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The Forum Civil Euromed:

Critical Watchdog and Intercultural Mediator

I. Civil Society in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) is based on the assumption that the deepening of interregional relations can not be achieved through governmental agreements alone; to bring the partnership to life it needs the participation of the people. Therefore, the 27 signatories of the Barcelona Declaration agreed that they

recognise the essential contribution civil society can make in the process of development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and as an essential factor for greater understanding and closeness between the people (Barcelona Declaration, 1995).

Basket III of the Barcelona Declaration, the Partnership in Social, Cultural and Human Affairs, is the most important one in this context, as it comprises specific instruments for the support of civil society. Most important are the MED-Programmes\(^1\) MEDA-Democracy\(^2\), Euromed Heritage\(^3\), Euromed Audiovisual\(^4\) and the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Action Programme.\(^5\)

While all these activities take place within the framework of the EMP, there are other activities on the level of civil society complementing the EMP from outside. Subject to this article are the latter, the civil society conferences that accompany all Euro-Mediterranean conferences on ministerial level since 1995, summarised under the notion Forum Civil Euromed (FCE).

The relevance of the FCE for the EMP has increased, since various of the Basket III Programmes mentioned above have been suspended due to the crisis of the European Commission.\(^6\) The role of the FCE can be defined by four different functions:
1. **Intercultural dialogue between the South and the North.** Against the background of mutual prejudices and misperceptions, the co-operation in the framework of the FCE contributes to intercultural understanding between the South and the North. Intercultural understanding can be encouraged either directly, for example through a religious-dialogue conference, or indirectly, through the co-operation in any project of common interest.

2. **Reconciliation between societies in conflict.** The conflict lines in the EMP are not only running between the North and the South, but also between societies within the southern region respectively within the northern region (examples are Israelis/Palestinians, Greeks/Turks, Turks/Kurds). The reconciliation of societies in conflict can, again, be supported either by directly addressing the conflict, or indirectly through technical co-operation.

3. **Critical observation of the EMP.** It is the task of a vivid civil society to scrutinise the construction of the EMP and to elaborate concepts for its improvement. Deficits that are addressed in this context are among other things the lack of a social dimension and the neglect of environmental considerations. A major reproach against the EMP concerns the unbalanced interdependence between the Mediterranean Third Countries (MTC) and the EU, favouring the latter.  

4. **Political challenge of authoritarian regimes.** Civil engagement, no matter in which field, undermines the authoritarian structures of non democratic countries and is thus a first step towards political liberalisation. Authoritarian regimes feel threatened by civil engagement, as it can lead to the development of opposition movements or opposing political parties, pushing for political change.
The first function of the FCE, *Intercultural dialogue between the South and the North*, is in coherence with the common goal shared by all participating countries of the EMP to create a region of peace and stability. The second function, *Reconciliation between societies in conflict*, is less consensual, due to the intensification of conflict especially in the Middle East. When Arab countries refuse to cooperate with Israel because of Israel’s negative stand towards the peace process\(^8\), co-operation on civil society level is often hampered too. The third function, *Critical observation of the EMP*, concerns mainly the EU and its member states, because of Europe’s often criticised dominance within the EMP. In contrast to that, the fourth function, *Political challenge of authoritarian regimes*, provokes especially the many non-democratic regimes among the MTCs.\(^9\) Yet, due to deficits in European migration politics, accusations of insufficient respect for human rights concern also the EU and its member states, though to a much lesser degree.\(^10\) In sum, civil engagement is a double-edged sword for all participants of the EMP and explains the political relevance that is attached to the FCE.

While the authoritarian MTCs either openly oppose the FCE or try to undermine it through various strategies that will be explained later on, the position of the EU towards the FCE is generally speaking supportive, but somewhat ambivalent if one regards the extent of this support. The general support of civil society is part of a new strategy adopted after the end of the Cold War, to promote democratisation as an essential goal of Europe’s foreign relations.\(^11\) This new strategy is based on the assumption that there is a causality between civil society, democratisation and development:

A viable civil society creates favourable conditions for the development of democracy, and the existence of democracy enhances a country’s development potential. [...] There is irrefutable evidence today, gathered
from a broad range of cross-cultural and ideologically diverse political experience, that links the existence of democratic politics, policies and practices with social and economic development (Entelis, 1995: 47).\textsuperscript{12}

Yet, in the given context of the EMP, the goal of democratisation can get into conflict with the prior goal of stabilisation, at least for certain periods of transition. The reason is that in most of the MTCs the process of democratisation will most probably lead to an extremely unstable period of transition, bearing the risk of violent upheavals or even civil wars (Jünemann, 1998b). As the initiative of the EMP goes back to Europe’s overriding interest in stabilising this turbulent region, the EU promotes democratisation only to a degree that does not challenge the survival of the governments in power, no matter how authoritarian they are.\textsuperscript{13}

The following article focuses on the politically extremely sensitive fourth function of civil society within the EMP, the Political challenge of authoritarian regimes. Since this function contradicts the national interests of many countries participating in the EMP, it was determinant for the development of the FCE since its setting up in 1995. The FCE was founded against strong pressure from some MTCs to either exclude civil society from the EMP altogether, or at least to reduce its role to its consensual function of promoting Intercultural dialogue between the South and the North. The genesis of the FCE and its Follow up until 1999 illustrate how much political impact is attributed to it, allowing the thesis that the FCE has a potential to outgrow the modest role it plays so far in Euro-Mediterranean relations.
2. The Genesis of the Forum Civil Euromed (FCE)

The first FCE took place in Barcelona 29 and 30 November 1995, immediately after the Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference that gave birth to the EMP. Its coming into being was the result of a political strategy to avoid the setting up of an alternative NGO-conference (Non-Governmental Organisation conference) that would have radically challenged the ministerial Euro-Mediterranean summit. During the preparations for this summit, the Spanish Presidency was informed about the intentions of several NGOs to organise such an alternative conference at non-governmental level. The European Commission shared the worries of the Spanish Presidency that an alternative conference of NGOs might overshadow the main event, as had happened before at the big international conferences in Rio, Cairo and Peking. To prevent this from happening, they decided to initiate a non-governmental conference themselves, thus being able to influence the selection of the participants and the agenda. In terms of credibility, this task was transferred to the Institut Català Mediterrània, a research institute belonging to the regional Government of Catalonia, the Generalitat de Catalunja.

The idea corresponded with the interests of the European Commission to have the ministerial conference undisturbed and to enhance the civil image of the EU. Spain’s national interest was to gain the reputation of pursuing an especially active Mediterranean policy. Besides that it has to be taken into consideration that Spain’s socialist government on national level was, towards the end of 1995, rather weak, thus depending highly on the support of the governments on regional level. The decision, to have the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona instead of Madrid, was presumably taken to repay the Catalan regional government for its political support. To let it have also the civil society event can be explained by the same pattern, as it is one of the major interests of the Catalans in the context of Spanish regionalism, to
present themselves as active players also in the field of foreign relations (Sabà, 1996: 200f). The Generalitat de Catalunja sponsored the FCE with a considerable amount of money that was generously supplemented by the European Commission. The Institut Català Mediterrània shared the intention of the European Commission, the Spanish government, and the Catalan regional government to avoid a conference that would radically challenge the participants of the ministerial Euro-Mediterranean summit. Thus, instead of stressing civil society’s watchdog function, emphasis was put on the promotion of interregional and intraregional dialogue. This task was successfully fulfilled by bringing together more than a thousand people from both shores of the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, criticism from various sides has to be taken into consideration before coming to a final evaluation of the first FCE.

One controversial point was the ambitious effort of the Institut Català Mediterrània to institutionalise the FCE under its own roof. Although the Institute has definitely proved its qualification for such a task, it has also provoked suspicion that it might want to instrumentalise the FCE to enhance Catalonia’s and/or Spain’s international reputation as a leading power in the Mediterranean. Such suspicion was especially strong within the European Commission, since the goal of institutionalising the FCE contradicted the philosophy adopted at the ministerial summit, to keep the administration of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation light (and cheap). Having co-financed the FCE in the beginning, the European Commission pulled out as soon as it was over, refusing to support its follow up. After having abandoned the project of the FCE, the European Commission was harshly criticised by many of the affected NGOs.

Despite the understandable disappointment of these NGOs, there are arguments of principle against institutionalisation that should be taken into consideration. First of all, there is the general assumption that institutionalisation contradicts the procedural and
heterogeneous character of civil society. New issues on the political agenda permanently generate new groups and new forms of civil society. It can be doubted that any institution would be flexible enough to integrate all the new groups and networks arising and to drop others that for one reason or another should be excluded\textsuperscript{16}. Furthermore, it can not be denied that institutionalisation generates power games and competition between insiders and outsiders, leading to a waste of energies and resources. Last but not least, institutionalisation reinforces the serious problem of legitimisation that civil society already suffers from. A lack of democratic legitimisation is given due to the fact that NGOs only represent segments of society and that their members are not elected. This deficit can only be compensated through structures that are extremely open, giving room for as many NGOs representing also contradicting interests as possible\textsuperscript{17}.

Another aspect that gave rise to criticism was the conception of the FCE. Instead of being an independent alternative summit, it followed an approach to incorporate civil society into the EMP. Although it is undoubtedly a positive signal that the EMP opened itself to the demands of civil society, the incorporation of the FCE also had ambivalent effects. Being co-financed by the European Commission and organised in agreement with the government of the country hosting the ministerial Euro-Mediterranean summit, the first FCE was too close to the EMP to fulfil a critical watchdog function. Yet, due to the lack of binding structures connecting the FCE with the EMP, it was too far away to influence it from within.

3. Theoretical Reflections on Civil Society

The controversy about the conception of the FCE has a theoretical background, concerning the vague definition of the term civil society. Originally, civil society is a
European model that refers to enlightenment concepts of reason and rationality, presuming basic tensions between (civil) society, economy and the State. Yet, there never existed a generally accepted definition of the term *civil society*, not even within the Western world. The difficulties of finding a clear cut and universally acceptable definition can be explained, among other things, by the fact that civil society is a *normative and value-laden concept*:

The values involved are those relating to liberty, to civilised or civilising behaviour, and to a set of ethics relating to work, social relationships, respect for human rights and so on. The emphasis on one or another aspect may vary from definition to definition, yet liberty must always be at the centre. Descriptive definitions which focus on pluralism or on a realm that is simply distinct from the State miss the point. There are pluralistic societies in which civil society does not exist; they are little more than fragmented societies if liberty does not transcend the various groups (Mabro, 1999: 46).

Based on these normative values, certain criteria became consensual for describing (rather than defining) civil society. According to these criteria, an individual or association that claims to be part of civil society

- participates in the political and social development of the country,
- is tolerant and rejects violence,
- is democratic in its internal structures.
Within the framework of these consensual criteria, there is a wide range of different forms of civil society, depending on the historical, cultural and religious background of a society but also - and particularly - on the political system. Consequently, there are other criteria besides the three consensual ones mentioned above that are highly controversial:

- independence from the State,
- independence from private business,
- independence from primordial structures.

Due to the scientific character of the Institut Català Mediterrània, there was theoretical reflection on the definition of civil society in the run up to the FCE, although it would be exaggerated to claim that the organisation of the FCE was based on an elaborated theoretical concept. A certain amount of pragmatism seemed to be adequate for the difficult task of organising such a big civil society conference. The European Commission’s attitude towards civil society is even more pragmatic, focusing mainly on the efficiency of civil society projects. Yet, no matter how pragmatic the approach of the practitioners dealing with civil society might be, the three controversial criteria have to be coped with in one way or another, as they have political implications that should not be ignored.

**Independence from the State**

The most controversial point concerning the first FCE was the question of its independence from the State. Being linked to the Generalitat de Catalunja, the Institut Català Mediterrània itself is - strictly speaking - not a NGO. Accordingly, it rejected the narrow, dichotomic definition of civil society that considers complete independence...
from the State to be an essential criterion of civil society and defines the relationship between civil society and the State as contrastive and polarised\textsuperscript{22}. In difference to that, an \textit{integral} concept was favoured that perceives civil society as part of the political system\textsuperscript{23}. The function of civil society according to the integral concept is not only to control the State, but also to contribute to its legitimisation through civil participation. In the context of the EMP the integral concept is not unproblematic, because it is based on the theoretical assumption of a \textit{democratic} political system while in reality most of the MTCs have authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, the \textit{Institut Català Mediterrània} decided to have a FCE representing the integral concept of civil society, in accordance with the short term interest of the EU to avoid too much embarrassment of the ministerial Euro-Mediterranean summit, and its long term interest to support no more than a carefully controlled process of gradual political reform.

\textbf{Independence from private business}

With regard to the theoretical question whether private business is part of civil society or whether it should be regarded as a separate sphere beside society and the State,\textsuperscript{24} the \textit{Institut Català Mediterrània} decided to invite entrepreneurs to the FCE, thus acknowledging the affiliation of private business with civil society. There are two reasons why the inclusion of private business makes sense in the context of the EMP. Firstly, because private trade accelerates interregional and intraregional rapprochement, thus being in coherence with the first two functions of civil society, promoting \textit{Intercultural dialogue between the South and the North} and promoting the \textit{Reconciliation between societies in conflict}. Secondly, as private business reduces the dominant role of the State sector, it can play a positive role in the context of the fourth function of civil society, the \textit{Political challenge of authoritarian regimes}. Yet, the
arguments against the inclusion of private business into civil society are also worth discussing, especially with regard to the high priority that the EU gives to privatisation in the context of Basket II of the EMP. Some theorists warn that Europe’s focus on privatisation, ‘which has a rational of its own (greater efficiency) […] may increase the power of groups in society that are connected to the political establishment’ (Mabro, 1999: 47), contradicting the cause of freedom and democratisation in authoritarian led countries. As entrepreneurs depend on stable political structures to run their business, they have no interest in directly challenging the State. Thus, entrepreneurs tend to rather side with the State, even if it is authoritarian, than with the democratic forces of civil society:

If we wish to treat civil society as that realm which stands against the political despotism of the State, then we should [...] leave the economy out, because entrepreneurs, merchants and firms will not fight the State politically but only in defence of their economic interests, and the pursuit of these interests may well lead to alliances with the State that reinforce its political authority and its despotic tendencies (Mabro, 1999: 39).  

With regard to all pros and cons concerning the relation between private business and civil society discussed above, it can be concluded that entrepreneurs may be acknowledged as parts of civil society, but only if they stand for political and social goals that go beyond their private economic interests. Thus, in difference to what many officials at European and national level like to believe, the encouragement of privatisation alone is not sufficient to promote political change in the MTC. Privatisation is a necessary request in the context of economic development, but
detached from the values of civil society it has little to do with the support of democratisation.

**Independence from primordial structures**

Likewise it is difficult to answer the question as to whether groups that are organised according to primordial structures of society like family, clan, or tribe are part of civil society. The political touchy aspect of this question concerns the problem of how to deal with associations from the very heterogeneous spectrum of political Islam, as religious institutions also belong to the category of primordialism. Do Islamist associations meet the theoretical categories defining civil society?

Some Islamist thinkers reject the concept of *civil society* (*al-mutjama al-madani*) because of its Western roots. They argue that the acceptance of the term already implies the acceptance of a Western model of society. So they developed the alternative concept of *citizen society* (*al-mutjama al-ahli*), meaning primordial structures of society such as family, clan and especially the religious institutions. These are not seen as (second best) equivalents to civil society, but as authentic structures in the context of a Muslim State (Ferhad, 1995: 39). For the question discussed here it is important to note that the values of *citizen society* do not necessarily contradict the values that constitute *civil society*.

Many intellectuals in the Arab world, especially those deriving from the secular sphere of society, do not agree with that view, as their understanding of civil society is based on the liberty of *individuals*, not groups or clans. They insist that primordial institutions should not be accepted as parts of civil society, as they are not based on the free and rational will of their individual participants. Some of them also reject the idea that political Islam can be tolerant. Against the background of Algeria’s civil war, they
draw the decisive conflict line not between society and the State, but between secularism and islamism (Ferhad, 1995: 28).  

To avoid conflict with the mainly secular NGOs, on the one hand, and with the governments of the MTCs (especially Tunisia, Algeria and Turkey) on the other, the Institut Català Mediterrània pragmatically decided to exclude primordial associations from the FCE. Other institutions in charge of organising civil society conferences in the following years solved the problem with similar pragmatism, restricting the invitations to networks and NGOs that already had some kind of working relation with the host institute or the European Commission. The result was the same; the participants coming from the MTCs belonged mainly to the rather small spectrum of secular intellectuals. Although it is much easier for Europeans to cooperate with secular partners, there is a growing awareness that the problem of how to integrate the Islamists has to be solved, because the secular segments of civil society are rather elitist and little representative for the societies in the MTCs. In difference to them, most Islamist associations are deeply rooted in society through their charitable engagement, filling the vacuum left by incompetent or corrupt governments. The difficulty in choosing dialogue partners within the spectrum of political Islam lies in the inscrutable links that often exist between radical and moderate groups. Yet, it would be a severe misperception to equate islamism with terrorism, as some secularist intellectuals especially in the Maghreb countries do. Political Islam and democracy are not necessarily incompatible and not all Islamists are intolerant and violent:

So long as religious based parties and associations accept the principle of pluralism and observe a modicum of civility in behaviour toward the different 'other', then they can expect to be integral parts of civil society. In
this respect, even the Islamists may evolve into something akin to the Christian Democrats in the West or the religious parties in Israel. There is nothing intrinsically Islamic that contradicts with the codes of civil society or democratic principles (Ibrahim, 1995: 38).

The integration of such moderate Islamist associations into civil society networks like the FCE could contribute to the reconciliation of torn societies (Algeria or Turkey), would be helpful for a better understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims within Europe or across the Mediterranean, and, last but not least, is a necessity to gain a broader legitimisation of the FCE itself.

Coming back to the first FCE of Barcelona in 1995, the controversy was not so much about the inclusion or exclusion of private business or political Islam - there seemed to be unspoken consensus about that - but about the relation between civil society and the State. Critics of the FCE claimed that civil society should be strictly independent from the State, according to the dichotomic concept. Yet, in practice, the division line between the dichotomic and the integral concept of civil society is not as clear-cut as it is in the theoretical model. As there is no such thing as a complete democracy, the classification of a political system can not be more than gradual and procedural. This applies even to authoritarian regimes, provided they have entered a process of political transformation. Consequently, civil society is in practice situated somewhere between the two poles of (dichotomic) anti-system opposition and (integral) mediation between society and the State. An association belonging to civil society can develop, moving from one pole to the other (in both directions), and it can coexist with other associations that situate themselves differently. If they cooperate, they sometimes even generate effects of synergy, as the development of the FCE between 1995 and 1999 proves.
4. The Alternative Mediterranean Conference (AMC)

Unsatisfied with the conception of the FCE, those who had planned an alternative summit did not give up their original idea and organised a strictly non-governmental Alternative Mediterranean Conference (AMC) that took place from 24 to 28 November 1995. Although this event competed with the FCE for the attention of the mass media, the organisers also co-operated, generating effects of synergy. Since both events were located in Barcelona, the organisers gave interested NGOs the chance to visit both.\(^3\)

The AMC focused on the watchdog function of civil society, especially on the Critical observation of the EMP. Since the EMP is a European initiative, especially the northern countries were exposed to the crossfire of an extremely critical discussion. By pointing out the structural deficits of the EMP, the AMC managed successfully to pour some water into the sweet wine of partnership rhetoric. Compared to that, the work on the fourth function of civil society, the Political challenge of authoritarian regimes, was rather secondary. Patriarchal cultures and structures of domination effecting especially women rights were denounced, but this was the only reference to the issue of democracy and human rights, reducing the merit at least of the written output of the AMC.

In contrast to the AMC, the FCE welcomed the establishment of the EMP and concentrated its work on selected issues within the given framework of the EMP. Eleven panels dealt with the following issues:

1) trade without frontiers,
2) investment,
3) tourism,
4) technology and co-operation,
5) transport and territory,
6) university and research,
7) cultural dialogue,
8) media co-operation spaces,
9) the role of women,
10) migrations,
11) environmental and energy challenges.\(^{33}\)

Yet, due to the underlying concept of civil society as an \textit{integral} part of the political system, the conference suffered from the negative impact of governmental interference. Various southern NGOs reported that their governments had successfully prevented them from being invited to the FCE. Instead, so called \textit{governmental NGOs} were sent to Barcelona. These are organisations installed by the governments themselves to keep civil activities under control and to fulfil Western requests for participatory democracies\(^ {34}\). Furthermore, criticism was expressed among the participating ‘authentic’ NGOs that they had not been able to push some politically sensitive issues onto the agenda. In sum, the FCE did a lot of noteworthy and constructive work in many fields of civil participation, contributing thereby to the task of interregional and intraregional understanding. Yet, many issues that were politically too touchy were excluded, leading to less critical discussions compared to the discussions at the AMC.

Despite the deficits in both conferences specified above, taken together, the AMC and the FCE complemented each other, producing noteworthy results. The AMC offered the framework for an open and critical dialogue harshly challenging the governments (especially of the North). Yet, being completely independent from the
official level, it did not gain any practical influence on the development of the EMP. In contrast to that, it was the achievement of the less critical FCE, to give civil society a strong voice, thus enhancing the awareness of the public opinion towards the needs of civil society. The attention the FCE gained in the international mass media generated growing pressure for a permanent follow up. Due to this success, the concept of having completely independent alternative civil society summits was dropped, while the concept of a FCE partly integrated into the EMP became the model for similar events in the following years. Yet, this follow up did not develop progressively, but rather in a ‘zig zag’ line. The crucial question that determined this process was, and still is, to which extent the FCE should interfere into politically sensitive issues.

5. Intercultural Dialogue in the Mediterranean: The FCE II and III

Although the European Commission had prevented the institutionalization of the FCE, it supported a similar conference called FCE II on the occasion of the second Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference in Malta in April 1997. Its organisation was this time delegated to a number of institutions, presumably to distribute the financial burden of such an event on several shoulders, but perhaps also to avoid any one-sided domination or instrumentalization. Leading was the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta and, to guarantee a certain degree of continuity, the Institut Català Mediterrània. The task of the FCE II was obviously the same as two years before; to bring civil society together without creating too much embarrassment at the ministerial conference. Yet, there were also differences between the FCE I and the FCE II, most noticeably in size - the FCE II was much smaller - but also concerning its concept.
The organisers of the FCE II invited no entrepreneurs and no governmental officials, but exclusively NGOs. Nevertheless it was less political - and less dichotomic - than the FCE I, because the agenda was limited to an Intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, there was no complementary AMC this time to address the politically touchy issues. Thus, while a lot of constructive work was done in terms of creating and strengthening Euro-Mediterranean networks on cultural level, the FCE II had moved further away from the original idea of a politically challenging alternative summit. In contrast to that, the approach of the Malta conference aimed at bringing the FCE more closely to the EMP to give it a stronger voice within this framework. Two achievements had been made in this context. Firstly, in Malta the FCE met before and not after the ministerial Euro-Mediterranean conference, thus improving the chances of making its voice heard. Secondly, in contrast to the Barcelona meeting it was agreed that the work of the FCE should in future be integrated into the follow up of Basket III of the Barcelona Declaration, the Partnership in Social, Cultural and Human affairs. Having agreed to that, the European Commission gave a signal that it had changed its negative attitude towards the FCE. Since the FCE of Malta, the European Commission gives the impression that it has gradually opened itself to the needs of civil society in the Mediterranean.

In December 1997, Naples was hosting a third Euro-Mediterranean conference on civil society level, organised by the Fondazione Laboratorio Mediterraneo, again in cooperation with the Institut Català Mediterrània. It was supported by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Region of Campania. This FCE was not connected with a ministerial Euro-Mediterranean summit, so that it gained hardly any attention in the media. Nevertheless, the Naples civil-society conference had more in common with the FCE I of Barcelona than with FCE II of Malta, as it went back to the
broader definition of civil society, including also governmental officials and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it went beyond cultural issues, picking up most of the subjects that were discussed in Barcelona two years before. That is why some people argued that the Naples meeting was much more in line with the FCE I of Barcelona, labelling it accordingly FCE II (Fondazione Laboratorio Mediterraneo, 1998).

The confusion in labelling and numbering the various Euro-Mediterranean conferences on civil society level throws light on two facts. Firstly, the term FCE does not really stand for a continuous process, but for separate events following more or less homogenous concepts. Secondly, the decision to incorporate the FCE into the follow up of Basket III has so far not been converted into practice. Yet, being neither independent, nor incorporated into the structures of the EMP, it is almost impossible for civil society to take an active part within the Barcelona process, especially if its political demands go beyond the accepted limits of cultural or technical co-operation.

6. Civil society at the Stuttgart summit: A new approach

When the third Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference in Stuttgart was in preparation, the question of organising a FCE appeared again. As before, it was the (informal) task of the host country, this time Germany, to find an adequate institution, willing to organise the event. While in the southern countries institutions were almost competing to get the job, it was rather difficult to find someone in Germany. Although it can not be excluded that these difficulties had something to do with Germany’s low profile in the interregional co-operation of Basket III, the decisive reason was the corruption scandal of the European Commission caused, among other things, by the mismanagement of the Med-Programmes. Until the very last minute it was completely unclear whether the European Commission would be allowed to co-finance the FCE or
not. Therefore, one German institute that had already arranged with the former Kohl government to organise the FCE, cancelled its commitment in late 1998 so that new partners had to be found quickly.

The problem was solved through the introduction of a new concept. Similar to the FCE II of Malta, the task (and the financial risk) of organising a FCE was divided between several institutions. But in contrast to the former FCE, they were asked to organise five independent conferences instead of organising just one big event. The Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, an institution close to the Social Democratic Party in power, was responsible for two conferences: a Euro-Mediterranean human rights conference and a conference bringing together the social partners from both shores of the Mediterranean. The Heinrich-Böll Foundation, an institution close to the smaller coalition partner Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen, chaired an environmental civil forum. The German-French Institute held a Euro-Mediterranean symposium on education, research and culture, and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Stuttgart organised a Euro-Mediterranean economic conference. Taken together, the five conferences built the framework for a civil society dialogue that was, according to people who had been participating in all the previous FCE, much more critical, putting much more weight on the watchdog function of civil society. This success was owed to the separation of the five conferences, taking into account that some of them are much more challenging for the governments than others.

Considering the fact that since 1995 human rights conditions in the Euro-Mediterranean region have increasingly given rise to grave concern, it is only natural that the human rights conference was the most challenging event in Stuttgart. Human rights NGOs stand per definition in a dichotomic relationship, that is in direct opposition, to authoritarian regimes based on the violation of human rights. Their
antagonism against these regimes is so strong that it leaves little room for an integrative concept of civil society. Knowing that, some of the MTCs tried to prevent the coming into being of a human rights conference in Stuttgart. Yet, having signed the Declaration of Barcelona and thus a commitment to the principles of human rights and democracy, they could not openly do so\textsuperscript{43}. Behind the screens, they put a lot of pressure on the organisers, trying to undermine the conference or at least to influence the composition of participants. To protect the participants from the pressure of their governments, the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation had tried to exclude the governmental sphere as much as possible, inviting only trustworthy NGOs\textsuperscript{44}. Despite of this caution, they could not prevent the appearance of a few NGOs that turned out to be disguised envoys from various governments\textsuperscript{45}. However, this did not happen completely unexpected, because wherever civil society meetings are held, authoritarian governments try to smuggle in a few people, either secretly to collect information, or openly to intimidate the participants, as Tunisia did in Stuttgart. A consequence that should be drawn from this experience is to keep human rights conferences on a working level as small as possible, while the big human rights conferences, that are held to gain public attention and support, can be staffed with activists in exile or Europeans who are less vulnerable.

In contrast to the human rights conference, there was much less resistance against the other four conferences. Environmental NGOs, trade unions, and intellectuals working in the sphere of education, research and culture find it much easier to be both, critical watchdogs and integral mediators. As long as they do not openly question the political system as such, they can push political reforms forward within the given system, using a mixed strategy of political pressure and professional consultancy. Governments that open themselves towards civil society gain in return an increase in democratic legitimisation, thus contributing to internal stability, which is a precondition for
economic development. Beyond that, democratic legitimisation becomes more and more important for southern countries to be accepted as partners of the EU. Thus, MTCs have a positive incentive to co-operate with civil society at least to a certain extent. For this reason, the environmental forum, the social partner conference and the symposium on education, research and culture were organised as fora for an open dialogue between civil society, governmental representatives and the public in general.

Yet, the political impact of integrated civil engagement should not be underestimated either, as it is not as harmless as issues like ecology or social dialogue might seem to be at a first sight. During the transformation process of the Eastern and Central European Countries it could be observed that environmental NGOs and trade unions had been the door openers for the arising process of democratisation. In a long term perspective, civil society’s permanent demand for transparency and its constant interference in governmental decision making helps to undermine authoritarian structures of regimes and societies. Such a pioneer role of environmental NGOs was proved in Stuttgart, when some of them succeeded in being received by the official German delegation before the ministerial conference started. As a result of this meeting some of the demands made by the environmental NGOs were included into the official conclusion of the ministerial Euro-Mediterranean conference, documenting the participation of civil society in the governmental decision making process.

Finally, the economic conference has to be mentioned, that was the least problematic for the MTCs. As all MTCs have opted for an integration into the world market, including the precondition of economic liberalisation, the relationship between private business and their respective regimes is one of, though unbalanced, interdependence. Thus, it was rather unproblematic that many of the southern country delegations were led by their ministers of economy or finance. The obvious harmony between
entrepreneurs and governmental officials confirms the theoretical thesis brought forward in § 3 of this chapter, that entrepreneurs share certain interests with their governments, no matter whether they are democratic or not. Yet, despite of this politically dubious coalition, the economic conference had a fruitful impact on the EMP, as it focused on the third function of civil society, the *Critical observation of the EMP*. The economic conference discussed mainly Basket II of the EMP, coming to very sceptical results concerning the planned free trade area. Worries of the MTCs were confirmed that under the present conditions of European protectionism the free trade area implies too many risks for the economically backward countries.

To sum up, it can be stated that the innovation to have separate fora has proved to be an adequate concept considering the heterogeneous forms and different tasks of civil society. Yet, despite all differences between them, there was common awareness that democracy and respect for human rights are indispensable preconditions for a vivid participation of civil society in all political and social fields, such as civil engagement depends on free information, the right of free expression and the right to freely assemble. Thus, there was an impressing coherence among the five different fora in their commitment to the basic values of civil society.

This coherence was also demonstrated in a final and joint session of all five conferences together with governmental representatives. Here civil society was given the opportunity to carry forward its demands directly to officials from Germany, Morocco, Egypt and the European Commission. This event of a top level was an innovation of high symbolic value, as it gave a clear political signal that the demands of civil society are taken seriously. Of course it would be naive to believe that the declarations of good intentions made by the governmental representatives in response to the five reports will change anything in the short run. Yet, the indirect effect of such
declarations should not be underestimated. We know from the CSCE-process that the declaratory acknowledgement of democracy and human rights was the first step for their future enforcement. Official declarations, no matter how sincere they are, set new standards that can hardly be ignored afterwards. They are helpful preconditions to develop a dynamic and irreversible discourse on democracy and human rights.

7. Reflections on the Future Development of the Forum Civil Euromed

Since the FCE I in Barcelona there was repeated demand to give the Euro-Mediterranean civil society dialogue stable structures instead of having disconnected events every two years. This demand was also expressed during the final joint session of the five civil society conferences in Stuttgart. People who had been in Barcelona, Malta, Naples and Stuttgart complained to have had a strong feeling of déjà vu, since many of the discussions had been merely repeated without any progress. A second argument in the discussion concerning the future of FCE was that continuous work between the FCE conferences is needed. Continuous grass root work should be performed by as many NGOs as possible, dealing with all social and political issues concerning the EMP. Yet, considering the bad experiences made with governmental interference in the past, politically sensitive subjects like human rights would need to be treated with the discretion that only very small circles can guarantee. In contrast to that, the FCE could serve as a representative civil society summit, presenting the results of all the grass root work that had been done in between. To take full advantage of the chances these FCE summits offer to mobilise the public opinion for the needs of civil society, well organised umbrella organisations should co-ordinate the manifold demands coming from the various NGO-networks and help preparing them for presentation. Yet, no matter how well organised a FCE summit might be, a
contradiction between the political ambition to present civil society as a strong and solid force on the one hand, and the heterogeneous character of civil society on the other, will remain. As long as there is consensus on the democratic values transcending civil society, varying viewpoints will have to be accepted, including those of political Islam. Umbrella organisations qualified to help preparing such summits already work in numerous fields of civil activity. Exemplary were, and only those shall be mentioned here that have demonstrated their professionalism in the Stuttgart conferences: in the sphere of environmental policy the very efficient Comité de Suivi,\(^{52}\) in the sphere of migration policy Migration-Dévelopement,\(^{53}\) and in the issue of human rights the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)\(^{54}\). To fulfil the demanding task of coordinating the manifold grass root activities, such umbrella organisations, and the institutions that finally host a FCE, need to be given stable and reliable structures within Basket III of the EMP. Therefore, the decision to organise a FCE should not be left with the government of the country hosting the ministerial summit anymore.\(^{55}\) Instead, the FCE should become a regular event, guaranteed by the European Commission\(^{56}\). While the European Commission would provide stable structures,\(^{57}\) the selection of participants and the development of the agenda would have to remain with the networks and the institution hosting the FCE, to guarantee the independence of civil society\(^{58}\).

With regard to the FCE of Stuttgart, two innovations proved to be worth maintaining for the future. One is the separation of the FCE into several conferences to provide adequate working conditions for the varying, sometimes incompatible tasks of civil society. Only in a long term perspective it is imaginable to join them together, provided that the authoritarian MTCs enter a credible process of democratisation, allowing all parts of civil society to become integral intermediators between society and the State. Secondly, the final session of the FCE together with representatives of the governments
was a success as it upvalued the political role of civil society. Yet, the symbolic value of such a high level dialogue forum could be raised in the future by joining together representatives from all governments participating in the EMP.

Concerning the relationship between the FCE and the official level of the EMP, suggestions were made in Stuttgart to establish regular exchanges between civil society and the Euro-Med Committee (which manages the follow up of the Barcelona process⁵⁹), and to strengthen contacts between civil society and the European Parliament⁶⁰. While regular contacts with the Euro-Med Committee are important to enhance civil society’s influence within the EMP, the importance of closer contacts with the European Parliament goes beyond questions of efficiency, leading at the end of this article to some theoretical reflections on civil society’s role in the process of democratisation.

This chapter focused on civil society’s fourth function, Political challenge of authoritarian regimes. Some authoritarian regimes counter this challenge by admitting controlled civil activity, while denying the development of a truly representative democracy. It is often overseen, especially by the advocates of civil society, that political repression can easily be relaxed without expanding political participation. ‘Indeed, far from automatically preceding or accompanying democratisation, such partial liberalisation can be intended to stave off democratic pressures’ (Brynen et al, 1995: 4). To assess civil society’s role in the transformation process of a country, it is therefore necessary to differentiate between political liberalisation and political democratisation:

Political liberalization involves the expansion of public space through the recognition and protection of civil and political liberties, particularly those
bearing upon the ability of citizens to engage in free political discourse and
to freely organize in pursuit of common interests. *Political democratization*
entails an expansion of political participation in such a way as to provide
citizens with a degree of real and meaningful collective control over public
policy (Brynen *et al.*, 1995: 3).

Thus, political liberalisation is only a step towards democratisation when combined
with *institutional* reforms. These institutional reforms have to go beyond the
establishment of so called *low-intensity democracies*, guaranteeing the accountability
of the government to public control, broad possibilities of public participation, the rule
of law and, of course, full respect for human rights. The core of institutional reforms has
to be a strong Parliament that does not only derive from democratic elections, but is also
equipped with constitutionally guaranteed political powers.

Yet, institutional reform by itself is not sufficient either; it needs a vivid civil society
to bring democracy to life. Political liberalisation and political democratisation should
therefore be acknowledged as interdependent and inseparable. Both processes need
equal promotion from the EU, if the development of truly representative democracies is
the long-term goal of European policy in the Mediterranean.

**Notes**

1 The MED-Programmes promote networks of universities (MED-Campus), in the
media-sector (MED-Media) and of local communities (MED-Urbs). They had been
suspended in 1996 because of mismanagement (European Commission, 1996).
Meda-Democracy ‘grants subsidies to non-profit-making associations, universities, centres of research and to public bodies to implement projects which aim to promote democracy, the rule of law, freedom of expression, of meeting and of association, to protect target groups (women, youth, minorities) and to increase the awareness of socio-economic rights’ (European Commission, 1997).

Euromed Heritage is a regional programme for the protection of the cultural heritage. A special conference on this issue has taken place in Bologna in April 1996 (European Commission, 1999).

Euromed Audiovisual is a regional co-operation programme that has become especially important since the suspension of MED-Media (European Commission, 1999).

The Euro-Mediterranean Youth Action Programme was launched at the end of 1998 and aims at acting both as a bridge across the Mediterranean and as a link between the southern partners of the EMP (European Commission, 1999).

When the European Commission was forced to withdraw in spring 1999, most Euro-Mediterranean projects on civil society level were stopped. Not even granted funds will be paid out until all accusations of corruption are removed.

The EMP is the result of a European initiative. Therefore the relationship between the EU and the MTCs is not really an equal partnership, but rather an unbalanced interdependence favouring the EU. For a comprehensive analysis of the EMP see Jünemann (1998a)

The second Euro-Mediterranean conference taking place at Malta in April 1997 had been almost blocked by the crisis of the Middle East peace-process (Jünemann, 1997).
The political systems of the MTCs are all very specific and can not simply be
generalised. Yet, despite the differences between them, most of them share deficits
concerning democratic standards and the respect for human rights, justifying the
notion authoritarian, although to different degrees (Kamrava, 1998: 63).

For a critical discussion of Europe’s migration policy see Jünemann (1999).

For the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) see Art. 11 Treaty of
Amsterdam (Art. J.1, Paragraph 2 of the old Maastricht Treaty). For Europe's
development policy see Art. 177 Treaty of Amsterdam (Art. 130u, Paragraph 2 of the
old Maastricht Treaty).

For the interdependence between democratisation and development see also Boeck

Besides that, the EU is bound by the treaties made with the MTC’s governments. In
case of an unbridgeable conflict between civil society and a government, the EU has
to side with its official partner, the government.

This version of a Spanish official was confirmed by others who had been involved in
the decision making process. None of the interviewed partners wants to be quoted.
Confidential Interviews were made in Brussels in March 1996 and in Barcelona and

Interview with Prof. Esther Barbé Izuel.

Groups do not belong to civil society anymore if they become violent or if they adopt
programmes contradicting democratic goals and values. Others might disappear
together with the solution of the political problem they had been working on. For the
definition of civil society see § 3 of this chapter.

The lack of legitimisation and other problems arising from the heterogeneity of civil
society are discussed by White (1996).
For an in-depth reflection on civil society in European thought see Taylor (1989).

For the problem of defining civil society see Cohen and Arato (1995).

This criterion concerns obviously associations and not individuals. Experience shows that civil engagement in non-democratic countries requires especially strict and efficient structures of its associations to enable them to resist repression and persecution. The internal organisation of NGOs therefore often reflects the authoritarian structures of the regime they oppose; European standards of internal democracy can thus not simply be transferred to the MTCs. For the sometimes problematic internal structure of civil society associations see Merkel and Lauth (1998).

For the contemporary discussion of civil society in the Arab world see Ferhad and Wedel (1995).

According to the *dichotomic* concept, civil society is completely independent from the State. Its primary function is to control the State which implies the legitimisation of civil society to overthrow an *authoritarian* regime. This concept goes back to the political thought of John Locke (Richter, 1997: 38f).

According to the *integral* concept, civil society is part of the *democratic* political system. There are no clear-cut division lines between the State and society; civil society functions as a *corps intermédiaires*. This concept goes back to Charles Montesquieu (Richter, 1997: 38f).

For the role of private business see also Schwedler (1995b).

See also the rather polemic article of Fülberth (1991).

In difference to Ferhad, Helmich and Lemmers translate *al-mutjama al-madani* with *civic* society and *al-mutjama al-ahli* with *civil* society (Helmich and Lemmers, 1999: 19). For the Islamist discourse on civil society see also Moussali (1995).
Concerning the difficult relationship between Algeria’s cultural élite and the traditional representatives of Algerian society see also Maougal (1997).

The necessity to integrate political islamism into Euro-Arab intercultural relations was one of the results of the *Third German-Arab Media Dialogue*. It was organised by the *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen* by account of the *Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung Deutschland*, Rabat, 8 to 9 June 1999. (The results will be published by the *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen*).

Radical groups are also often engaged in social welfare, so that charitable activities are not a sufficient criteria for choosing a partner organisation.

To reduce islamism to its radical segments is understandable from the personal perspective of people being pursued by Islamist terrorists. Nonetheless it is an inadmissible simplification, ignoring the manifold non-violent segments of political Islam. Within this very heterogeneous spectrum there are noteworthy attempts to redefine Muslim society in terms that are compatible with Western concepts of democracy. To give only one example, a growing number of Islamist feminists legitimate their emancipatory demands with a new interpretation of the Koran (Pinn and Wehner, 1995).

As the AMC was lacking funds, the *Institut Català Mediterrània* even helped out by financing parts of the travelling costs. The *Generalitat de Catalunya* is mentioned as a supporter of the conference. The Documentation of the AMC can be found on the web side of the *Institut Català Mediterrània*.

See *Project Outline of the Conférence Méditerranéenne Alternative* on http://www.pangea.org/events/cma95/eng/about/html.

The results of these panels are documented in Institut Català Mediterrània (1996).
Governmental NGOs are not necessarily new foundations. A less conspicuous strategy of authoritarian regimes to get civil society under control is to co-opt authentic NGOs by infiltrating them with loyal people.

The organisation of a conference with participants coming from 27 countries is extremely expensive, due to high travelling costs and the need of many translators. In Malta there was no sponsor comparable to the Generalitat de Catalunya.

The other institutions were the Foundation for International Studies, University of Malta, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, the University of the Mediterranean (UNIMED) and the European Cultural Agency/ Mediterranean Programme (UNESCO).

Due to its modest funding, the FCE II was restricted to 130 participants compared to over one thousand two years before at the FCE I. See Agência Europe, 17 April 1997, p.14.

One workshop concentrated on cultural tourism, another one on youth, education and media and a third one on university (training, research and culture). For the results of the second FCE II see Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta (1997).

During the FCE II, there was a strong demand for improvements of Basket III and suggestions for its follow up.

See the promising presentation of Jaques Giraudon from the European Commission at the opening of the FCE II in Malta, in: Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta (1997). Convincing are also the strong efforts by the European Commission to reinstall the MED-Programmes.
Despite its general interest in Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, Germany’s profile in cultural co-operation within the framework of Basket III is rather low. For a deepened analysis see Jünemann (1998c).

The Chamber of Industry and Commerce organised the conference together with the Bund Deutscher Industrieller, the Deutscher Industrie und Handelstag and the Ministry of Economics of Baden Württemberg.

The essential importance of democracy and human rights is stressed in Art. 2 of all Euro-Med Association Agreements and in the Barcelona Declaration itself.

The Friedrich-Ebert Foundation functioned as host and co-ordinator, delegating the task of choosing the participants to two trustworthy partner organisations, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and the Forum des Citoyens de la Méditerranée.

Human rights activists from several MTCs reported to have been threatened by these people during their stay in Stuttgart, and the organisers had to withhold the list of participants to prevent it from getting into the wrong hands.

The demand to ensure environmental policy integration into all policies and activities of the EMP appeared in the formal conclusions made by EU-president Joschka Fischer, saying that the indicative programmes should be based, among other things, on an environmental review of the respective country (Heinrich-Böll Foundation, 1999; German Foreign Ministry, 1999).

See the resolution of the economic conference in the appendix.

For the risks of the planned free trade area see Nienhaus (1999).

To stress this point, the environmental forum had invited two representatives from human rights NGOs to give presentations.

The demands of the five conferences are documented in the appendix.
For the effects of the CSCE human-rights-regime see Rhode-Liebenau (1996).

Members of the Comité de Suivi are Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Friends of the Earth (FoE), Med-Forum, Mediterranean Information Office (MIO-ECSDE) and WWF Mediterranean Programme (WWF/MEDPO).

This network was founded in 1996 in the context of a Euro-Moroccan conference in Tanger. Migration issues are on the top of the political agenda in the Maghreb countries and Turkey, less in the other MTCs.

The EMHRN was founded in 1997 in response to the Barcelona Declaration and is situated in Copenhagen. It delivers regular reports, giving utmost information on human rights conditions in the area and providing transparency concerning its own work.

Host countries of the Euro-Mediterranean governmental summits could (and should) support the realisation of the FCE. Yet, governments opposing the idea of civil participation in the EMP could not prevent the FCE from coming into being, they could at most hamper its organisation.

The weakest point of all five civil society conferences in Stuttgart was the short time that was given for their organisation. If the FCE had already been integrated as a regular event into the EMP, the networks could have started preparing themselves in time.

This includes a regular financial commitment organisers can rely upon.

Without interfering into the selection of participants, the European Commission could support the building of civil society networks through the EU-Delegations working in all MTCs, as these are in permanent contact with many NGOs participating for example in the Med-Programmes or MEDA-Democracy.
The Euro-Med Committee meets on a quarterly basis at ambassadorial level. It is chaired by the EU-Presidency, and consists of the Troika, MED partners, Council Secretariat and Commission representatives (Member States not in the Troika participate as observers). The Committee gives its opinion concerning activities to be financed in accordance with the Regional Indicative Programme, and prepare for ministerial meetings, ad hoc conferences of ministers of various portfolios, and of senior officials, experts and representatives of civil society.

The EMHRN for example announced that it will make contacts with ‘country rapporteurs, members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy, the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Delegations for relations with the Maghreb countries and in the Arab Maghreb Union, the Delegation for relations with the Mashrek countries and the Gulf States, the Delegation for relations with Israel and the Delegation for relations with the Palestinian Legislative Council’ (EMHRN, 1998: 24).

The terms ‘low-intensity democracy’ or ‘formal democracy’ stand for political systems that fulfil only a minimum of the formal criteria defining democracy, without allowing political participation and public control over the government. The EU has often been criticised for contenting itself with the establishment of such low-intensity democracies in the Mediterranean, instead of insisting on real democratisation.

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(The) Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), Art. 11 (Art. J.1, Paragraph 2 of the old Maastricht Treaty); Art. 177 (Art. 130u, Paragraph 2 of the old Maastricht Treaty).