

**The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary
Assembly, 2004–2008: Assessing the First Years of the
Parliamentary Dimension of the Barcelona Process**

Roderick Pace and Stelios Stavridis

Numerous and lengthy studies and assessments exist on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP, or the so-called Barcelona Process), particularly those published in the wake of its tenth anniversary in November 2005.¹ In 2007–2008, the so-called Sarkozy Proposal for a Mediterranean Union led to renewed interest and controversy. Following the March 2008 European Council meeting in Brussels, the French initiative was linked with the existing EMP and renamed the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: A Union for the Mediterranean. However, at the ministerial meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean foreign ministers held in Marseilles on 3–4 November 2008 under the French European Union presidency, it was decided that from that

1. The initial 1995 EMP launched a process between the EU with its fifteen member states and the twelve southern Mediterranean states. With the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the EU now consists of twenty-seven members (Cyprus and Malta moved from being southern Mediterranean states to EU members). The southern Mediterranean states now include the ten remaining countries plus Mauritania. Libya enjoys an observer status. All except Turkey (candidate in EU accession negotiations), and including this time Libya, also belong to the ENP/European Neighborhood Policy.

Roderick Pace teaches international politics and European studies at the University of Malta and is director of the European Documentation and Research Centre of the University of Malta, a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence.

Stelios Stavridis is Aragon Research and Development Foundation (ARAID) Senior Research Fellow, Research Unit on Global Governance and the European Union, University of Zaragoza. Previously he was head of the Euro-Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Studies Unit of the Institute of International Economic Relations in Athens, and Jean Monnet Chair and director of the Centre for Euro-Mediterranean Studies, both at the University of Reading.

point onward the title would revert to one that is very close to the original, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).²

The debate on the name to be given to the Sarkozy initiative has swung to and fro like a pendulum, often with some entertaining twists as well. Its conflation with the Barcelona Process was perceived by some as a sign that it had been killed and buried. To back their claim, those who held this view pointed out that the 13 July 2008 meeting held by the French EU presidency included all the EU member states, and not only the EU's Mediterranean littoral ones (as originally planned) together with the non-EU Mediterranean countries. They also highlighted the fact that the European Council had instructed the European Commission to prepare a report on that issue. This smacked very much of what happens in the Barcelona Process, where the agenda-setting role is firmly in the hands of the EU Council and the Commission. On 20 May 2008 the European Commission published a communication as instructed by the Council.³ Other observers were less convinced that Sarkozy's initial project would completely disappear, pointing out that the very fact that there has been a formal name change to the EMP signals in fact some alteration to that process in the direction of the Sarkozy initiative.⁴ The fact that at Marseilles in 2008 ministers endorsed the title "Union" for the Mediterranean has resuscitated hope that the Sarkozy initiative is still breathing. Meanwhile, the (renamed) union's new secretariat will be located in Barcelona in a move no doubt intended to placate the Spaniards who feared that the UfM would supplant the Barcelona Process.

2. Final Declaration, "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean," ministerial conference, Marseille, 3–4 November 2008, Council of the European Union, press statement no. 15187/08 (Presse 314) issued on 4 November 2008.

3. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council, "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean," Com (2008) 319 final, Brussels, 20 May 2008.

4. Jean-François Daguzan, "Why Sarkozy's Mediterranean Plan Looks Worth a Try," *Europe's World*, no. 7 (Autumn 2007): 151–5; Gonzalo Escribano and Alejandro Lorca, *La Unión Mediterránea: Una unión en busca de proyecto*, Royal Institute Elcano DT no. 13/2008–03/03/2008, Madrid, available at www.realinstitutoelcano.org. See also, inter alia, Peru Egurbide, "Zapatero y Prodi asumen el plan mediterráneo de Sarkozy," *El País*, 6 December 2007; Luís Bassets, "Descubrir el Mediterráneo," *El País*, 20 December 2007; R. M. De Rituerto, "Bruselas hace suya la Unión por el Mediterráneo," *El País*, 15 March 2008; "Editorial, L'Union dans l'Union," *Le Monde*, 14 March 2008; Hervé de Charette, "Sauvons l'Union méditerranéenne," *Le Monde*, 29 February 2008; Stephen Castle, "Europe Aims to Build Links with Mediterranean Neighbors," *International Herald Tribune*, 20 May 2008.

An implication for the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) is that its composition will have to change to better reflect the composition of the UfM. As the parliamentary assembly of the Barcelona Process, it covered the twenty-seven EU member states and the ten Mediterranean nonmember states.⁵ Now the UfM consists of forty-three states and one observer, Libya.⁶ The EMPA's Rules of Procedure (Article 2) state that the EMPA shall consist of no more than 260 members. We think this number is excessive, and the proof of this is the rather lackluster turnout for the plenary sessions. The increase in the number of member states of the UfM as compared with the Barcelona Process should not be an excuse for inflating the number of seats in the EMPA. But such a development has actually taken place. Thus, the current membership consists of 280 members, including the following:

130 EU members (81 members of the 27 EU national parliaments, on the basis of equal representation, and 49 members of the European Parliament);

10 members from the parliaments of the European Mediterranean partner countries (2 members for each of the delegations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco, and Montenegro);

130 members of the parliaments of the 10 founding Mediterranean partners, on the basis of equal representation; and

10 members from the Mauritanian parliament.⁷

Another development worth mentioning is the launching of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), which groups twenty-five states and is not related to the Barcelona Process. The PAM stems from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and its long-standing interest in the Mediterranean. The PAM also replaces the parliamentary dimension of the Conference

5. The 10 Mediterranean nonmember states under the 1995 Barcelona Process (EMP) are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

6. The additional six states added under the Union for the Mediterranean are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco, and Montenegro.

7. See "EP Delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly: Membership," www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/empa/assembly/default_en.htm#Membership, accessed 29 October 2009.

on Security and Co-operation in Mediterranean. The PAM secretariat was inaugurated in Malta in November 2007. During its 2008 plenary session in Athens, the EMPA also announced the establishment of its own secretariat, to be located in Brussels. Notwithstanding that some uncertainties still remain on how the EMPA and PAM will relate to one another, there is no doubt that these developments show that Euro-Mediterranean relations are becoming more parliamentarized. Interestingly, very little academic interest has been given to this aspect.⁸ In this essay we aim to bridge this gap by offering a preliminary study of the EMPA's first four years in existence.⁹

The analysis that follows consists of three parts. Part one provides a wide context. In it, we show that the Mediterranean is not unique in witnessing a parliamentarization process. Part two briefly discusses the origins of the EMPA, its aims and objectives, and its structure and functions. Part three offers a preliminary assessment of the EMPA's first four years in existence, from the inaugural session held in Vouliagmeni near Athens on 22 and 23 March 2004 to its latest plenary, which also met in Athens, in March 2008, and its extraordinary meeting in Jordan in October 2008.

Why a Parliamentary Dimension?

The intensification of international parliamentary relations is a relatively new phenomenon. Interest in this area of foreign policy can be traced back to

8. There is very little literature on the EMPA and even its predecessor, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum. For exceptions, see Abdelwahab Biad, "Los parlamentos como nuevos actores del partenariado: hacia una diplomacia parlamentaria en el Mediterráneo," *Àgora-Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 8 (2003): 11–9; Cristina Retta, "La política euromediterránea: Su dimensión parlamentaria en el proceso de Barcelona," *Àgora-Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 9 (2003): 37–51; Ioannis Seimenis and Miltiadis Makriyannis, "Reinvigorating the Parliamentary Dimension of the Barcelona Process: The Establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (2005): 85–105; Stelios Stavridis, "The Parliamentary Forum of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: An Assessment," *Mediterranean Politics* 7, no. 2 (2002): 30–53; "El futuro de la cooperación parlamentaria en el Mediterráneo: El proceso de Barcelona," *Cuadernos Constitucionales de la Cátedra Fadrique Furió Ceriol*, nos. 38/39 (2002): 5–15; "From Parliamentary Forum to Parliamentary Assembly in the EMP: Does It All Amount to Much Ado About Nothing?" (working paper no. 2, Med Obs/Observatori de polítiques mediterrànies [IEMed and IUEE/UAB], Barcelona, January 2004, available at www.medobs.net).

9. The EMPA's Web site address is www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/empa/default.htm, accessed 17 April 2010.

the 1960s,¹⁰ but the gradual expansion of this process in many, as well as across, regions has led to limited but renewed academic interest in the subject. These studies refer to more than just international interparliamentary cooperation and comprise more than the traditional activities of technical, training, or financial cooperation between long-established parliaments, on the one hand and, those of newly democratic, democratizing countries, or aspiring democracies, on the other.¹¹ In sum, the international relations of parliamentary bodies have nowadays developed much further than just mere parliamentary cooperation.¹²

This extensive development of the international activities of parliamentary bodies in world affairs, witnessed by the proliferation of transnational parliamentary bodies of all types, has led some to argue that this type of diplomacy has become one of the most important developments in international affairs.

One important way through which national parliaments engage in regional and transnational relations is through parliamentary assemblies. International parliamentary assemblies have been expanding along with the development of multilevel regionalism worldwide, which is itself characterized by deeper integration and cooperation that goes beyond the traditional liberalization of trade. They are often considered as part of the organizational structure of regional cooperation schemes; their functioning is formal and institutionalized, based on written statutes and agreed rules of procedures.¹³

Senior European Parliament official Javier Fernández distinguishes

10. Kenneth W. Thompson, "The New Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace: The United Nations' Accomplishments and Prospects," *International Organization* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1965): 394–409.

11. There are many types of technical interparliamentary cooperation, ranging from the consolidation of the constitutional state to the enhancement of the proper functioning of democratic institutions, in the French Senate program for EU candidate states' parliaments. See French Senate, "Technical Parliamentary Cooperation," www.senat.fr/international/english/coop.html, accessed 19 February 2008.

12. To use the words of MP Squarcialupi in *Parliamentary Diplomacy: The Role of International Assemblies*, WEU Parliamentary Assembly Report, document A/1685, 6 June 2000, www.assemblee-ueo.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires, accessed on 22 October 2001 (accessible by permission only).

13. Stefan Marschall, "European Parliaments in Transnational Organisations: Parliamentary Cooperation beyond the European Union" (paper prepared for the conference "Fifty Years of Interparliamentary Cooperation," organized by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 13 June 2007, Berlin).

between *multi-national* parliamentary assemblies and *mixed* assemblies: the former include the parliamentary assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the IPU itself; whereas the latter include interregional bodies.¹⁴ Perhaps a more adequate term for mixed assemblies should be *interregional assemblies*. Others, like Andrés Malamud and Luís de Sousa, have distinguished between *integration parliaments* and the rest.¹⁵ They argue that there is a fundamentally different objective between parliamentary bodies that aim at integration (for example, the European Parliament, or EP, in Europe) and those whose main objective is not to integrate but simply to parliamentarize cooperation and other types of relations.

There are then subnational/substate, regional parliaments,¹⁶ which are becoming more self-confident in their foreign relations as they seek to strengthen direct links with regions outside their national boundaries and sometimes with states, or sometimes even with macroregions.¹⁷ To all this, one may add national parliaments of various countries that have parliamentary delegations for relations with their counterparts in the neighboring states or even further afield. One thing seems certain: the proliferation of these activities in recent years has led to the creation of a cobweb of relations linking states as well as geographic and subnational regions.

What are the main reasons for the development of parliamentary diplomacy? Spanish senator Gabriel Elorriaga has argued that parliaments allow

14. José Javier Fernández Fernández, “La contribución del Parlamento Europeo a la proyección exterior de la Unión Europea,” in *Política Exterior y Parlamento Europeo—Hacia el equilibrio entre eficacia y democracia*, ed. Esther Barbé and Anna Herranz (Barcelona: Oficina del Parlamento Europeo, 2007), 135–48, available at www.uab.es/iuuee. See also Zlatko Sabic, “Building Democratic and Responsible Global Governance: The Role of International Parliamentary Institutions,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 61, no. 2 (2008): 255–71; Robert Cutler, “The OSCE’s Parliamentary Diplomacy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus in Comparative Perspective,” *Studia Diplomatica: Brussels Journal of International Relations* 59, no. 2 (2006): 79–93.

15. Andrés Malamud and Luís de Sousa, “Regional Parliaments in Europe and Latin America: Between Empowerment and Irrelevance” (paper presented to the First Global International Studies Conference, World International Studies Committee, Bilgi University, Istanbul, 24–27 August 2005, available at www.iscte.pt).

16. That is to say, *microregions* as opposed to *macroregions*.

17. See Stelios Stavridis and Romain Pasquier, “Linking Levels: Re-examining the EU’s Multi-level Paradiplomacy in a Globalized World” (paper presented at third GARNET Annual Conference, Bordeaux, 17–20 September 2008).

for a legitimization process of diplomacy thanks to their links with popular sovereignty.¹⁸ This point reappears time and time again in the still underdeveloped literature on the subject.¹⁹ During the fourth EMPA plenary session held in Athens in March 2008, many speakers reiterated this point.

Elorriaga identifies three main reasons for the emergence and development of parliamentary diplomacy in the post-1945 international system:

1. intensification of international relations,
2. democratization throughout the world, and
3. technological advances and other similar innovations such as easier air travel, which has drastically cut distances, and the Internet, which provides easier communication.

Elorriaga also offers a comprehensive, although perhaps not exhaustive, list of what parliamentary diplomacy entails:²⁰

- the activities of multilateral international parliamentary organizations
- bilateral parliamentary groups, and in particular the so-called friendship groups
- international agreements between parliaments
- the activities of parliamentary foreign affairs committees
- plenary sessions dealing with foreign policy questions
- parliamentary participation in election monitoring processes

There is also a fundamental difference between traditional diplomacy and parliamentary diplomacy. An IPU report argues that one should expect a different international role from parliamentarians, simply because they are not traditional state diplomats:

18. Gabriel Elorriaga, *La diplomacia parlamentaria* (Madrid: Imagine Ediciones, 2004), 35.

19. On the parliamentary dimension of Latin American regional integration efforts, see Malamud and de Sousa; Mariana Vazquez, *The Parliamentary Dimension of Regional Integration: A Comparison of the European Union and MERCOSUR* (CIES e-working paper no. 2/2005, CIES-ISCTE, Lisbon), 15.

20. See also Victor-Yves Ghebali, *The Conferences of the IPU on European Cooperation and Security, 1973–1991: The Contribution of Parliamentary Diplomacy to East-West Détente* (Dartmouth, UK: Aldershot, 1993); Stelios Stavridis, “Parliamentary Diplomacy: Some preliminary findings” (Jean Monnet Working Paper in Comparative and International Politics no. 48, Political Studies Department, Università di Catania, November 2002, available at www.fscpo.unict.it/euromed/cjmhome.htm).

A diplomat is an envoy of the executive branch and represents the positions of the State. Members of parliament, however, are politicians who hold political beliefs which may or may not coincide with their respective country's official position on any given issue. This allows parliamentarians *a margin of flexibility* that is denied to the diplomat. They tend to bring a moral dimension to international politics that transcends narrow definitions of the national interest, particularly in their principled support for democracy and human rights. Time and again we have seen that this flexibility allows parliamentarians to debate more openly with their counterparts from other countries and to advance innovative solutions to what may seem to be intractable problems.²¹

In particular, parliaments are expected to act as “moral tribunes” in international affairs. Parliamentarians can take the high moral ground and castigate both their own governments and third-party regimes or governments. Of course, there is a price to pay if there is no consistency in such an approach: being rightly accused of double standards. Unfortunately, history is full of such cases. But one should not miss the forest for the trees; by adding a normative dimension to international relations, parliaments play an important ethical role in international affairs. This is not to take the view that international relations are amoral by nature (the realist school). Nor is it to claim that morality should be the sole and exclusive guide (utopian school). But a balance between normative aims and interests is in fact what the foreign policy of democratic states, entities and institutions should be about. Otherwise, what is the point of being democratic? And what is better for democracies and their foreign policies than to have a strong parliamentary input?

The Parliamentary Dimension of the Barcelona Process

Besides the wider parliamentarization of international affairs as described, why is there a parliamentary dimension to the Barcelona Process? The initial proposal of convening a parliamentary forum was put forward at the

21. David Beetham, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century: A Guide to Good Practice* (Geneva: Interparliamentary Union, 2006), available at www.ipu.org, accessed 6 June 2006. (Emphasis added.)

time when the EMP itself was launched in 1995. The European Parliament has been the main promoter for its parliamentarization. In addition, various national parliaments of the EU member states—particularly the larger member states such as Italy, France, and Spain—have concluded bilateral agreements with many third countries, including the Mediterranean partners. However, not all of these bilateral agreements are actually active, and many of them have indeed turned out to be dead-letter agreements. As the EMPA is still very much a work in progress, we shall start with its genesis.

The Genesis: The Early Stages of Parliamentarization and the Long Road toward the Parliamentary Forum

Although the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly was inaugurated in Greece in 2004, it did not spring out of nothing. It was preceded by the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum, originally established in 1998. The basis for parliamentary dialogue within the EMP is found in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration itself, which invited the European Parliament “to take the initiative with other parliaments concerning the future Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Dialogue, which could enable the elected representatives of the partners to exchange ideas on a wide range of issues.”²²

A few days before Barcelona, at a conference held in Valletta by the Geneva-based IPU to discuss security and cooperation in the Mediterranean, Malta proposed the establishment of an association of Mediterranean states that would also include a parliamentary dimension. Another idea floated at the conference suggested the convening of the Interparliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean. The proposal stated that this interparliamentary conference could possibly meet on a yearly basis to, among other things, foster the development of relations in the social and cultural fields, as well as trade, among member countries and to promote dialogue among parliamentarians on security and stability issues.²³ The 1995 Barcelona Declaration took the Valletta proposals under its wings.

22. Part 5 of the Barcelona Declaration adopted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs attending the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Barcelona on the 27–28 November 1995, which witnessed the launching of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

23. Final document of the Second Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Valletta, Malta, 1–4 November 1995, www.ipu.org/splz-e/valetta.htm (Valletta is misspelled in the IPU’s URL).

EP representatives and delegates from the parliaments of the Mediterranean partners and the EU member states met for the first time in Strasbourg in March 1997. The first Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum met in Brussels in October 1998.²⁴ It was attended by delegates from the EP, the national parliaments of the EU member states, and the partner countries, under the joint chairmanship of the president of the EP and the president of the Moroccan Chamber of Representatives. The forum's conversion into an assembly, as proposed in an EP resolution adopted in April 2002, was actually approved in Valencia by the Fifth Euro-Mediterranean Conference:

While recognizing the value of existing parliamentary forums, to recommend the strengthening of the Parliamentary dimension through the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, as proposed by the European Parliament, and to this end to mandate Senior Officials to liaise with the Parliaments of the Euro-Mediterranean partners and the European Parliament to examine the necessary agreements and steps to facilitate its establishment, as soon as possible.²⁵

The subsequent ministerial conference held in Naples further polished the Valencia accord (or we should have perhaps said “exhortation”) and formally launched the EMPA in December 2003. The assembly was officially inaugurated in March 2004 in Athens.²⁶ Its first plenary was held in March 2005 in Cairo; an extraordinary plenary to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Barcelona was held in Morocco in November 2005. The EMPA's second regular plenary was held in Brussels in 2006, its third in Tunis in 2007, and its fourth in Athens in March 2008. Another extraordinary plenary session was convened in Jordan on 12–13 October 2008. The main aim of the latter meeting was to take stock of the results of the July Paris meeting on the UfM and to prepare an EMPA position for the 3–4 November 2008 Marseilles meeting, both presided over by France. The Jordan meeting approved two

24. For an analysis of the four forums held in 1998, twice in 2001, and in 2002, respectively (the last scheduled one did not survive the impact of the 2003 Iraq war and after being initially postponed was finally cancelled), see Stelios Stavridis, “The Parliamentary Forum.”

25. Conclusions of the Presidency, Fifth Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, Valencia, Spain, April 2002.

26. Its latest session took place 16–17 March 2009 in Brussels, but we do not cover it in this study.

important resolutions. The first was on the flagging Annapolis initiative of the Middle East peace process. Among other things, this resolution reiterated the role that Mediterranean civil society could play in strengthening confidence despite the ongoing difficulties in the way of a lasting peace settlement in the region. It called on “the executive bodies of the ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean’ to help achieve this aim by setting up exchange programs to bring young people together.”²⁷ The EMPA also repeated its support for human rights organizations and other Israeli and Palestinian popular non-violent movements.²⁸

At the meeting in Jordan, the EMPA approved a resolution in which it called on the Euro-Mediterranean ministers who were going to meet in Marseilles to not only establish the EMPA as the parliamentary dimension of the UfM (as had already been proposed at the July Paris meeting) but also for a formal, legal basis to be provided, linking the executive branch with the parliamentary one in the process. In other words, the EMPA proposed that decisions by the executive branch of the UfM should be open to the scrutiny of parliamentarians within the EMPA. At Marseilles, ministers took note of the EMPA’s resolution, adding, “The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean requires a strong parliamentary dimension. Therefore the Ministers underline that the position of the EMPA should be further consolidated and its work better articulated with the other institutions of the Partnership.”²⁹ In addition, the ministers also decided to give the regions of the Mediterranean a greater say by establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly, which would be made up of representative elected officials from local and regional authorities around the Mediterranean, with its composition to be similar to that of the EMPA.³⁰ The first outcome of this is that regional parliaments and assemblies of the Mediterranean are going to play a role in the future, though what exactly this will be remains still to be determined.

27. Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, “Declaration on the Peace Process in the Middle East for the Attention of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Marseilles 304, November 2008,” Dead Sea, Jordan, 13 October 2008.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Final declaration, Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, 10.

30. *Ibid.*, 11

The Forum's Aims, Objectives, Structure, and Functions

From the very beginning, the aims of the EMPA were not set very high. On the contrary, if anything they were rather modest. Indeed, the 2002 EP resolution urging the Euro-Mediterranean foreign ministers to set up the assembly stated that such a body should be composed of plenary and joint parliamentary committees. One of the latter would deal with immigration and another with human rights and democracy. They would meet annually and monitor closely the application of the association agreements.³¹

The EMPA is chaired by one of the members of its bureau, in rotation and on an annual basis (March to March), thus ensuring nominal parity and alternating South and North presidencies.³²

The EMPA Bureau also includes three vice-presidents and four other members, two appointed by the parliaments of the Mediterranean partner countries, one by the EU national parliaments, and one by the European Parliament. The EP exercises effective leadership of the assembly. Some critics use the term *hegemony*, though not always in its negative connotations. We note this, not only because of a number of complaints made by southern Mediterranean parliamentarians, but also because the next presidency rotation (2009 to 2012) was agreed to behind closed doors at the Athens plenary in March 2008.³³ This list was first agreed to and then presented to the plenary for approval without discussion.

There are now four permanent EMPA committees and one ad hoc committee (initially there were three permanent ones and one ad hoc):

- The Committee on Political Affairs, Security, and Human Rights
- The Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, Social Affairs, and Education

31. EP Resolution on the Preparation of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Valencia 22–23 April 2002, adopted by the EP 11 April 2002, OJ C127, 29.05.2003, point 66, page 651.

32. The following have served as president of the EMPA: Ahmed Fathi Sorour of Egypt's Parliament, March 2004 to March 2005; Josep Borrell Fontelles of the European Parliament, 2005 to 2006; Fouad Mbazzaa of the Tunisian Parliament, 2006 to 2007; and Anna Benaki Psarouda/Dimitrios Sioufas of the Greek Parliament, 2007 to 2008.

33. Hans-Gert Poettering of the European Parliament, March 2008 to March 2009; Abdel-Hadi El Majali of Jordan's Parliament, 2009 to 2010; and Mostafa Al-Mansuri of the Moroccan Parliament, 2011 to 2012.

- The Committee on Improving the Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies, and Culture
- The Committee on Women's Rights (for the first four years, it was only an ad hoc committee)
- The Ad Hoc Committee on Energy and Environment (agreed to in March 2008).

The establishment of a new permanent committee reflects the growing interest on the part of the EU partners in women's rights in the Mediterranean region. This has caused the EMPA to evolve from its original scope of monitoring solely the three baskets of the Barcelona Process (three permanent committees were established initially coinciding with the three baskets.)

Working groups had been established on such topics as peace and security in the Middle East, financing of the assembly and revision of the EMPA rules of procedure; the problem of landmines; a Euro-Mediterranean development bank; and dealing with natural and ecological disasters in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

A Preliminary Critical Assessment of the First Four Years: 2004–2008

A number of general issues affect the EMPA: for instance, the wider question of whether it is possible and even desirable to engage in a parliamentary dialogue in the absence of real democratic interlocutors, as almost all southern Mediterranean states are only, at best, facade democracies. Some argue that democracy cannot be built by nondemocrats.³⁴ The real issue is whether the parliaments involved are real parliaments.³⁵ Indeed, according to the 2007 Freedom House Index of Political Rights and Civil Liberties (as an indicator of the state of health of the democratic processes of the EU's Mediterranean Partners), one obtains a rather dismal picture: one free state, four partially free ones, and the rest are not free.³⁶

34. Belgian MP Patrick Moriau speaking during the second EMP Parliamentary Forum held in Brussels, February 2001.

35. French senator Jacques Legendre, as cited in Sénat, *La diplomatie parlementaire*, Actes du Colloque, French Senate, Paris, 2001, 15 available at www.senat.fr.

36. Freedom House rates Israel as "free"; Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Turkey as "partially free"; and the other five as "not free."

The “socialization effect,” which works in settings in which democratic and undemocratic or partly democratic states belong to common institutions such as the EMPA, is presented as a reason for engagement. The basic argument is that otherwise one is left with no other option than not to engage at all. The difficulty in settling this fundamental debate can be found in a recent study on setting up the EMPA, in which the authors desperately try to put a brave face on the inaugural event. On the one hand, they argue that “this body is by definition the ultimate institutional incarnation of democracy and the popular will and ensures that democratic principles will be adopted and practiced.” On the other, they claim that “with authoritarian governments’ in the southern Mediterranean, the subsequent weaknesses of the[ir] parliamentary institutions . . . leaves little room for parliamentary activities in international parliamentary institutions and forums.”³⁷

Southern national MPs bring their own domestic politics into the workings of the EMPA—but do they take home with them the lessons they learn there, which could influence the way certain conflicts are perceived in their countries? Are they MPs in the European sense of the word, possessing political ties with their parties back home but also enjoying some freedom of action and initiative? Or are they the parliamentary arms of governing elites arriving at the EMPA to defend national positions in the same way as diplomats normally do within the UN General Assembly or any other major diplomatic conference? In short, are they diplomats, for want of a better term, dressed as MPs?

Parliamentary cooperation can help to link the Barcelona Process to its grassroots level. There is an active Euro-Med-wide civil society,³⁸ and one must not overlook that in traditional western liberal parliamentary systems, it is parliamentarians’ role to act as intermediaries because of the prevailing model of indirect democracy.³⁹ Also important is the question of decentral-

37. Seimenis and Makriyannis, “Reinvigorating the Parliamentary Dimension,” 101, 92.

38. Fulvio Attinà has described the growing cooperation among civil society actors as “the most remarkable innovation of the Barcelona Process.” See his “The Barcelona Process, the Role of the European Union and the Lesson of the Western Mediterranean,” *Journal of North African Studies*, 9, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 140–52. The Civil Forum has now been turned into a permanent NGO platform. See www.euromedplatform.org/spip/index.php?lang=fr&lang=en, accessed 17 April 2010.

39. On parliaments and civil societies in the Mediterranean, see Roderick Pace, Stelios Stavridis, and Dimitris Xenakis, “Parliaments and Civil Society Cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 75–92.

ization, which at least for the time being is still considered to be a taboo subject on the southern rim of the Mare Nostrum. This has particular relevance for the role of subnational regional parliaments. The eventual creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly may begin to address this issue. The EMPA itself has supported the idea of a role for subnational elected bodies and regions when it lists regional parliamentary and intergovernmental organizations that may request the status of observers and guests to the EMPA.⁴⁰ Due to the growing importance of decentralization both within and outside the EU, it is vital to stress the role that parliamentary paradiplomacy could play, that is to say, microlevel regional parliamentary diplomacy.⁴¹ Parliaments have a particularly important role to play in that domain, considering they are privileged interlocutors of civil society actors.⁴² Both regional parliaments and civil society actors have been clearly identified for some time as key partners by the Barcelona Process: for instance, see points thirty-four and thirty-five of the resolution of the EMPA's Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights that was adopted in Rabat (21 November 2005). The same can be said of the local and regional authorities in the region. They have declared that they want to make their "voices . . . heard throughout the Euro-Mediterranean arena."⁴³ The current rules allow for "regional parliamentary and intergovernmental organizations," among other bodies, to apply for permanent observer status.⁴⁴

The agenda setting is normally in the hands of the EP, which often has to struggle to ensure that its proposals are fully attuned to the realities on

40. Rule 7 of its *Vade-Mecum*, January 2006 edition.

41. See, inter alia, Mario Kölling, Stelios Stavridis, and Natividad Fernández Sola, eds., *Las relaciones internacionales de las regiones: Actores sub-nacionales, para-diplomacia y gobernanza multinivel* (The international relations of the regions: Sub-national actors, para-diplomacy and multi-level governance), Actas de Congreso/Conference Proceedings, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Zaragoza, Zaragoza, 2007.

42. On civil societies in the southern Mediterranean, see Maria-Àngels Roque, ed., *La sociedad civil en Marruecos* (Barcelona: Icaria, IEMed, 2002); Olivier Roy, "The Predicament of 'Civil Society' in Central Asia and the 'Greater Middle East,'" *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005): 1001–12; Peter Woodward, "Civil Society and Democratic Reform in the Middle East with Particular Reference to Egypt and Lebanon," *Journal of Political Science and Sociology*, no. 5 (2006).

43. Declaration by the regions and the cities of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, Barcelona, 26 November 2006.

44. See EP Delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/empa/assembly/default_en.htm#observers, accessed 29 October 2009.

the ground, at least from the perspective of the Mediterranean partner countries. Prime Mediterranean items are likely to feature in all meetings but a deeper understanding of the Mediterranean realities by many European MPs and MEPs is often evident in the debates, and this is explicable by the fact that following enlargement, the EU's character has shifted markedly and geographically. As a result, Mediterranean sensitivities do not have the same impact on the EU as they had in the past. Only a quarter of the EU member states, seven out of twenty-seven, can be considered to belong to the Mediterranean group.⁴⁵ Of these seven, Portugal, which lies entirely on the Atlantic seaboard, is an "honorary" Mediterranean state for cultural reasons and because of its geographic proximity to the region. Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia could also be co-opted to the club if we include the Black Sea as part of the Mediterranean region and if forty-two kilometers of Mediterranean coastline make Slovenia a Mediterranean state. Indeed, Slovenia has also become the seat of the newly founded Euro-Mediterranean University.

The EU 2003 Security Strategy does well to underline a principle that has wide applications. It notes that the threats that Europe faces, including those emanating from the Mediterranean region, are everyone's threats and that the combined resources of the EU should be brought into play in the effort to overcome them. In 2008, the EU also underlined the need for it to shape events as opposed to playing a passive role. But when the influence of the Mediterranean EU member states tends to be limpid in determining the EU's agenda on Mediterranean issues, it is reasonable to expect that policy initiatives will not always reflect their main concerns. One anonymous member of an EU national parliament has said that, frankly, some MEPs participating in the EMPA can speak about Mediterranean issues as well as astronomers can speak with precision about planets millions of light years from Earth. This presents the EMPA with a very difficult challenge, which has to be resolved in the years ahead.

The creation of the Barcelona-based secretariat for the UfM as agreed to in Marseilles, together with the enlargement of the union to forty-three members, promises to give the Mediterranean states a stronger voice in the affairs that affect their region. But much, of course, will depend on the pow-

45. These are Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain.

ers that the institutions of the UfM are given. From the aspect of efficiency, and on paper, the best-case scenario would seem to be an intergovernmental approach and the involvement of the European Commission as agenda setter and executor. The limitations of this approach have been all too clear in the life of the Barcelona Process. From the vantage point of developing a truly integrated and democratic Mediterranean region—obviously close to our thinking as expressed in this essay—the deeper involvement of parliamentarians together with governments, the new secretariat, and the European Commission seems to hold the better answers. That said, however, many dangers lurk over this issue, and these are all connected to the institutional design chosen. Will the newly established Barcelona-based secretariat prove to be a more efficient executive than the Brussels-based commission? Is the EMPA's own proposal regarding its involvement in the decision-making process—namely, an annual plenary, participation in the biannual summits of the heads of government and of state and in the annual foreign ministerial meetings of the UfM—sufficient to enable it to stamp its mark on the process? One thing appears certain: the committees of the EMPA will have to be employed much more efficiently than has been the case in the past if the assembly wishes to exercise a more significant role in the UfM. The uneven activism of the EMPA committees so far, and in particular their tendency to get bogged down on the Middle East problem, do not augur well for the EMPA's willingness to play a more significant role. Alas, the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.

The influence of political groups within the EP is significant. The preponderance of MEPs from non-Mediterranean EU member states means that Mediterranean MEPs already find themselves in a minority when determining the group's stand on political issues in the EMPA—notwithstanding that a conscious effort seems to have been made to promote Mediterranean MEPs to positions of leadership (chairpersons) in committees dealing with the Mediterranean and the EMP. By the time discussion enters the EMPA, the EP position generally will already have solidified around a core of priorities as seen by the EU, with a diminished Mediterranean dimension. The only way that the EMPA can move out of this damaging morass is by strengthening the participation of the EU's Mediterranean partners. This is not unproblematic,

for it entails, among other things, that southern parliamentarians become willing to maintain a high momentum of activity and interest.

Some Examples of the First Four Years (up to Athens 2008)

For the Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, which appears to have gone into hibernation lasting for nearly the whole of 2007, the issue of most concern to the EU's Mediterranean partners was the proposal to transform the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership into a full-fledged Euro-Mediterranean Development Bank. (A working group was also established to follow the issue.) Many Mediterranean partners expected support for this initiative from the EMPA, but it never materialized. This issue was also the subject of intense negotiations within the EMP ministerial meetings. The EP ended up simply following the trail blazed by the EU Council, abated by the European Investment Bank, which vehemently opposed the creation of a new development bank. Ironically, the creation of such a bank was originally proposed by Cyprus's foreign minister Ioannis Kasoulides (now an MEP), at the third Euro-Mediterranean Conference of foreign ministers, which was held in Stuttgart, Germany, in mid-April 1999.⁴⁶ Is this yet another case of the lack of influence of an EU Mediterranean state in the EU on an issue of direct interest to the Mediterranean?

If the EU insists on labeling its relations with the Mediterranean partners as a "partnership," then a greater effort is required to ensure that the basic requirements of a partnership are truly met. There is no likelier policy area in which this can succeed than in the economic domain, on issues that are of a functionalist, low politics nature and where the fruits of such collaboration are relatively easier to demonstrate.

The 2008 Athens Plenary and the Jordan Extraordinary Plenary

The analysis in this section focuses mainly on the plenary held in Athens in March 2008, with some reference to the extraordinary plenary held in

46. As reported by the Cyprus News Agency, 16 April 1999.

Jordan in October 2008. The objective here is to underline some perceived trends. The Athens plenary came at a very important crossroads in Euro-Mediterranean relations. The general perspective was that the partnership was in a coma and needed revival. Sarkozy's proposal for a Mediterranean Union (later the UfM) at first appeared as if it was the master stroke most people were waiting for to revive the Mediterranean's fortunes. It turned out to be a very controversial proposal. However, it certainly led to one fundamental change, namely, that the Mediterranean was brought back into focus at a time when everyone thought it was on the verge of slipping into oblivion. This renewed interest in the Mediterranean region did not, however, lead to dramatic events in Athens. Rather, life went on as normal during the Athens EMPA session. Nor did the EMPA become hyperactive during the extraordinary meeting hurriedly convened in Jordan to debate the role of the assembly in the UfM before the crucial Euro-Mediterranean November summit. Indeed, attendance was lower—both in actual numbers and as a percentage of membership—in Jordan than it was in Athens.⁴⁷

In Athens, 170 of the 240 MPs eligible to attend (that is, 71 percent of the total) actually turned up for the session, while in Jordan the figures were down to 135 out of a total of 260 (51.9 percent). The Mediterranean non-EU states' national parliamentarians were second in attendance (68.3 percent of those eligible in Athens) after the EU national parliaments (78.7 percent) and before the EP delegation (64.4 percent). In Jordan, the Mediterranean non-EU states had dropped to the last position (42.3 percent). For the Jordan meeting, all delegations were smaller in actual numbers and as a percentage of the number of MPs eligible to participate. Although it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from this information before a set pattern of behavior emerges over time, it is rather worrying that the participation of the southern parliamentarians is the weakest. One other issue is why the membership of the EMPA should have been enlarged if eligible members fail to turn up.

Of the EU member states' national delegations, in Athens the host Greek group was the largest. Greece also had the largest delegation in Jordan. Mal-

47. See list of participants at www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/200/200810/20081012participants.pdf, accessed 1 December 2008.

ta's absence from the Athens meeting is partially explicable by the fact that a general election was held in Malta in March 2008 and the new parliament had not as yet been convened; in Jordan, a full three-member delegation attended. The complete absence of both UK and Estonian parliamentary delegations in both Athens and Jordan is, to say the least, quite noteworthy.

Parliamentarian attendance at the Athens and Jordan sessions should be compared with the previous plenary sessions held during the four-year existence of the EMPA.⁴⁸ There is little doubt that what happened in Athens is an on-going trend: in the years of the Parliamentary Forum, one could not but notice the rather weak representation of several EU states, as well as a southern bias in both national EU states' parliaments and EP representation.⁴⁹ At the March 2007 Tunis plenary, out of twenty-seven EU states, no less than six countries failed to send a parliamentary delegation: Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Slovakia, the UK, and the Netherlands, which was represented by its ambassador to Tunis. In total, EU member state parliamentarians and MEPs amounted to only 73 (44 and 29, respectively).⁵⁰ There is room for further analysis to assess the reasons behind this behavior and, among other things, whether a smaller EMPA is necessary. If the low attendance is due to other, more fundamental political reasons, than there is room for grave concern. The low showing by the EP delegation also needs to be analyzed more thoroughly because the EP has been entrusted with the lead in the EMPA, as is evident from the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, and now wants to maintain this lead and expand its competencies within the UfM.

In Athens, the topics discussed varied but were all in line with the aims of the committees. In the Political Committee the main issue was the Israeli-Palestinian situation. But other important topics were also featured, such as the UfM and the evaluation of the action plans negotiated between the EU and its Mediterranean partners within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy. In the Ad Hoc Committee on Women's Rights the main emphasis was on women and immigration, but there was also attention paid

48. Bearing in mind, of course, that nowadays committees carry out the bulk of parliamentary activities, we should still not be distracted from the importance of the plenary meetings (once a year) for the international bodies such as the EMPA. Visibility is of the essence.

49. Stavridis, "The Parliamentary Forum," 46.

50. *Activity of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly*, Tunis, March 2006–March 2007.

to women and science, focusing on the need of ensuring equal opportunities. The main topic in the Economic and Social Committee concerned ways of encouraging investment in the Mediterranean region and the topical issue of renewable energy resources. This led to the formation of a new working group that will follow that particular issue. Energy and environment were the issues to be discussed formally in the Athens session. In the final EMPA declaration we find the reiteration of the assembly's recommendation that an individual's access to sustainable energy resources be declared a human right by the governments of the region.

In the political and economic committees the work was taken up mostly by the Middle East problem. Quite acrimonious debates took place within both committees, threatening at times to end in absolute stalemate and to paralyze progress on other important issues. The evidence showed all too clearly that rather than being a locus of dialogue between parties in conflict, the EMPA is yet another arena where the contestants tussle with each other in the endless game of scoring propaganda points without however achieving any progress on the issues concerned. The EMPA may want to enter a period of self-reflection to see whether it is indeed achieving its aims of strengthening dialogue.

The rather cumbersome "qualified majority" system employed in the assembly also came under severe pressure from some national European MPs, who were opposed to salient parts of resolutions. A majority of four-fifths in two of the three pillars of the assembly need to be secured for a vote to pass—the three pillars being the EP delegation, the national parliaments of the Mediterranean partners, and members of the national EU parliaments. This makes dissent very difficult. However, minority and opposing views must be recorded in the texts of the approved resolutions if the proponents so insist. In practice, the Greek Parliament presidency and the political committee chair (French MEP Tokia Saifi) made every possible effort to avoid decisions that would not be taken by unanimity and consensus, two approaches that were lauded as the founding principles of the whole EMPA exercise.

Finally, it is important to note that the presidency rotation for the 2008–12 period, as well as other main issues, was decided at meetings of the Bureau, which were not open to the public, and subsequently approved without discussion by the plenary. In Athens it was also decided to establish a secre-

tariat as well as a modest budget according to a proposal by the Greek delegation. As noted above, two new permanent committees were established in addition to the three existing ones — one on culture and the other on women's rights. This, of course, moves the EMPA away from the three-basket structure of the EMP.

Conclusion

The following general conclusions on the EMPA can be made. As with the EMP/UfM, despite its many weaknesses and limitations, the EMPA can play an important role, but to do this efficiently its structures and functions must be strengthened. The October 2008 Jordan EMPA resolution proposes ways of strengthening the assembly's role in the UfM. The weak showing by the non-EU states is important, as is the diminished participation compared to the previous Athens plenary. The salience of the Israeli-Palestinian issue cannot be denied. This by itself is not necessarily a bad thing, because parliamentary bodies should engage in conflict resolution. But precisely because parliamentary diplomacy is supposed to reach areas that traditional diplomacy cannot reach, it should not be bogged down by this conflict either. Nor should it be the only conflict discussed: the Western Sahara and Cyprus *brilliant par leurs absences!* The EMPA certainly needs to think hard on ways in which it could encourage real dialogue between parliamentarians from these conflict situations, because if these conflicts continue to bog down debate within the work of the EMPA and its committees, the objective of helping create the conditions for their eventual resolution will remain elusive. Besides, how can the parliamentary dimension contribute to conflict resolution if debates end up in acrimonious stalemate at each and every meeting of the EMPA and its main committees?

A smaller caucus might also be envisaged: the 2008 Athens plenary session—in which both authors participated—took on an institutionalized routine. Very little substantive work appeared to take place. Prearranged agendas, declarations, and conclusions were either quickly confirmed, or quite the contrary led to huge confrontations, but with no real practical results. One could not be blamed if one were to think that the parliamentarians involved were playing to their respective national audiences more than

trying to make a substantive contribution to the problems discussed. Having more often than not pontificated at length and comprehensively in traditional *langue de bois* that any traditional diplomat would envy, they could go back home fully convinced that they had carried out their role adequately.

We mentioned in the introduction that with the upgrade of the UfM, the number of national parliamentary delegations has also been increased. We repeat here our reservations about enlarging a process that is not necessarily in need of more actors, which in fact diminishes its cohesiveness.

Linked to this, and the previous point, is the question of the cost of such events. Would more specialized meetings be more effective and cost-efficient? There is no official costing of the Athens meeting that we are aware of. But a rather conservative estimate would go anywhere between half a million and a million euros. The *total* yearly budget for the newly created secretariat is around €1.2 million with the EP paying about 31 percent of the amount, while the rest is shared between the national parliaments (barring the Palestinian Assembly, which has been exempted from paying its own share, a common practice among international assemblies). It does not take a genius to wonder why a plenary session costs so much.

In brief, the parliamentary dimension of the Barcelona Process is important and needs further attention. It must also address the question of institutional proliferation with the existence not only of the EMPA and its potential competitor the PAM,⁵¹ but also the parliamentary assemblies of the Western European Union, OSCE, NATO, and Council of Europe. Can states, especially small and medium ones, afford such a situation? Does the proliferation of these assemblies and the numbers involved put additional stress on MPs given the somewhat stressful agendas in their own chambers?

Furthermore, relations between the EMPA and the PAM need to be improved. A representative of PAM was present in Athens and addressed the meeting. The *raison d'être* and objectives of the two parliamentary assemblies of the Mediterranean need to be explained well and their activities differentiated from each other in order to maximize collaboration and avoid unnecessary duplication. Both assemblies — perhaps in more watered-down versions,

51. The PAM Web site is <http://www.apm.org.mt/>.

with fewer MPs involved in both—can exist concurrently if their respective tasks are carried out efficiently.

There also needs to be a clear EMPA work program outlining what initiatives will be pursued over a given period, and central to this must be the work of promoting the development of parliamentary systems and election monitoring in the South. The tasks of election monitoring and helping the emergence of full-fledged democratic parliamentary systems (which will not happen naturally) need greater focus. European political parties should also strengthen their links with parties in the southern partner countries, perhaps on the model of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. If parliaments are reluctant, or unable, to take on the challenge of strengthening parliamentary democracy where this lags behind, whom do we expect to do it?

What remains clear from our study is that more research must be carried out on this particularly interesting dimension of Euro-Mediterranean relations: its parliamentarization.

**The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, 2004–2008: Assessing the First
Years of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Barcelona Process**

Roderick Pace and Stelios Stavridis

Abstract

Parliamentarization is an under-studied dimension of Euro-Mediterranean relations. A preliminary assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly shows that the parliamentary process is not unique to the Mediterranean. The origins, aims, and objectives of the EMPA are presented, as are its structure and functions during its first four years of existence. Despite many weaknesses and limitations, the EMPA can play an important role in Euro-Mediterranean relations, but in order for it to do so, both its structures and functions need to be strengthened.