

## From EMP to ENP: acronyms change but what about their contents?

Cosimo LACIRIGNOLA\*

*Barcelona process, launched in 1995 with a view to turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of peace, stability and security through the development of democracy and the creation of a free trade area within 2010, is failing to take off and to impact the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP).*

*Europe, wrestling with internal issues, is politically weak and unable to play a guiding role as repeatedly pledged at various levels. And Mediterranean Third Countries, poorly involved in this process, have not been able to govern the contradictions and the relevant economic and social changes brought up by the integration process. The major objectives set forth by the Barcelona process have failed to be achieved.*

*The technical barriers to trade (technical standards, sanitary and phytosanitary measures) imposed by the EU and by the states belonging to the area hamper free trade and the process of economic and commercial integration. Agricultural trade is still curbed by a system of quotas and imports schedules designed to curtail the expansion of Mediterranean countries in sectors in which they might have a competitive advantage.*

*One of the greatest issues to solve in view of an effective liberalization is the harmonization of quality standards and the mutual recognition of rules.*

*The need is felt to gain information on the rules of the markets of origin and of destination, especially for the European ones where the level of information requested by the consumer is high. This issue, which is crucial for a free trade area, was in part tackled after the Uruguay Round that led to the approval of two basic agreements within the*

*WTO: the technical barriers to international trade (TBT) and the sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS).*

*The harmonization of legislative principles will call for the implementation of an inspection and certification system by independent and accredited boards. This international system implies investments and costs which have not been fully analysed by the international negotiations.*

*Pertaining to the European policy, in 2003 the Commission urges the Union to redefine the cooperation policies with the neighbouring countries with a view to establishing an area of prosperity and neighbourhood thereby launching the European Neighbourhood Policy.*

*The greatest peculiarity of the European Neighbourhood Policy is its ability to enable each country to individually approach the European Union on the basis of its own interests and abilities without losing sight of the regional framework delineated by the Barcelona process.*

*The ENP does not offer the chance to join the EU but allows strengthening the links between Europe and neighbouring countries through the "status of neighbour country".*

*The operational tool of the neighbourhood policy is the Action Plan, negotiated by the Community institutions and the authorities of the partner countries, resulting from a mutual understanding which takes account of the peculiar political, social and economic conditions of the neighbour countries and of their relations with the EU.*

*The Action Plans are not international treaties but technical or political agreements partly based on Association or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements. Furthermore, Action Plans are time-limited and are continuously reviewed and updated.*

\* Direttore dell'IAM di Bari del CIHEAM

Based on the results achieved, the Council will evaluate the chance to involve the most "virtuous" countries in a new round of international treaties, Neighbourhood Agreements, to replace the Association or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements.

The Action Plan tends to privilege the bilateral approach since it responds to the need to speed up and improve the cooperation with neighbours. The multilateral approach will hold, for some sectors, its status as cross-border cooperation tool or as instrument for the development of infrastructures among the Union, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean basin.

The Action Plans will be funded by an ad hoc tool which should streamline the current conditions. The cooperation among the EU, its member states and the neighbour countries is based on several funding and planning tools each being established by a specific Regulation. The reform of financial instruments envisages the introduction of a financial instrument called "European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument" (ENPI) within the framework of the next financial perspectives 2007-2013. The importance of introducing a single instrument is due to the availability of a single budget line without the constraints of community resources.

The ENP does not intend to replace the current EU policies with third countries but tries to integrate them. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, its institutions and procedures, will not be modified after the adoption of the Action Plans. The Action Plans will leave the Partnership three pillars unaltered and will in part develop forms of cooperation (political, economic, cultural) which have not yielded the expected results within the context

of the Barcelona process.

The ENP will be complementary to the EMP and will strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

The differentiated approach of the ENP for its operational tools and action plans is designed to create strong bilateral links between individual countries and the EU favouring those countries willing to cooperate with the EU and to promote reforms.

Some observers argue that this criterion might lack the regional dimension of partnership which, instead, should be reinforced.

Other observers state that the strategic orientations of the Partnership will be pursued more decisively through a bilateral approach. In fact, the accrued importance of a differentiated bilateralism might strengthen the development of integration with the EU versus a higher dispersion of efforts and achievements in the regional context.

No doubt that the free trade process is within the ENP where agreements will be negotiated on the evaluation of the product conformity and on the harmonization of standards and technical rules thereby reducing the costs and certification procedures needed to access the market. This will be an advantage for the whole Mediterranean basin which, through the development and application of shared certification systems and recognized quality standards, will lay the bases for trade and coordinated development of the whole agri-food chain. It might be expedient not to introduce new standards and concepts, which could hamper trade, to improve the knowledge on the existing rules in the food chain, to disseminate training and information processes of the actors concerned in order to reinforce the commercial links between the two shores.

