

## **Together We'll Win: Can the Old Barcelona Process Vision Serve as a Platform for a Contemporary Regional Alliance?**

*By Nellie Munin<sup>±</sup>*

*The war following the October 7th, 2024, Hamas attack on Israel is imposing a significant economic burden on Mediterranean nations involved. In the aftermath, these economies will require substantial rehabilitation. Economic stability in the Middle East is crucial for fostering peace. Achieving this may best be realized through regional cooperation, which can strengthen solidarity among neighboring countries. The European Union (EU) has a vital role to play in this process, potentially drawing inspiration from its own integration model. Additionally, the conflict may revitalize the Barcelona Process vision, initially conceived in 1995 and further developed since. Considering existing regional initiatives that emerged prior to the war, such as the Abraham Accords concluded in 2020, there is an opportunity to capitalize on the weakening influence of groups like Hamas and Hizballah. By leveraging the gradually established security coalition and utilizing the network of regional association agreements, the EU and its Mediterranean partners could formulate a constructive plan. This plan would empower regional stakeholders to rebuild the area with a contemporary framework that leverages each partner's comparative advantages and addresses mutual interests—such as advancing modern technologies, promoting clean energy, combating desertification and climate change, improving infrastructure, and strengthening the regional resilience of moderate nations. This article explores the feasibility of such an initiative from an Israeli perspective and addresses the questions and concerns that may arise during the process.*

### **Introduction**

In a broader regional context, the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel can be viewed not only as an act of sheer malice but also as a reaction against recent normalization efforts, particularly following the Abraham Accords between Israel, Morocco, the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan, with Saudi Arabia on the brink of joining this alliance (Atlantic Council, 2023). This U.S.-sponsored initiative poses a threat to terrorist and hostile global and regional actors (Khan & Shahzad, 2021). It offers a framework for regional normalization based on a "peace for peace" approach, as opposed to the outdated "land for peace" formula (Sorkin, 2021), which has long been a pretext for ongoing regional conflicts (Pressman, 2024).

Groups that benefit from sustained political and security instability in the Mediterranean orchestrated the October 7th atrocities to undermine this peaceful alternative and deliver a chilling message to its advocates and supporters. As a

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<sup>±</sup>Associate Professor, Zefat Academic College, Israel.

result, Saudi Arabia temporarily retracted its intention to join the Abraham Accords, and regional collaborations, such as the Israel-Jordan-UAE water-for-electricity agreement (Munin, forthcoming), were put on hold (Aljazeera, 2023). Consequently, Israel found itself increasingly isolated on the international stage (Sharvit-Baruch, 2024). In this regard, the October 7th operation was a tactical success for its perpetrators, though it unfortunately discouraged moderate regional players from pursuing peaceful initiatives and alliances that could have fostered regional welfare for all inhabitants.

This article posits that empowering moderate regional actors to unite, bolster their cooperation, and promote a shared positive agenda may help deter future violence in the medium to long term, or at least enhance regional resilience against it.

Written from an Israeli perspective, this article explores one potential approach to achieving this goal: reviving and updating the comprehensive Barcelona Process vision initiated in 1995. Section 1 examines Israel's situation and challenges following the October 7th events. Section 2 broadens the vision within global and regional contexts. Section 3 discusses the revival and updating of the Barcelona Process, emphasizing the potential of the provisions within the EU's association agreements with its Mediterranean partners. Section 4 addresses questions and concerns that this initiative may evoke. Section 5 concludes.

## Israel After October 7<sup>th</sup> 2024 Events

Israel is a small country, with fewer than ten million citizens living in an area of 22,000 square kilometers, much of which is largely unsettled desert. It is surrounded by a largely unfriendly neighborhood, a reality starkly illustrated by the October 7th, 2024, Hamas attack and subsequent events.

Politically and economically, Israel functions as an island. To achieve economies of scale and synergies with other economies, it must seek alliances beyond its immediate vicinity. The EU represents Israel's largest trading partner, comprising a vast market of over 448 million people. Cyprus, an EU member state, is only 300 kilometers from the Israeli coast. Many Israelis hold EU passports, facilitating trade in services. Additionally, the cultural and taste affinities between Israelis and Europeans, combined with their geographical proximity, enhance opportunities for trade in sensitive and expendable goods. Consequently, Israel's trade with the EU forms almost one-third of its entire international trade.<sup>1</sup>

The Israeli economy faces numerous challenges. Its small market size necessitates that national industries focus on exports to achieve economies of scale. Additionally, a scarcity of raw materials results in high dependency on imports. Developing know-how industries, which represent Israel's primary comparative advantage, requires external foreign direct investments (FDIs) due to a domestic funding shortfall. However, these investments are negatively impacted by Israel's political and security instability.

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<sup>1</sup>Israel-EU trade amounted to \$48.65bn out of a total of \$155,548 bn (2023), 52 bn\$ out of a total of \$180,320 bn (2022). (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

Prior to the war, global and regional<sup>2</sup> developments further exacerbated these challenges. Nonetheless, before the events of October 7th, Israel's economy was relatively strong,<sup>3</sup> with notable achievements in high-tech, research and development, and innovative technologies. The discovery of gas reserves in the Mediterranean provided Israel with a degree of energy security, enabling it to share resources with neighboring countries.<sup>4</sup>

The October 7th events and the subsequent war severely impacted the Israeli economy (Taub Center, 2023; Fadlon & Klor, 2023). Directly, the conflict imposed substantial unplanned security expenditures.<sup>5</sup> Indirectly, the war paralyzed the market, with businesses taking months to recover as missile threats diminished in central Israel. In the South, ongoing threats prevent many civilians from returning to their homes, some of which have been destroyed and will take years to rebuild. The North faces constant bombardment from Hizballah, leading to the evacuation of tens of thousands, with no clear timeline for their return.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, a year after the war began, economic activity in these regions remains significantly impaired, affecting particularly agricultural output and driving up prices, which in turn impacts the cost of living.<sup>7</sup>

The war has fundamentally altered Israel's security perception, requiring much of the workforce to allocate substantial time to military service at the expense of civilian productivity.<sup>8</sup> As a result, national productivity has declined significantly.<sup>9</sup>

Consumer spending has also decreased. Many Israelis are reluctant to purchase non-essential items such as new clothing, entertainment, and travel, opting instead to save due to the unpredictable situation and concerns over job security. External tourism has nearly halted, with many foreign airlines suspending services to Israel, either temporarily or permanently, until the end of the war.

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<sup>2</sup>The COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary blockage of the Suez Canal by a ship during 2021 (Russon, 2021) augmented shipment prices. Domestic monopolies abused these temporary events to raise market prices, without decreasing them after these events subsided. The Houthis' hostilities in Bab el Mandeb now have a similar effect (Brew, 2023). The Russia-Ukraine war further contributed to prices rise, both of commodities, directly, and of energy, which indirectly added to commodities' prices. (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2024).

<sup>3</sup>In 2023, Israel's GDP per capita was 53,434 \$ (World Bank, 2023). Its growth rate was 3% (Trading Economics, 2023). Its unemployment rate in August 2023 was 3.1%. After the COVID-19 pandemic and before the war, inflation decreased from 5.2% to 3.8%. Israel managed to decrease its deficit to 0%, and its debt to 59.7% of its GDP.

<sup>4</sup> With Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus and Greece (as gates to Europe). See Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, 2024.

<sup>5</sup>The Central Bank of Israel estimates these costs by 67 bn\$ for 2023-2025. (Wrobel, 2024).

<sup>6</sup>In total, the number of displaced Israeli civilians is 135,000 (Lev, 2024).

<sup>7</sup>The deterioration in Israel-Turkey relations prevents cheap imports from the latter, that in past crises, e.g., COVID-19, moderated price augmentation.

<sup>8</sup>Soldiers on reserve duty serve for long months instead of a maximum of 45 days per year. Due to the war situation, they may be summoned for service in short notice, without giving them due time to arrange their businesses. A law extending the compulsory army service for three years, until 2029 (Adamkar, 2024), and a law extending the reserve service by one year (Shalev, 2024) are in the process of enactment in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament.

<sup>9</sup>The central bank of Israel (2024) predicted in April 2024 growth of 2% in 2024 (compared to almost 5% before COVID-19 hit), a deficit of 6.6% of the national GDP, debt of 67% of the national GDP and inflation of 2.7%.

Despite a generally positive 2024 Investment Climate Statement that emphasizes the resilience of the Israeli economy (US Department of State, 2024), the ongoing conflict has deterred many investors, undermining business and R&D initiatives.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, several high-tech firms have begun laying off employees. Moreover, the war has intensified a brain drain (Eilam, 2024) that had already begun due to domestic political instability.

Given the current fragility of the Israeli economy, credit ratings have been downgraded (e.g., S&P, 2024; Fitch, 2024), making it more expensive for Israel to secure funding from abroad.

Israel's adversaries have actively campaigned<sup>11</sup> against its response to the October 7<sup>th</sup> events, capitalizing on Israel's vulnerabilities in international diplomacy and foreign misunderstandings. The unfortunate success of this campaign carries significant economic repercussions,<sup>12</sup> among other consequences.

The cumulative impact of these factors is exacerbating Israel's national debt<sup>13</sup> and deficit.<sup>14</sup> The Israeli economy is projected to face the financial repercussions of the war for many years to come.

Additionally, this situation increases Israel's vulnerability.

As a result, Israel must explore every available avenue and fully utilize all possible strategies to recover its economy, which is essential for its survival and independence.

Building alliances is crucial to achieving this objective.

## The Regional and Global Perspectives

After more than three decades of US dominance in a unipolar world, recent events reflect a gradual shift towards a multipolar landscape (Adam, 2023). This emerging world order is divided into two major axes: one led by the US, while the other features Iran, China, and Russia as central players.

The war in Ukraine exemplifies Russia's determination to reclaim its status as a global superpower. This ambition poses a significant threat to former Soviet states, many of which seek protection through Western alliances like NATO and the EU (De Waal, Bechev & Samorukov, 2024).

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<sup>10</sup>According to the data of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, foreign direct investments decreased in 2023 by 28.7% compared to 2022, from a level of \$23 billion to only \$16.4 billion (Filut, 2024). In the hi-tech sector, they shrunk by 55% by June 2024 (Young, 2024).

<sup>11</sup>This campaign involves not only the direct war parties but also countries like Russia, using misinformation to shape the public opinion against Israel (Czreny, Michlin-Sapir & Siman Tov, 2024) as well as abuse of international legal forums like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by South Africa, blaming Israel for alleged genocide in Gaza Strip (ICJ, 2024), which Loengarov (2024) addressed as 'unprecedented in terms of politization'. See also the opinions of Orde Kittie and David May (FDD, 2024), and Abrams, 2024.

<sup>12</sup>Political delegitimization affects consumers globally. Israel suffered from this phenomenon in the past, following the ECJ judgments Brita and Psagot (Munin & Sitbon, 2021, 2022) and the BDS activities (Feldman, 2017).

<sup>13</sup>In the first quarter of 2024, Israel's debt was crossing the 145 BN \$, compared to an average of about 70 BN \$ from 1980 until 2024. (Trading Economics, 2024).

<sup>14</sup>In July 2024, Israel's deficit climbed to 7.6% of its GDP. (Wrobel, 2024a).

Russia has aligned with countries like China, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, all of which are marginalized by the West. This alliance increasingly challenges moderate values and global stability, offering a more violent alternative.

The war that began on October 7, 2024, cannot be understood solely in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Iran<sup>15</sup> plays a critical role in orchestrating, funding, and arming groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. It has even enlisted Yemen's Houthi forces. Iran's direct threats against Israel escalated on April 15, 2024, when it launched over 300 missiles at Israel. By July 2024, Turkey began threatening to invade Israel, sensing that Hamas was weakening and Hezbollah's support might not suffice. These acts of aggression are less about helping Palestinians and more about demonstrating the power of the so-called "axis of evil" against the moderate bloc. This is only the beginning. While some countries prefer to downplay the broader implications and blame Israel for the escalation, the power to prevent further conflict may no longer rest with the moderate powers. The "axis of evil"<sup>16</sup> could now control the scale of this conflict. If the global balance has shifted this dramatically, it is a matter of grave concern. If it hasn't, this is the moment for moderate countries to unite and neutralize the threat before it grows (Matthews, 2024).<sup>17</sup> This battle must be fought not only militarily but also in the economic sphere<sup>18</sup> (Negrea, 2024).

Economic stability is key to the success of the peaceful axis. Each member's resilience strengthens the entire alliance, as the "axis of evil" will inevitably target any weak links to destabilize it. A strong regional economic alliance could bolster the security and long-term strength of its members.

### Reviving the Barcelona Process?

In 1995, the EU launched the Barcelona Process, fueled by the optimism following the 1993-1995 Oslo peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Against this backdrop, the idea of creating a peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean region, modeled after the EU and linked by bilateral agreements, seemed feasible.

The Barcelona Process focused on four key areas of collaboration (European Union, 1995):

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<sup>15</sup>Khataei (2022) argues that Iran sees the development of the Abraham Accords as potentially threatening to include Israel in the Persian Gulf security structure, which is totally unacceptable by its regime. Therefore, it is pursuing a multilateral de-escalation of regional tensions.

<sup>16</sup>The term 'axis of evil' was originally used in 2002 by the US former president George W. Bush, referring to Iran, Ba'athist Iraq and North Korea. Contemporary literature (e.g., Negrea, 2024, Rotacher, 2024) marks the establishment of a new axis of evil, including, among others, Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

<sup>17</sup>In his address to the American Congress in July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed the necessity to form a political alliance to confront this threat, suggesting to name it the 'Abraham alliance' (the Times of Israel, 2024).

<sup>18</sup>While such steps are inevitable and considered by the global community as preferred over military action, Kovach (2015) drew attention to the necessary precaution in their implementation, to prevent unnecessary side-effects.

1. **Political and Security Partnership:** Promoting dialogue and cooperation on security to enhance regional stability.
2. **Economic and Financial Partnership:** Encouraging economic integration through trade liberalization, investment promotion, and financial aid.
3. **Social, Cultural, and Human Partnership:** Strengthening cooperation in education, research, migration, and cultural exchange to foster social cohesion and mutual understanding.
4. **Justice and Home Affairs:** Addressing shared challenges like migration, terrorism, organized crime, and judicial cooperation.

To achieve this vision, the EU signed association agreements with Mediterranean partners, including Israel and its neighbors. These agreements tied economic benefits to political expectations, requiring beneficiaries to work toward democracy, the rule of law, peace, and regional cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

However, while these agreements still form the legal foundation for relations between Mediterranean countries and the EU, political setbacks have prevented the establishment of a broader network of agreements between Mediterranean states themselves. As a result, the vision of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA), inspired by the EU model, has not materialized<sup>20</sup> (Attina, 2004; Del Sarto, 2023).

Discouraged by this, the EU has not always fully utilized the economic potential of its agreements, hoping that the prospect of future economic benefits would serve as leverage for regional peace. However, for Mediterranean partners, conflicting political interests outweighed the allure of economic rewards.

For example, in two landmark rulings, *Brita* (2010) and *Psagot* (2019), the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) interpreted the EU-Israel (2000) and EU-PLO (1997) association agreements. In *Brita*, the CJEU ruled that exports from Israeli settlements are not covered by the EU-Israel agreement but fall under the EU-PLO agreement since the territories are not recognized as part of Israel. In *Psagot*, the court mandated that products from the territories be labeled as such, to inform consumers. The EU applied these rules to other areas of cooperation, like culture, research, and agriculture (Munin, 2015). Israeli commentators criticized these judgments for their controversial legal basis and negative practical implications (e.g., Kornfeld, 2010; Pardo and Zemer, 2011; Munin, 2015). Many in Israel viewed them as politically motivated sanctions,<sup>21</sup> reinforcing a perception of EU bias in favor of the Palestinians and undermining the EU's credibility as a neutral mediator. For Israel, the conflict with the Palestinians is existential, and the

<sup>19</sup>E.g., Articles 2-4 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>20</sup>The Barcelona Process laid the foundation for the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), established in 2008, in which 43 countries participate: the 27 EU members and 16 Mediterranean countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestine, Syria (currently suspended), Tunisia and Turkey. Libya has an observer status. The UFM continues to pursue these goals with a focus on concrete projects and initiatives. This platform is unsuitable as an institutional and legal framework for an alliance of the kind described in this article, due to its fragmented character and operation (Soler i Lecha, 2008, Winter, 2020).

<sup>21</sup>Not sanctions in the sense of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter.

country never considered yielding to EU political demands for withdrawal from the territories in exchange for economic incentives.

In light of the current war, some EU member states have called for the suspension of the EU-Israel association agreement (European Parliament, 2024).<sup>22</sup> This is not the first time Israel has faced such threats. Fortunately for Israel, any such EU decision requires consensus, and more moderate member states have countered these attempts. Nevertheless, many Israelis are disappointed that their major trading partner does not fully support them in difficult times. A suspension of the agreement would have dealt a significant blow to Israel's already fragile economy.

Looking back over the past 25 years, it is evident that the EU's strategy has not achieved its intended goals. The "carrot and stick" approach of using economic incentives to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has proven ineffective (e.g., Harpaz & Shamis, 2010; Munin, 2003, 2011; Pardo & Zemer, 2005, 2006; Frid, 2018). For years, scholars have proposed replacing this counterproductive agenda with a more constructive approach focused on enhanced cooperation (e.g., Herman, 2005, 2006; Munin, 2003; Tovias, 2004, Tovias et al., 2015).

Recent global developments offer an opportunity for the EU to reconsider its strategy. The EU could demonstrate leadership by launching a regional initiative to unite moderate Mediterranean countries against the "axis of evil." The legal framework of the Barcelona Process could serve as a foundation for such an initiative. Despite the region's political conflicts, a pragmatic focus on shared interests and practical benefits could enhance cooperation in several areas. This collaboration could help build trust and gradually create a more integrated and stable Mediterranean region, allowing partners to navigate the complexities of a divided world.

Potential areas of cooperation include:

1. **Trade and Economic cooperation:** Strengthening economic ties<sup>23</sup> through sector-specific trade agreements in areas like agriculture,<sup>24</sup> textiles, and

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<sup>22</sup>Such demands rely on an argument that Israel allegedly breached its legal commitment for democracy and human rights in article 4 of its association agreement with the EU. Israel denies this claim based on its right to defend itself, pointing the selective and incoherent EU application (or non-application) of this provision, existing in all the association agreements concluded since the Barcelona Declaration, to different Mediterranean partners. This 'flexible' EU approach is facilitated by the vague drafting of these commitments and their activation mechanism. (Attina, 2003, 9).

<sup>23</sup>E.g., Article 44 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement calls for mutual parties' effort to enhance regional cooperation.

<sup>24</sup>E.g., article 46 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. According to Attina (2003, 6), in the original Barcelona Process, 'keeping the agricultural sector practically out of the free trade project is good demonstration of the European resolve to play the privileged position in the highly asymmetrical trade system between the two Mediterranean shores.' For the process to succeed, this approach has to change.

technology, or comprehensive trade agreements,<sup>25</sup> fostering gradual economic liberalization.<sup>26</sup>

2. **Infrastructure Development:** Joint investments in transportation,<sup>27</sup> energy,<sup>28</sup> and telecommunications<sup>29</sup> infrastructure to improve regional connectivity and reduce costs for economically strained partners.
3. **Energy Security:**<sup>30</sup> Collaborating on diversifying energy sources and building infrastructure, such as pipelines and grids, to reduce reliance on external suppliers like Russia and Iran.
4. **Environmental Protection<sup>31</sup> and Sustainability:** Addressing shared environmental challenges, such as water management and marine conservation, to promote regional sustainability.
5. **Tourism<sup>32</sup> and Cultural Exchange:**<sup>33</sup> Promoting tourism and cultural understanding to enhance regional ties and mutual respect.
6. **Health Cooperation:** Coordinating public health initiatives and medical research to address shared challenges, such as pandemics.
7. **Scientific and Educational<sup>34</sup> Collaboration:** Fostering scientific research<sup>35</sup> and educational exchange to boost innovation and human capital.
8. **Human Capital Development:** Investing in education and skills to strengthen resilience and competitiveness.
9. **Immigration Challenges:**<sup>36</sup> Collaborating to address immigration crises that affect economic, social, and security dynamics.
10. **Security Cooperation:**<sup>37</sup> Building trust to enhance security cooperation and collectively address threats from the "axis of evil."
11. **Regional Stability and Conflict Resolution:** Facilitating political dialogue<sup>38</sup> and conflict resolution<sup>39</sup> to promote peace and stability.

Existing EU cooperation with Mediterranean partners in many of these areas could be deepened and expanded to foster stronger ties within the region itself. For example, bilateral initiatives like the Israel-Morocco energy cooperation agreement

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<sup>25</sup>When both regional trade partners are WTO members, such agreements must be subject to the conditions specified by article XXIV GATT (goods) or article V GATS (services), respectively.

<sup>26</sup>For example, despite the fact that trade in services encompasses more than 70% of the Israeli and EU's GDP, the association agreement between them does not provide for trade liberalization in services yet (potential provisions: Articles 29, 48 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement).

<sup>27</sup>E.g., article 53 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>28</sup>E.g., article 51 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>29</sup>E.g., article 52 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., article 51 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>31</sup>E.g., article 50 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>32</sup>E.g., article 54 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>33</sup>E.g., articles 58, 60, 61 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>34</sup>E.g., article 59 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>35</sup>E.g., article 40 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, also covering medical research.

<sup>36</sup>E.g., article 57 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>37</sup>Attina (2003, 6) marked the EU strive towards de-nationalization of armed forces, in collaboration with NATO while excluding the Mediterranean partners, as a source of mistrust by the Arab states. A new approach may consider including the moderate Mediterranean partners in such collaboration.

<sup>38</sup>E.g., articles 3-5 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

<sup>39</sup>E.g., article 75 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.



(Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022) or the Israel-Egypt-Jordan EastMed pipeline project could be broadened to include other partners for mutual benefit.

This initiative could unite moderate Mediterranean countries in pursuit of peace and prosperity, creating a synergy that counters the "axis of evil." It would send a strong signal that terrorism will not derail peaceful initiatives and that a focus on positive collaboration is the best way for moderate countries to denounce violence and thrive despite it.

## Doubts and Challenges

This idea is certainly not without its challenges and uncertainties.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the more it is examined, the more questions emerge. This section will briefly highlight some of the key issues, with the hope of sparking further discussion:

1. **Political Will and Trust – Among States:** Historical grievances, territorial disputes, divergent political ideologies,<sup>41</sup> or domestic instability, as seen in the original Barcelona Process, can obstruct consensus-building and cooperation. Insisting on peace among the partners as a precondition could undermine the initiative. Can the potential partners collaborate despite their conflicts? The 2004 EU decision to admit Cyprus as a member despite unresolved tensions between Greek Cypriots and Turkey (Akritidou & Lindenstrauss, 2024) demonstrates the possibility of pragmatic cooperation despite ongoing conflicts, though it depends on the weight of the mutual interests at stake.<sup>42</sup>
2. **Public Sentiment vs. State Alliances:** International alliances are often forged at the leadership level (top-down), but as Segell (2022) notes, there can be a disconnect between the decisions of leaders and the sentiments of the public (bottom-up).<sup>43</sup> Israel's "cold peace" with Jordan (Winter, 2024) and Egypt

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<sup>40</sup>The Barcelona Process failed due to obstacles that have not necessarily been overcome since then: ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, undermined efforts to create a stable and peaceful regional environment; Political instability in many Mediterranean partner countries also hindered progress; Economic disparities between the northern and southern Mediterranean countries undermined efforts for further economic integration; Social and cultural initiatives were often overshadowed by political and economic issues; The EU and its Mediterranean partners often had different priorities and agendas, leading to disagreements and a lack of coherent strategy.

<sup>41</sup>Attina (2003, 9) points on a major difficulty the Barcelona Process encountered in applying the democracy and human rights clauses included in the Mediterranean association agreements: "...the difficulties involved by application of human rights clauses to this region with so different cultural and religious characteristics, and in which the question of cultural relativism is relevant, persists to be strong. Similarly, in the application of the democracy clause, ...consensus neither exists on what democracy might mean nor what the appropriate means to achieve it might be."

<sup>42</sup>The *two-dimensional* psychological approach to trust argues that personal relations are complex and that there may be simultaneous reasons for trust and distrust in the same relationship. It suggests that "trust allows the possibility of undesirable behavior by the other to be removed from consideration." (Lewicki et al., 2006, 1002).

<sup>43</sup>Higgins (2023) illustrates this gap in the difference between the narrative in the state-run media in comparison to the social media.

- (Aftandilian, 2018, Schenker, 2024) is a relevant example. Addressing this gap is essential for ensuring the long-term stability and success of any alliance.
3. **Leadership and Commitment:** The commitment of political leaders in the member states to prioritize regional cooperation over national or bilateral agendas is critical. Leadership changes or shifts in political priorities could either support or undermine the alliance. It's also crucial to treat cultural and religious differences as strengths, not hindrances.<sup>44</sup> Leaders must also resist growing nationalism, which tends to emerge during global crises.
  4. **Who Will Participate?:** Will the UK, a former EU member and participant in the Barcelona Process, contribute? What will be Turkey's role, given its current alignment with the 'axis of evil' after the EU's cold shoulder? Can this initiative extend to include Abraham Accords signatories, even if they lie outside the Mediterranean, considering their economic and security cooperation with moderate regional partners?<sup>45</sup>
  5. **Contributions and Value-Added:** What will each partner bring to the table? Understanding the unique capabilities and strengths of each country is essential for maximizing the alliance's effectiveness and resources.
  6. **The EU's Role:** One of the reasons the Barcelona Process faltered was the perception among Mediterranean partners that it was an EU-driven initiative (Attina, 2003). Could a renewed initiative deepen the partners' dependence on EU policies, and might this deter participation? How can a fair balance of power be achieved that satisfies all participants?
  7. **Security and Safety:** Differences in security capacities between Mediterranean countries (Attina, 2003) could complicate cooperation. Greater integration may lead to increased movement of people, which raises security concerns. Thorough planning will be necessary to mitigate potential safety risks.

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<sup>44</sup>Attina (2003, 7) marked the asymmetry in the EU approach towards the different culture and values of the Mediterranean partners as one reason for the Barcelona Process failure: "...[t]he partnership process, meant as a cooperative endeavor to gap reduction, imposes a great effort to change on one group of partners (the Med-countries) while the other group (the European countries) hold the task of creating the conditions for the successful socialization of the recruits in the neo-liberal global system. This change is needed to transform the region in a stabilized area ...." The article (p.8) describes the efforts and funding the EU invested in this goal since the 1980's and their limited success, among other reasons, due to the controversies among the partners and the low level of participation of the Mediterranean partners. To make the alliance succeed, clearly this approach must be replaced with a more pragmatic, instrumental tolerant and inclusive approach towards different cultures, values and mentalities, ensuring that the mutual goals would not be adversely affected by the fact that "Arab and European views differ sharply on as fundamental issues as the relations between state and religion, religious pluralism and the dialogue between religions, the contrast between individualism and collectivism, the role of civil society, and equal opportunities for women." (Attina, 2003, 10). The Abraham Accords' success may serve as a model for collaboration bypassing these differences by avoidance to address them as precondition for collaboration in mutual fields of interests.

<sup>45</sup>Sorkin (2021, 2, 72) suggests that countries like Tunisia and Oman can potentially join the Abraham Accords. Tunisia is a member of the Barcelona/EuMed initiative but Oman is not. Raza (2022) toys with the idea that Pakistan could join the Abraham Accords. Michael & Guzansky (2020) examined the potential participation of Qatar, a dominant player in the current regional crisis, in Abraham Accords. Would any of these countries be willing to join an extended Barcelona Process initiative? Would the current partners accept them?

8. **External Influences:** Geopolitical tensions and the involvement of major powers could complicate the dynamics within the renewed Barcelona Process. External actors, including the 'axis of evil' states, may attempt to persuade hesitant partners to exit the alliance.
9. **Civil Society and Public Opinion:** Public engagement, driven by civil society organizations, can be instrumental in advocating for cooperation and holding governments accountable. However, public opinion, often shaped by media or nationalist sentiment, could resist deeper integration.
10. **Institutional Capacity:** The effectiveness of the institutional framework of the Barcelona Process (e.g., working groups, committees) will be crucial. Strengthening these institutions, fostering inclusivity, and creating a transparent decision-making process will help manage political controversies and build trust. Allocation of resources and budget for the alliance must also be carefully agreed upon.
11. **Membership Size:** A larger number of partners could enhance the alliance's influence, but it may also make decision-making more complex and slow.
12. **Increased Interdependence:** Could increased cooperation make partners more resilient or create new vulnerabilities? For instance, could the alliance be more susceptible to attacks on joint infrastructure by hostile forces like the 'axis of evil'?

Once these challenges are addressed through mutual agreement, the partners can cautiously move forward with a pragmatic approach:

- **Shared Interests:** Focusing on areas of common interest, such as economic development, security, and energy, could lay the groundwork for cooperation, even in the face of political disagreements.
- **Incremental Progress:** Rather than pursuing comprehensive agreements immediately, progress on smaller, specific projects could build trust and showcase the benefits of collaboration.
- **Mediation and Dialogue:** Diplomatic channels and dialogue platforms can help manage political controversies. The shared need to defend against external threats might serve as a catalyst for cooperation.
- **External Support:** International organizations and influential powers can provide diplomatic, financial, and technical support to help overcome political obstacles.

As a key initiator, sponsor, and conductor of this process, the EU could play a critical role in advancing the goals of a renewed Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Here are several ways the EU can contribute:

1. **Mediator and Facilitator:** The EU could mediate disputes and promote dialogue between partners, drawing from its own experience managing diverse member interests. However, it must prove its impartiality to gain trust.

2. **Political and Economic Support:** The EU could offer political and financial backing to strengthen governance and promote economic stability. However, other partners will also need to contribute financially to maintain balance.<sup>46</sup>
3. **Setting Norms and Standards:** Instead of imposing EU standards, the partners could collectively agree on their own norms, promoting convergence while building trust.<sup>47</sup>
4. **Trade and Investment:** Deepening trade and investment ties could stimulate growth and stability, though criticisms<sup>48</sup> of the original Barcelona Process's economic model will need to be addressed.
5. **Security Cooperation:** Joint initiatives to tackle terrorism, organized crime, and trafficking could enhance stability.<sup>49</sup>
6. **Capacity Building:** Technical assistance and institutional capacity-building could improve governance and mitigate political controversies, but this must be done with cultural sensitivity.
7. **Cultural Exchange:** Programs fostering educational<sup>50</sup> and cultural exchanges can help overcome societal divisions.

This moment could serve as a key test of the EU's global leadership ambitions as a 'normative power'. By moderating its dominance and fostering a more balanced partnership, the EU has an opportunity to exercise global leadership for the benefit of all involved.

The original Barcelona Process can serve as a foundation for this vision, updated to reflect today's realities. With thoughtful leadership, proactive diplomacy, and a pragmatic approach, a reinvigorated Euro-Mediterranean partnership could foster stability, resilience, and prosperity in the face of global threats.

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<sup>46</sup>To that extent, the UFM framework reflects a more balanced formula compared to the original Barcelona process, since the presidency and the funding are shared between the EU and the Mediterranean partners. (European Union, 2024).

<sup>47</sup>The relevant association agreements include approximation of law provisions (e.g., article 55 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement) allegedly phrased symmetrically. Nevertheless, in reality the EU expects the other partners to approximate their laws to the EU law.

<sup>48</sup>Arab elites "pointed at trade liberalization as not necessarily resulting in economic development; to industrial products free trade as a menace of erosion of the Arab industries; to restructuring as resulting in social instability; and to the vertical integration with the European economies as an injury to horizontal Arab cooperation and the prospects of establishing an Arab free trade area." They further claimed that the failure of these agreements to balance the liberalization of industrial trade with the liberalization of trade in agriculture deprives them of their right to enjoy their relative advantage in the free trade the agreements provide for (Attina, 2003, 14).

<sup>49</sup>E.g., article 56 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement enables cooperation in combating drugs and money laundering.

<sup>50</sup>E.g., article 59 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement refers to youth exchanges and cooperation among academic institutions.

## Conclusion

Segell (2021) suggests that the Abraham Accords demonstrate how the national interests of its participants took precedence over their historical support for Palestinian interests. He argues that this shift is driven by "a new evolving world order of sovereign interests, channels to address terrorism, and of communication to address common dilemmas, for example, the Palestinian question, and common threats such as Iran, and, above all, the futility of terror as a means to an end." If this assumption—further supported by Baqai & Mehrin (2021, p. 123) and Kosman (2022, p. 117)—holds true, it could serve as a motivation to build a broader regional alliance grounded in the original vision of the Barcelona Process. At the same time, adapting this model to the realities of the current era may be necessary.

Leadership in global crises requires both a clear vision and the determination to execute it, often in the face of significant challenges. Leaders must seek common ground among diverse partners, foster international collaboration, and guide efforts toward a mutually beneficial agenda. Strengthening the moderate majority committed to a peaceful and prosperous existence is key.

As a global power, the EU has a historic opportunity to demonstrate leadership that benefits its citizens and regional partners. The legal and institutional framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership could save significant time and resources if leveraged for this purpose.

Ultimately, the Barcelona Process derives its strength from its capacity to create a cooperative, integrated regional framework that bolsters the economic, political, and social resilience of its members. By doing so, it can contribute to stability and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region, indirectly aiding member states in addressing challenges posed by external adversaries. The institutional structure and funding of this process, previously criticized as ineffective, can be improved to support its objectives more effectively.

In the past, the US introduced the Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ), which offered trade concessions on goods produced by Israel and Jordan, or Israel and Egypt, for export to the US. This served as a model for the EU's broader regional initiative, the Pan-European Cumulation. Today, the US-sponsored Abraham Accords could provide a blueprint for a broader, EU-led regional alliance.

Though this concept faces significant challenges, it warrants further exploration. Proactive diplomacy and a pragmatic approach can enhance the likelihood of success, even in the face of political controversies. Success in this initiative could represent a decisive step forward, especially given the global threats on the horizon.

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