Arab countries to create the large Arab free trade zone.

The negotiations were trying and complex. Syria dealt with the weight of the negotiations regarding the introduction of the draft Declaration, its principles, its dual political and security axes, terrorism, human rights, civil society, globalisation, and other matters.

We worked resolutely to fail the general plans and programmed attempts of the European troika, in collaboration with Israel, that aimed to direct the peace process away from the course of the Barcelona Process and to empty the Declaration of its substance and its political content. To encase the partnership within its economic and social framework through the use of double standard and selective policies.

One of the most dangerous decisions taken during the first stage of negotiations concerned the fixing of a mechanism for the adoption of resolutions. Thanks to our unwavering tenacity, unanimity was retained, allowing us to guide the results far away from Israel and their allies’ plans.

The Barcelona Declaration was finally announced by the Barcelona Conference held on the 27th and 28th November 1995, after difficulties caused by Israel that threatened to destroy the conference and drown the many hopes linked to the partnership.

The Declaration is composed of an introduction, a section of principles, and of three lines of reference: political,
The principles of the Declaration accorded great importance to the principles of international law, to international conventions, and to the specificity’s of the States. The Declaration gives priority to a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of International Legality, the UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 425, and the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference for peace in the Middle East, including the principle of land for peace.

The Declaration underlines in marked detail that it is by no means permissible to acquire other territories by war and that it is essential to safeguard the entirety of the States’ regional territories and proceed with nuclear disarmament.

The Declaration decides to prepare the Charter for Peace and Stability and to transform the Mediterranean region into a region of peace, stability, security and prosperity. It also considers that the culture and customs of both banks of the Mediterranean form a basic foundation to link and to cultivate understanding amongst its peoples. It stresses the need for dialogue between the cultures and religions, as well as the role of civil society and democratic institutions within the partnership.

All of these efforts failed to bring Israel to carry out their duties conforming to the Declaration and to the relevant resolutions, to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and to recognise the legitimate rights of the Arabs.

Israel had refused the realisation of a just and comprehensive peace based upon International Legality and had therefore...
destroyed the peace process and complicated the launch and consolidation of the partnership.

In the face of Israel’s refusal, the Presidency tried by all means to consolidate the economic and social partnership independently from the political and security partnership.

Syria were brought to fail these attempts, giving Israel the opportunity to blatantly ignore the profound meaning of the partnership, which is the realisation of peace and security in the region in relation with the three integral dimensions of the Barcelona Process.

This was sufficient enough to put an end to Israel’s attempts to use the Euro-Mediterranean partnership as a horse of Troy to infiltrate politically and economically into the capitals of the Arab world in the name of regional co-operation and mutual confidence.

Israel had refused to recognise the existence of a link between the Middle East peace process and the Barcelona Process, conforming to a strategy of refusing peace and of perpetuating aggression, occupation and expansion.

The sometimes hesitant position of the EU, entirely of the opinion of the Israeli and American position, gave further encouragement to Israel to continue in their policy of refusing even the basic essence of the partnership, the Declaration of Barcelona and the terms of reference for a just and comprehensive peace.

We continue to wait for the EU to play an effective role as a political partner in the realisation of a just and comprehensive peace. The Arab-European Partnership obliges Europe to bring themselves back up to the level of the resolutions of the
European Summit of Berlin and stresses that Israel put resolutions 242, 338, and 425 of the Security Council, as well as resolution 194 of the UN General Assembly as defined by the Barcelona Declaration, into practice.

A positive EU political role is necessary to adjust the balance of an unequal equation containing total partiality from the USA in favour of Israel and against International Legality and its relevant resolutions.

The speed of the negotiations increased in relation to the frequent return to double standard and the deliberate ignorance of the priorities of the partnership by the EU and Israel.

Our logic in the negotiations was based upon the construction of a solid partnership platform by attributing all of the obstacles placed in the way of realising the partnership and the lack of co-ordination between the dimensions of the Barcelona Process to Israel.

The British Presidency managed to advance the European position when President Cook, British Foreign Affairs Minister, included amongst the Presidencies conclusions from the Palermo Conference “the existence of linkage between the Middle East peace process and that of Barcelona, and a complement between the two processes”.

Regional co-operation had suddenly become important and had taken a pre-eminent place in the negotiations. The Presidency, whilst trying to emphasise the implementation of regional co-operation, had hoped to use this angle to ensure Israel’s forced incursion into the Arab world and to fasten its occupation of the Arab territories without having to turn its back on peace or to submit to International Legality.
Confronted by European pressures, we gave utmost attention to the realisation of regional co-operation on the provision that we disposed of the necessary conditions needed to overcome all political obstacles on the way.

However, in actuality, regional co-operation seems impossible, and this will continue to be true as long as Israel continues to occupy the Arab territories. Furthermore, there is space to mention the existence of a flagrant contradiction between on the one hand, the EU’s call for regional co-operation between the Arabs and Israel, and on the other hand, the position stated by the European Commission declaring that “there is no headway in regional co-operation if there are no further advances in the search for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.”

The “Charter for Peace and Stability”, a French initiative that figures amongst the main objectives of the Barcelona Declaration, has assumed particular importance as an addition to the Barcelona Process, as well as one of its means of execution.

Due to its political and high security properties and its long-term repercussions on the region, the Charter has held a privileged position within the negotiations.

France pulled out all of the stops to put the finishing touches to the Charter and for its adoption by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the time of their fourth conference held in Marseilles on the 16th and 17th November 2000.

Their efforts were surpassed as their vision was adopted by a Euro-Mediterranean summit to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was only Israel’s destruction of the peace process that hindered the realisation of this aspiring vision.
The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Pros and Cons

The Charter was discussed during talks on the basis of two documents, one Euro-Mediterranean, the other prepared by the Arab group. The Arab document can be distinguished by the emphasis that it places upon the complete constitution of the Barcelona Declaration in its three dimensions, as well as on the commitment to realising a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of the terms of reference of the peace process. The Arab document links the adoption of the Charter to the halt of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Similarly, the Arab document emphasises the following global aspects: the inseparable relationship between global security and the disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle Eastern zone, starting primarily with nuclear disarmament.

We made it clear that the Charter held no interest for Syria as long as Israel continues to occupy the Golan, the Arab Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories.

Therefore, we asked for discussions surrounding the Charter to be frozen with the impression that persisting with the negotiations to prepare the Charter during the current state of affairs would incite surprise and encourage Israel in its aggression and defiance of the international community.

The negotiations continued in relation to the Charter for more than four months until the moment when the French Presidency realised that they could not continue down the same route and gave its agreement to Syria’s demand aiming to freeze negotiations and not to present the Charter to the Ministers at the Conference of Marseilles. This is how discussions on the Charter were stopped and why the subject was not presented for adoption at the Conference of Marseilles.
No other subject evoked in the Barcelona Declaration received as much attention in debate as that of terrorism. The EU, alongside Israel, wanted to prove that the fight for freedom itself constitutes a terrorist act.

We insisted that no official conference was to be held unless measures were included in the agenda making a distinction between terrorist acts, which we condemn, and a peoples right to fight for the liberation of their occupied territories, and also between State and nuclear terrorism.

Only one official meeting was held with an agenda established comprising the measures of our demands. Otherwise, meetings were held without an agenda and without reaching any conclusions or follow-up.

The participants exercised their rights and raised subjects that they wanted to be discussed. It was in this way that we clarified our opposition and condemnation of all forms and manifestations of terrorism, demanding a clear distinction to be made between terrorism and the legitimate right of peoples to fight by any means available for freedom from occupation.

The subject of human rights reassumed great importance in the work of Barcelona due to an evident but unspoken European design to use the concept of human rights as a means of interfering in the internal affairs of other States.

It was necessary to clarify that different models of human rights cannot be forcefully applied onto different peoples, in the knowledge that every people has its own history and every nation its own heritage and culture. It is only through dialogue that it will be possible to find suitable common values and their consecration in a global framework.