

# The Origin of Intercultural Dialogue Practice in European Union External Action

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This paper analyses the origin of the practice of ‘intercultural dialogue’ as a tool for European Union external action towards the Mediterranean. ICD is currently a relevant instrument in EU external relations. However, when it was first launched in 1995, in the policy initiative known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or the Barcelona Process, ICD was granted little effort by the partners involved. Many accounts from that period agree that this tool initially took a back seat if compared to other political-economic priorities in the EU agenda in this initiative. The paper aims to investigate the reasons for the initial neglect of this tool, which was considered by many to be a relevant innovation when it was launched, but that has actually become a relevant resource for EU external action only recently. Through analysis of EU policy documents of the period, the paper demonstrates that the EU had envisaged strategic use of ICD before 1995, in particular, in the hope of tackling key issues, such as mounting xenophobia in Europe and escalating Islamic fundamentalism in the Maghreb. It thus identifies a dual explanation for the limited and ineffective scope attributed to ICD in the first years of the Barcelona Process. On the one hand, in 1995 a number of Mediterranean partner countries were reluctant to lend much credit to the intercultural aspects of regional cooperation, and, on the other, the EU at that time had a growing but still restrained perception of urgency for the emerging issues that ICD was designed to address.

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## Introduction

In the last 15 years, the European Union (EU) has increasingly made reference to the importance of ‘intercultural dialogue’ (ICD) in its external actions (Prodi 2002; Council 2008a), going so far as to identify the former as one of the most determinant issues of its first quarter-century (Ferrero Waldner 2006).

In international politics<sup>1</sup>, the concept of ICD (or of dialogue among civilisations)

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1 Intercultural dialogue or analogue concepts have been the subject of analysis in several disciplines, including political philosophy (Habermas 1984; Senghaas 2002; Dallmayr 2002), social psychology (Kelman 1999; Worchel 2005; Kuriansky 2007), pedagogy (Cestaro 2004), business communication (Prosser 1978), development studies (Hammel 1990).

is generally employed to encompass a set of efforts (initiatives and programmes) prompted by international organisations, national/local authorities and civil society organisations so as to facilitate interactions between 'units' (individuals, civil society groups, community representatives) that are characterised by some degree of cultural and/or religious diversity. These efforts are based on the assumption that fostering frequent exchanges between such units can favour a broader mutual understanding among them and thus contribute to reducing stereotypes, improving mutual respect, empathy and, finally, to reducing political, social and cultural tensions. Major ICD initiatives have been developed, *inter alia*, by UNESCO, the United Nations, through the 'Alliance of Civilisations', the Council of Europe and the Islamic Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO).

The EU formally introduced ICD into its foreign policy within the framework of the initiative known as Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) or 'Barcelona Process'. When the EMP was launched in 1995, however, ICD did not receive a degree of attention comparable to that which the EU has attributed to it in recent times. Many accounts of that period (Jünemann 2003; Schumacher 2007) agree that ICD initially took a back seat to other political-economic priorities in the EU's agenda for this initiative. It was offered as an important component of the Barcelona Process (EMP 1995a; EMP 1997), but was presented with comparatively vague objectives, which, unsurprisingly, informed the establishment of only partially effective programmes. The result was an erratic, and initially ineffectual, implementation process of ICD, the outcomes of which only started to have some visible effect on EU Mediterranean policies a few years later.

This paper aims to investigate the origin of ICD in EU foreign policy with a particular aim to analyse why the EU was pushed to introducing such a tool, which was praised as being a policy innovation (Panebianco 2001), and to immediately downsize its actual relevance within that same policy framework. To answer this question, this paper addresses ICD as one of the several foreign policy instruments wielded by the EU in the framework of its external action. Accordingly, the key to understanding the origin of ICD is identified through the study of the changing dynamics in Mediterranean politics and in the analysis of the EU policies adopted in their wake. The rationale for the introduction of this policy instrument is thus discussed in relation to the evolving Euro-Mediterranean milieu in the period around the launch of the EMP in November, 1995.

Delving into the EU foreign policy documents in those years, the paper demonstrates that the European states and institutions had envisaged the strategic use of ICD at the Euro-Mediterranean level long before the political conditions for its full deployment had materialised. Before 1995, when they were formulating the scope and goals of the Barcelona Process, European member states and institutions

designed ICD primarily as a tool with which to foster mutual understanding among civil societies in the hope of tackling a host of key issues across the Mediterranean, such as the mounting xenophobia in Europe and the escalating Islamic fundamentalism in the Maghreb. In addition, ICD was expected to support grassroots confidence building in the framework of the on-going Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). In other words, when the EMP was formally launched there was a significant gap between the initial strategic idea of ICD, as conceived by the EU in preparation for this new Mediterranean initiative, and the final broad and ineffective scope that was attributed to this instrument in the first years of the EMP. This paper advances two related explanations for this gap. On the one hand, a number of Mediterranean partner countries (MPCs) were reluctant to lend much credit to the intercultural aspect of regional cooperation; on the other, the EU had, at that time, a growing but still restrained perception of urgency for the emerging issues that ICD was designed to address. As a result, ICD was defined broadly when it was introduced in the EMP, without encouraging any specific objectives for its employment. Nothing in the broad formulation of ICD, however, precluded its more effective implementation of more apposite political conditions that were to be met in future Euro-Mediterranean relations.

This paper begins with an analysis of the evolution of the international political milieu surrounding the launch of the EMP, together with a discussion of the main challenges faced by the EU in the early 1990s. The focus then shifts to an analysis of the objectives of ICD that were set out in the context of the political framework under discussion, providing an account of how the EU increasingly attributed more strategic credit to ICD before the launch of the EMP. The third section discusses the reasons that caused the vague conception of this policy instrument when it was originally introduced into the Barcelona Process in 1995. The fourth, and final, section analyses the outcome of these efforts, introducing and discussing the first programmes launched by the EU to implement ICD in the Euro-Mediterranean space.

## **EU and Mediterranean Politics in the Early 1990s: Challenges and Innovations**

As mentioned, ICD was first formally introduced into EU foreign policy in the Barcelona Declaration (EMP 1995a). The Declaration was adopted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all the EU member states and the 12 MPCs<sup>2</sup> at the first Euro-Mediterranean Conference, held in Barcelona on 28th–29th November, 1995.

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2 In 1995 the MPCs were: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and the Palestinian Authority. Cyprus and Malta became EU member states in 2004.

The idea of a Euro-Mediterranean Conference was first endorsed by the Corfu European Council in 1994 and was later championed by the European Council and Commission with a view to offering a platform from which to discuss the establishment of a medium and a long-term framework for cooperation between the two shores of the common sea (European Commission 1994). The outcome of the conference was the Barcelona Process (or EMP), which became the official policy of the EU towards its southern neighbours for the following decade.

Scholars have generally described the EMP's policy framework as a 'true novelty' and a 'radical departure' from past cooperation initiatives, particularly because of its comprehensive approach to security, which encompassed the political, economic, social, and cultural challenges faced by the EU in the area (Bicchi 2006, 145; Adler and Crawford 2006, 4). Some analysts commended the introduction of ICD in this latter context as being one of the greatest innovations of the EMP, insofar as it instantiated the introduction of culture in the domain of international politics (Schumacher 2001, Panebianco 2001). However, in order to understand the innovative features of the EMP, and the original rationale of ICD therein, it is necessary to take a step back and to analyse the historical and institutional processes that initially led to the establishment of the Barcelona Process.

In the 1970s and 1980s, European relations with Mediterranean countries were included under the label of 'Global Mediterranean Policy'. Some authors questioned the actual reach of this policy, limited as it was to economic and trade issues and dominated by bilateral cooperation agreements (Calabrese 1997, 94). Socio-cultural cooperation was envisaged within the informal, and largely unsuccessful, 'Euro-Arab dialogue', established in the mid-1970s between the European Community (EC) and the Arab League (Biad 1997, 54). In 1990, there was a decision by the EC to revise the basic parameters of its relations with the Mediterranean countries. This revision was motivated by the recognition that there was a need to go beyond mere trade relations and to bridge the growing development gap, both economic and social, between the two shores of the Mediterranean (European Commission 1990). The outcome of this process was known as the 'Renovated Mediterranean Policy' (RMP). The advantages of this policy framework were the introduction of decentralised cooperation programmes, as well as aid programmes and higher budgets for the promotion of development in Mediterranean countries (Adler and Crawford 2006, 22).

The RMP had a relatively short life and was *de facto* replaced by the EMP in 1995. Although it had just been revised, this policy quickly appeared to be unsuited to addressing the multi-dimensional changes that were underway in the aftermath of the Cold War (Mascia 2004, 194; see also Calabrese 1997, 91-95). With the collapse of the Soviet Union in December, 1991, and the definite conclusion of

the decades-long confrontation between the Western and Soviet blocs, the EC underwent a process of re-examining its position, role and priorities in the emerging post-bipolar system of international relations. The new international security milieu was characterised, in particular, by a multiplicity of non-military challenges, ranging from increased migration flows from developing countries, to the spread of generalised threats to security, such as terrorism and organised crime. At the same time, the emerging international scenario offered unprecedented opportunities, such as the potential democratisation of former communist neighbours and the removal of barriers to cooperation in areas, like the Mediterranean basin, that were of lower priority to the great powers during the Cold War (Attinà 2004a, 142). In this framework, the EC felt the need to revise the overall scope and instruments of its external action, and to identify new areas for prioritising action. In other words, the EC/EU considered its foreign policy system inadequate to the new world order (Smith 2008, 32). The European Political Cooperation, established in 1970 and institutionalised by the 1986 Single European Act, was replaced by the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) by the 1991 Maastricht Treaty. The CFSP was expected to enable the EU to build on the *acquis* of the EPC, to improve joint action, and to make full use of the means at its disposal (European Council 1992a). The first two areas of priority implementation for the CFSP were identified in the European neighbourhood, and they included Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the Mediterranean (Council 1992).

The Mediterranean basin posed most of the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ (i.e. non-military) security challenges faced by the EU in the early 1990s (Biad 1997; Haddadi 2006; Calabrese 1997; Adler and Crawford 2006). ‘Hard’ security challenges included, among others, issues that related to the proliferation of non-conventional weapons and the emergence of new armed conflicts, such as the 1990 crisis in Kuwait and the ensuing Gulf War. Within the Mediterranean basin, the 1991 outbreak of conflict in the former Yugoslavia represented the first armed conflict on European soil after the Second World War. That conflict was thus a major cause of concern for EU countries and institutions, not least because it ‘exposed the improvised collective decision-making of European States during the conflict’s early stages as embarrassingly ineffectual’ (Calabrese 1997, 90). Nonetheless, European ministers announced a number of declarations in support of the efforts that were underway for peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction (European Council 1992a and 1995a). However, the EU explicitly excluded the former Yugoslavia from the scope of its Mediterranean policies (European Commission 1994). In the early 1990s, the ‘Mediterranean region’ included the Maghreb and the riparian countries of the Middle East with which the EU had established formal relations.<sup>3</sup>

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3 This also included Jordan, with which the EU had signed a cooperation agreement.

The term 'Soft security challenges' referred to a number of issues that were connected to the growing socio-economic gap between Europe and its partners, as well as to the socio-political instability that resulted from it. European politicians were quick to identify social and political instability in these countries as being synonymous with European insecurity (Fernandez-Ordofiez 1990). This perception of insecurity was most strongly felt in connection with the Maghreb, especially among those states overlooking the Mediterranean (e.g., France, Italy and Spain). One particular source of apprehension among European leaders was the rise of religious extremism in Algeria following the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front in 1991 and the ensuing *coup d'état* in 1992; this was, in fact, one of the main catalysts for the revision of EU policies that led to the EMP (Gillespie 1997, 67-68; see also Joffé 1997; Adler and Crawford 2006). This sense of insecurity intensified further when Islamic terrorism directly affected France and Italy in 1994 (Calabrese 1997, 90). European institutions emphasised the causal relationships among the rise of religious fundamentalism in the Maghreb, the current terrorist drift in the region, and the worsening socio-economic divide between Europe and its neighbours (Council 1992; European Commission 1994). A similar relationship was identified in connection with the emergence of other threats to regional stability, such as the growth of transnational organised crime and the increase in both legal and illegal migration flows from the Maghreb. The latter issue was felt most acutely in those European countries that had a strong tradition of emigration, rather than immigration, such as Italy and Spain. Moreover, the growing phenomenon of migration coincided with a rise in episodes of violence and xenophobia on the part of European citizens against migrants, which stoked tensions with their countries of origin. At the same time, the Western Mediterranean was also expressing encouraging economic cooperation opportunities following the establishment, in 1989, of the Arab Maghreb Union. Against this background, the EU proposed the establishment of a special relationship with the Maghreb countries to promote cooperation in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres (Council 1992). This 'Euro-Maghreb Partnership' constituted the immediate precursor to the EU pan-Mediterranean initiative that was established a few years later through the EMP (Calabrese 1997, 89). The geographical upgrading of this policy resulted in the growing relevance for Europe of the challenges and opportunities that were emerging in parallel from the Eastern Mediterranean.

Two such opportunities deserve special attention in this context. First, the formal beginnings of the Arab-Israeli peace process following the 1991 Madrid Conference offered the EU new opportunities to achieve regional stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean. For Europe, the peace process represented 'a great opportunity which [had to] be seized if dangers to the stability of the region [were] to be avoided' (European Council 1992c, 108). In this context, the signing of the

'Oslo Accords' in 1993, between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, provided an effective political breakthrough, without which 'it would have been difficult to foresee the launch of the Barcelona Process' (Peters 2006, 214). The focus of EU joint action was targeted on the promotion of regional integration in the MEPP, the deployment of confidence-building measures, and the support for bilateral talks and prospective international agreements that were conducive to a peace settlement (European Council 1993). The EU was also keen to amplify the perception, among both Israelis and Palestinians, that those first steps towards peace were bringing an immediate improvement in material conditions (European Commission 1993). In brief, the goal of the EU in the Middle East was to embed any positive outcome of the MEPP within the regional framework of cooperation that was under construction. In this sense, the EU made it very clear from the outset that the EMP was not meant to be a new forum for conflict-resolution or a platform for the MEPP. After all, European institutions showed confidence in an imminent and positive conclusion to the peace agreement (European Council 1995, sec. II).

The second, and maybe less immediate, opportunity that emerged from the Eastern Mediterranean was the submission, in 1992, of accession applications by three MPCs: Malta, Cyprus and Turkey. European institutions were quick to follow up on these requests in the hope of improving their medium- and long-term economic relations with them. Moreover, the applications of the three MPCs provided a possibility, particularly welcomed by Greece, to find a solution to the long-lasting Turkish-Cypriot crisis (Calabrese 1997, 104).

To be sure, the political, security, economic, and social challenges and opportunities emerging from the Maghreb and the Eastern Mediterranean were multi-dimensional and interdependent. However, the establishment of an ambitious, comprehensive, and region-wide initiative in the form of the EMP, in 1995, was not a foregone conclusion. Progress towards the Barcelona Process was only possible due to the commitment of southern member states to match the EU's extensive involvement in the process of transition that was underway in post-Soviet Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had posed direct challenges to the EU's eastern, rather than southern, borders. Eastern dynamics were given political priority in central and northern European countries, Germany in primis, which were directly concerned with possible changes at their borders (Attinà 2004a, 142). Under the lobbying of those member states, post-Soviet Europe became the recipient of intensive EU economic, political and social support and aid initiatives (Council 1994b). When the 1993 European Council of Copenhagen officially accepted the accession applications of the countries from that area, the barycentre of the Union was possibly moving east. This prospect was a source of concern for those

southern EU countries that were directly affected by the instability challenges that were coming from the Maghreb. France; Italy and Spain in particular, in their opposition to the channelling of EU foreign policy resources to the east, mounted a sustained lobbying campaign in European with the aim of ensuring 'a semblance of balance between east and south' in EU external action (Gillespie 1997, 68; see also Calabrese 1997; Attinà 2004a).

The active lobbying of France, Italy and Spain was also advanced through parallel initiatives in conjunction with different groups of MPCs. The most significant of those were the proposal to develop a Conference for Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), the 'Dialogue 5+5' (Western Mediterranean), and the Mediterranean Forum. All of them called for a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to co-operation between Europe and its southern neighbours (Calleya 2006; Calabrese 1997; Philippart 2003). The CSCM was proposed in 1990, by the foreign ministers of Italy and Spain, during the Italian presidency of the EC. The idea was to develop a model of structured co-operation with the Mediterranean countries on the example of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now OSCE). The CSCM should have been established as a system that would have '[taken] a comprehensive and balanced view of all aspects of security, [encouraged] economic development and [promoted] dialogue between cultures' (Fernandez-Ordofiez 1990, 10). For a number of reasons, the proposal did not make it past the preliminary stage of development, which ranged from the outbreak of the Gulf War to France's scepticism against such a highly institutionalised profile of co-operation with Mediterranean countries (Calleya 2006, 115; Mascia 2004, 193; Biad 1997, 55). At the same time, the initiative was adopted by the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), which organised a series of meetings on this matter from 1992 onwards. The IPU proposal was to build a CSCM project based on three pillars: political and security related co-operation; economic co-operation; and dialogue and human rights among civilisations.

The CSCM project, and the other alternative frameworks, were all eventually overshadowed by the Barcelona Process. However, these initiatives are of crucial analytical importance insofar as they contributed to shifting the agenda of southern European member states closer to the prospect of an integrated and comprehensive framework of co-operation between the EU and MPCs. In this context, it would be naïve to overlook the fact that the active participation of European ministers and parliamentarians in those initiatives would not have resulted in the transfer of some of the ideas discussed there into the Council and other institutions. It is sufficient to note, by way of example, that it was the European Parliament in 1994 that called on the Council and the Commission to revive the CSCM project (European Parliament 1994), just as it was the IPU that requested the distribution of its final



documents to Parliaments and Governments and, in particular, to the participants at the 1995 Barcelona Conference (IPU 1995).

The above facts point to two main catalysts underpinning the upgrading of the bilateral RMP agreements to the 1995 pan-Mediterranean initiative launched by the EU in Barcelona:

1. The fact that Europe was presented with a growing set of multi-dimensional and interconnected challenges and opportunities originating from the whole Mediterranean basin after the end of the Cold War; and
2. The technical alignment of a 'southern EC lobby' (Calabrese 1997, 101) that was committed to redressing the prioritisation of eastern Europe in EU foreign policy. Eventually, however, it was the subsequent accommodation of Germany, the UK and the Netherlands to the positions of the southern lobby, if partly in furtherance of their political and economic interests in the Mediterranean<sup>4</sup>, that was determinant in allowing European institutions to strengthen their Mediterranean policies 'in parallel' with their on-going commitment to central and eastern Europe (European Council 1994a and 1994b).

In light of this discussion, it is possible to identify three main elements of innovation that are inherent to the Barcelona Process. First, the EMP put into practice a multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to security in the Mediterranean space, through the establishment of a programme of cooperation with the MPCs on three complementary and interconnected thematic partnerships (or 'baskets', in the jargon of the initiative):

1. A political and security partnership to promote human rights, democracy, disarmament, and the fight against terrorism;
2. An economic and trade partnership; and
3. A partnership in cultural, social and human affairs (EMP 1995a).

Secondly, the EMP introduced a regional 'Euro-Mediterranean' dimension of cooperation, in addition to the established bilateral (association agreements) and unilateral (aid for development) channels that were already promoted under the RMP (see figures in Phillippart 2003, 34). This feature, in particular, led some scholars to consider the EMP as an initiative that primarily aimed to establish a

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<sup>4</sup> Germany was traditionally more concerned with migration flows from Turkey; the UK had an historical interest in advancing the situation in the Middle East; while the Netherlands had concerns with the worsening situation in former Yugoslavia (see Gillespie 1997; Calabrese 1997).

security community in the Mediterranean (Attinà 2004b; see also Pace 2007). Thirdly, from the outset the Barcelona Conference involved different types of actors. Besides the officials from the European Commission and the Ministers of the 27 partner countries (15 EU + 12 MPCs) who put forward the EMP, the Barcelona Conference also involved representatives from Parliaments, local authorities, and civil society organisations. In particular, European officials considered that the contribution of civil society was fundamental to establishing a permanent and lasting dialogue between the two shores (EMP 1995b). This plurality of actors was considered one of the greatest elements of innovation in the Barcelona Process (Mascia 2004, 200-202).

### **The Objectives of ICD in the EMP and Before its Launch**

ICD was part of the third basket in the multi-dimensional framework of co-operation that was established by the EMP. This basket, as stated above, denoted the part of the partnership devoted to human, social, and cultural affairs and included a variety of co-operation areas, policy instruments and objectives. In particular, the contents of this basket ranged from cultural co-operation, social rights, development, and civil society interaction to the management of migration flows, the fight against terrorism, organised crime, and illegal migration.

The definition provided for ICD in this framework was somewhat vague. The Barcelona Declaration simply recognised that ‘the traditions of cultures and civilizations throughout the Mediterranean region, the dialogue between these cultures and exchanges at human, scientific and technological level are an essential factor in bringing their peoples closer, promoting understanding between them and improving their perception of each other’ (EMP 1995a). The EU and its MPCs thus introduced ICD as a tool for promoting mutual understanding and knowledge through cultural exchanges across the Euro-Mediterranean space. Besides being very abstract, however, this general goal left the actual scope of ICD, the ‘what for?’ largely unspecified, and hence the whole policy instrument effectively disorganised at the implementation level. This conception of ICD remained in place until the beginning of the 2000s; no further efforts were made to better define the roles, objectives and added values of this tool in the context of the EMP. Yet, the importance of ICD for the larger goals of the EMP was given unequivocal emphasis at all Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conferences during the period 1995-2001 (EMP 1997; EMP 1999). This apparent contradiction raises a simple yet fundamental question: were mutual understanding and cultural exchanges really an end to themselves, or was ICD functional for more specific strategic goals which were initially omitted from EMP documents and practice?

The preamble to the Barcelona Declaration listed mutual understanding as well as measures to reduce poverty and strengthen democracy, human rights, and social development, as fundamental requirements for the promotion of peace, security and prosperity in the Mediterranean (EMP 1995a). From this angle, the role of ICD in the EMP appeared to be that of contributing, primarily through mutual understanding, to the resolution of the above-mentioned set of security challenges that beleaguered the Mediterranean. However, if it provides some concreteness to ICD, since it allows the identification of at least some specific targets for its deployment, this consideration still leaves the scope and relevance of this instrument of the EMP largely unspecified.

To understand whether EU policy makers and officials had considered a more strategic role for the promotion of cultural exchanges and mutual understanding in the Mediterranean, it is necessary to examine the contents of the policy-formulation processes that led to the establishment of the EMP in 1995. This analysis identifies three main strategic targets behind the promotion of ICD:

1. The tensions connected to mass migration into Europe from MPCs;
2. The growth of Islamic fundamentalism; and
3. The efforts to promote peace and build mutual confidence in the conflict areas of the Mediterranean.

Since the idea of the EMP, as discussed above, originated primarily in southern Europe's concerns in regard to the Maghreb, it is not surprising that two out of three targets were connected to the tensions in that area. References to cultural exchanges and mutual understanding in those matters can be traced back to the early 1990s' EC/EU cooperation initiatives with Western Mediterranean countries, and in the alternative initiatives proposed by France, Italy and Spain from the early 1990s. The third target, on the contrary, was mainly derived from the opportunities provided by the Middle East, and emerged a few years later following the signing, in September, 1993, of the 'Oslo Accords' between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

With regard to the first challenge, the approach chosen by the EU to manage the phenomenon of mass migration implied a commitment to a liberal trading system, assistance to the developing world, and the establishment of a framework of political and economic relations with third countries in the area (European Council 1992c). In the Barcelona Declaration, this approach was complemented by the provision of co-operation initiatives in support of vocational training and job co-operation in the MPCs (EMP 1995a). In this context, the objective of ICD was not to reduce or mitigate the causes of mass migration from the MPCs, but was connected to the economic and social tensions that derived from the increasing

presence of migrants in Europe. As mentioned above, these tensions, exacerbated by the difficult economic situations in some European states, were leading to increasing episodes of xenophobia and violence towards migrants, and represented one of the most alarming social problems in post-Cold War Europe (Baumgartl and Favell 1995). The Commission was well aware of the relationships between migrants, cultural exchanges, and mutual understanding when it reviewed European policies on the Mediterranean in 1990. In that context, migrants were valued as ‘a bridge between the Community and its Partners’ (European Commission 1990, 11). Yet that group was not targeted specifically by any decentralised co-operation programme promoted by the EC in the RMP framework. European officials confined themselves to stating their concerns on the increase in xenophobic violence against migrants and their resolve to use any means at their disposal to preserve the human dignity and peaceful co-existence of all citizens in the EU (European Council 1993; 1994b). When presenting the EMP proposal, the Commission portrayed the promotion of mutual understanding as one of the factors that might reduce the negative social effects of mass migration, which was considered among the most dangerous effects of the instability in the area (European Commission 1994). After the launch of the EMP, however, the causal link between migration, xenophobia and the promotion of mutual understanding was not formulated in the Ministers’ conclusions, nor was it put into practice through any concrete policy action. Within the EU policy framework the commitment to pursue ICD in the Mediterranean to fight intolerance, racism and xenophobia was officially made clear in the first Common Strategy on the Mediterranean (European Council 2000). Although often dismissed on the grounds that it merely restated what the EU was already engaged in with the EMP (Smith 2008, 46), the Strategy constitutes a relevant point of reference for understanding the significance attributed to ICD in that framework. The Common Strategy, a CFSP Act, was the first legally binding document adopted, after the launch of the EMP, in which the EU had affirmed a tangible strategic objective for the promotion of ICD in that area.

With regard to the second challenge, the objective envisaged for ICD was to weaken the hold of religious extremists on Muslim populations across the Mediterranean, by providing a more balanced view of the ‘other’ through the establishment of direct exchanges at the civil society level. The first two strategic targets considered by the EU for the promotion of mutual understanding were thus inherently related, as both were concerned with the security consequences of socio-cultural stereotypes. A direct connection between a spreading turn to ‘ancient religious legacy’ and growing regional instability was originally acknowledged in the 1990 proposal for a CSCM (Fernandez-Ordofiez 1990, 8). The proposal devoted a full basket, the third, to human rights and dialogue between civilisations (IPU 1992). In that context, ICD was conceived of as a tool to be used to support a process of

mutual appreciation between the two shores of the Mediterranean and to help to prevent or to curb the development of conflicts that were driven by extremism. Indeed, the latter were said to be connected to the generation of intolerance and terrorism that had contributed to the destabilising of good neighbourly relations and to increasing the cultural gap (IPU 1995). However, the CSCM was a non-EU project that was never implemented. Moreover, its influence on the EMP, although glaring in some respects, cannot be verified. Within the European institutional framework, the relationship between ICD and the threats arising from religious fundamentalism was originally established in 1992, with the proposal of the 'Euro-Maghreb Partnership', the embryo of the EMP. As already stated, the main thrust of that initiative was to reduce the causes for European instability that were arising from the western Mediterranean. Religious fundamentalism and integralism were at the heart of European concerns (Council 1992). In that context, the EU aimed to put its relations with Maghreb countries on a better footing across a number of different areas of co-operation, including the promotion of tolerance and coexistence between cultures and religions through exchanges between young people, university students and staff, scientists and those in the media (European Council 1992b). A couple of years later, the Commission, endorsed by the Council and the European Council, was more specific; it recognised that the promotion of mutual understanding would have helped to reduce the negative implications of fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism on European and Mediterranean societies (European Commission 1994). As in the case of migration, EMP co-operation on issues that were related to the proliferation of (Islamic) terrorism in the Mediterranean, was to be supported primarily by other instruments. Specific efforts, in particular, were to be devoted to strengthening co-operation among the law-enforcement, judicial and other authorities. The action plan of the Barcelona Declaration envisaged employing ICD to reach this target, envisaging periodic meetings of representatives of religions and religious institutions, with the aim of breaking down prejudice, ignorance, fanaticism and of fostering co-operation at the grassroots level (EMP 1995a). This possibility, however, was never reiterated, nor was it followed up in the period under analysis.

The third and last context in which ICD was expected to play a specific role derived from an opportunity, rather than from a challenge. In this context, the objective was to employ ICD to help build confidence and sustain reconciliation efforts between populations that were involved in conflict situations. Although the Mediterranean was dotted with old and new conflicts, the EU initially considered this possibility in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian scenario, following the signing of the 'Oslo Accords' in September, 1993 (European Commission 1994). The EU had committed to establishing confidence-building measures and to supporting the advancement of the MEPP at least since the 1991 Madrid Conference (European Council 1992c).

However, those measures were explicitly derived from the CSCE experience and, as such, they mainly encompassed such activities as the exchange of information, data dissemination, and the notification of military movements and communications. In this context, the proactive role recognised by some analysts for the so-called 'track 2 talks'<sup>5</sup> in the negotiation of the Oslo Accords (Agha et al. 2004) may shed some light on the reasons why the EU explored the opportunity for ICD as a confidence-building measure only after the signing of that early agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. This conception of ICD concurred with the view of some scholars that the third basket was the part of the EMP that aimed to build 'the conditions for the future development of a security community in the Mediterranean' (Adler and Crawford 2006, 26). However, just like migration and terrorism, this strategic objective of ICD was not followed up during the first years of the EMP. An attempt to revive this function may have been made, however, at the end of the 1996 Euro-Mediterranean meeting of the Ministers of Culture. In their effort to provide some substance to the concrete implementation of ICD, Ministers hinted at its employment as 'an ingredient for reconciliation' (EMP 1996). Yet this insight remained isolated, probably due to the progressive failure of the MEPP at the political level. Indeed, the sudden change in Israeli leadership in 1996, and the reluctance of the new right-wing government to push forward the peace process had negative, if not fatal, implications for the overall progress of the EMP (Asseburg 2003). The consequences affected all the baskets of the Barcelona Process (Aliboni 2000). In the third basket, these tensions may have been behind the trend among Arab Governments to forbid their civil society organisations and experts to participate in multilateral co-operation projects with any Israeli counterparts (Bouquerel and El Hussein 2009, 61). The opportunities to employ ICD as a post-conflict confidence-building measure was therefore almost immediately scuppered by the escalation of tensions between the Arabs and the Israelis, further exacerbated in 2000 by the failure of the Camp David Summit and the outbreak of the second Intifada.

## **From a Potential Strategic Instrument to an Actual Latent Resource**

EU member states and institutions therefore conceived of ICD in pursuit of the three strategic objectives that were laid out in the previous section. However, the silencing of these objectives during the first years of the Barcelona Process undermined its strategic potential and, as shown in the next section, the overall implementation of ICD. Considering the important effects of this silence, why

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5 The 'Track 2 talks' have been defined as being: 'discussions held by non-officials of conflicting parties in an attempt to clarify outstanding disputes and to explore the option to resolve them' (Agha et al. 2004, 1).

were these specific objectives neglected during the phase analysed? The paper has already put forward a plausible explanation for the absence of references to the third objective: building confidence between civil societies in the MEPP context, by reference to the impact of the worsening relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This, however, does not explain the disappearance of the other two objectives.

The literature on Euro-Mediterranean policies associates the vagueness surrounding ICD with the problems connected to the whole third basket of the EMP. As the argument goes, all the components of the human, social, and cultural partnership, including ICD, were subordinated to the gains pursued through improved co-operation in the political, security, and trade spheres (Jünemann 2003, 8). As a result, not much attention was given to the functioning, viability, and correlation of its content (Gillespie 2003, 20; see also Schumacher 2007, 4). This hypothesis is empirically valid, but the premises stated at the outset cannot be fully accepted. The inextricable interconnection between the objectives set for ICD, discussed above, and the political, security, and socio-economic priorities of the EU in the Mediterranean, suggests that the introduction of ICD into the EMP was not a secondary afterthought, even if it was not as strategically relevant as the creation of a free trade area in the region.

An alternative explanation for the neglected position of ICD can thus be found in the reluctance of the MPCs, especially the Arab and Muslim ones, to lend much credit to initiatives concerning cultural and religious issues within the EMP co-operation framework. As documented in the literature, the Arab countries were interested in 'preferential access to European markets and development aid and resisted the idea of convergence' prompted by the EU (Adler and Crawford 2006, 27). Most of them only accepted participation in the EMP due to the lack of viable alternatives, since, to them, accession into the EU was denied with great scepticism (Joffé 1997). On the other hand, Turkey (just like Cyprus and Malta) was, in fact, seeking EU membership, for both its economic and political interests. Lastly, Israel was interested in the benefits of increased trade and financial co-operation and saw the opportunity to have a voice in the Euro-Mediterranean process in order to promote regional co-operation and security positively (Tovias A. 1998). For all the MPCs joining the EMP, the strategic potential of cultural exchanges and mutual understanding for the sake of regional stability was therefore considered, at best, as an irrelevant waste of resources. Moreover, Arab countries tended not to trust initiatives concerning cultural and religious exchanges, since they raised the spectre of neo-colonialism (Adler and Crawford 2006, 27) and, along with this, there was an attitude of cultural relativism against Europe and the West (Aliboni and Said 2000, 213). This clearly had the opposite effect to what ICD was meant

to achieve. After all, Europe was perceived by some MPCs to be responsible for a number of major economic and social ills, as well as for cultural intrusion and violent xenophobia against their migrant citizens (Biad 1997, 57).

There were other sensitive issues on the table at Barcelona, such as the promotion of democratic reforms and human rights. These reportedly caused friction during the EMP negotiations (Edis 1998, 96), although the EU managed to introduce them, without apparent limitations, into the Barcelona Declaration. The special treatment applied to ICD can thus also be explained by the still limited sense of urgency within the EU around the sensitive issues that ICD was meant to address. In fact, certain security threats, of the kind brought about by religious fundamentalism, could have given much corroboration to Samuel Huntington's theory of the 'Clash of Civilisations', thereby triggering the introduction of a more strategic conception of ICD as being of vital interest to the EU. That choice, however, was not made. This was likely because European politicians did not consider the situation in 1995 to be urgent enough to intervene directly in what Huntington claimed to be the root of the problem: the allegedly irreconcilable cultural differences between Western and Islamic civilisations (Huntington 1993). Southern European states were increasingly concerned with terrorist acts committed by religious fundamentalists from the Maghreb (Calabrese 1997, 90; Biad 1997, 57), however, the predominant European response was to reject Huntington's thesis on the basis that, at that moment, the Islamists in the Maghreb 'may have threatened certain Mediterranean regimes but did not constitute a direct threat to Europe' (Gillespie 1997, 68; see also Bicchi 2007, 143).

## **The Contribution of 'Euromed' Programmes to ICD Implementation**

The attribution of a broad scope to ICD in the Barcelona Declaration had important repercussions for the implementation of this instrument during the early years of the EMP. In particular, the absence of well-defined objectives led experts, officials and politicians from the whole region to enter into an open-ended debate concerning how, and in what fields, ICD might have been employed. The outcomes of this paradoxical situation were the development of a stalemate and of discontinuity. Implementation had a late start and the selection of areas of co-operation was, in large part, inconsistent with even the most general goal of ICD.

The difficulty of giving substance to the vagueness of this new tool was already plain to see in the 5-year action plan adopted at the Barcelona Conference. The document shows that Euro-Mediterranean ministers deliberately postponed any decision on how to implement ICD. While the political, security, and economic dimensions of the EMP were supported from the outset by precise objectives and



activities, the Barcelona action plan did not provide any specific indications for the cultural dimension. The action plan merely identified a broad list of fields with the potential for co-operation: cultural and creative heritage, cultural and artistic events, co-productions in the media, translation, and other means of cultural dissemination and training activities. The plan also considered a few target groups that should have been involved in co-operation activities, including civil society organisations, young people, and religious representatives and institutions. These references, however, were just broad directions since, as stated in the plan, concrete proposals for action should have come directly from officials and experts during *ad hoc* meetings (EMP 1995a). Consequently, the first programme set up to implement ICD, *Euromed Heritage*, was only launched in 1998, although it was discussed by officials and endorsed by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Culture as early as 1996 (EMP 1996).

In the following years, experts and officials also agreed to promote ICD through another two programmes, besides *Euromed Heritage*: *Euromed Audiovisual* and *Euromed Youth*. These three programmes were conceived of as offering financial grants funded by the European Commission and disbursed through calls for proposals that were open to civil society and cultural institutions across the whole Euro-Mediterranean area. The EU provided the necessary financial resources under the MEDA instrument (*MEsures D'Accompagnement*), established in 1996 to support all regional and bilateral efforts undertaken by MPCs 'to reform their economic and social structures and mitigate any social or environmental consequences which may result from economic development' (Council 1996).

*Euromed Heritage* was endorsed in 1996 by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Culture, meeting for the first time in Bologna to follow up on the Barcelona action plan and to discuss practical possibilities for the development of ICD. On that occasion, the Ministers recognised cultural heritage 'as a custodian of the collective memory, an instrument for a policy of peace, a guarantor of diversity and a generator of employment' (EMP 1996). The programme was only launched in 1998, and it was centrally managed by the Commission's DG Aid. Its first edition, *Euromed Heritage I* (1998-2002), focused on material heritage. It was specifically aimed at starting a process of identification and mapping of historical sites and cultural phenomena in partner countries, at sharing and exchanging conservation and preservation techniques, developing financial and marketing skills, as well as at fostering networking activities among museums, cultural institutions, teachers, and students in the area of heritage conservation. *Euromed Heritage I* received a total of EUR 17 million from the MEDA instrument and funded 16 projects. All of these involved partners from the whole Euro-Mediterranean space, except for a couple of projects that were devoted to very localised activities and concerned only a few coastal countries.

*Euromed Audiovisual* was proposed in 1997 at the intergovernmental conference on regional audiovisual co-operation, held in Thessaloniki. It was officially endorsed by the Ministers of Culture during their second meeting, held in Rhodes in 1998. *Euromed Audiovisual I* was eventually launched in 2000 (for the period 2000–2005). Its general goal was to contribute to mutual understanding between the peoples of Europe and the Mediterranean through emphasising their common values and the richness of the region's cultural diversity in the fields of radio, television and cinema (EMP Info Note 2000). The EU specifically, considered *Euromed Audiovisual* to be a platform from which to pursue an effective peace prospect on both shores of the Mediterranean (Council 2008b). The specific objectives of the first edition of this programme were to preserve and distribute documentaries and feature films concerning Mediterranean people's lives and cultures; by means of practical exchanges of knowledge about working methods and technology, workshops in script writing and co-productions between independent film production companies. The Commission committed EUR 18 million for the programme under the MEDA instrument. This money was employed to fund 6 macro projects for a period of 5 years, ranging from the production of animation and documentary series, to activities for the conservation and the development of the Euro-Mediterranean audiovisual industries.

The third ICD regional programme, *Euromed Youth*, was launched in 1999. Differently from the other two, the Commission originally conceived of *Euromed Youth* as being an extension of *Youth* (then *Youth in Action*, and currently part of *Erasmus+*), a successful programme involving young people, mainly within the European borders. This Mediterranean 'spin-off' of that programme was managed centrally by the European Commission, DG Education, and Culture and was based on three main actions: fostering youth exchanges, voluntary service, and support measures. The financial resources committed for its first edition (1999-2001) were EUR 9.7 million. The general goals established for *Euromed Youth I* were:

1. To improve mutual understanding among young people;
2. To contribute to integrating young people into social and professional life, and;
3. To democratise the civil society of Mediterranean partners 'by stimulating active citizenship within local communities, by promoting the active participation of young people, in particular young women and young people's associations, and by developing the employability of the young people involved' (European Commission 2004). The total number of projects funded in three years amounted to 211 and involved more than 3,157 young participants from the whole Mediterranean, mostly in the first action of the programme: youth exchanges (ECOTEC 2001).

The overview, above, of the three programmes provides sufficient data to advance a few analytical considerations with regard to the first EU efforts to implement ICD. The following analysis concentrates on the objectives of the programmes, their consistency with the goals of ICD, and the amount of resources allocated to all the funds committed by the Commission to Euro-Mediterranean co-operation.

As concerns the objectives, all of the programmes were developed under the conceptually broad and unspecified umbrella of ICD that had emerged from the Barcelona Conference. They were aimed primarily to the fostering of mutual understanding, either in a specifically cultural co-operation sector, or in a target group. Unsurprisingly, none of these programmes was launched in a field, such as the interreligious exchanges proposed in the Barcelona action plan, which could be specifically connected to one of the strategic interests of the EU. Given that there was little inclination in some of the MPCs to foster co-operation on cultural and religious issues and the parallel need for the EU to give more substance to this part of the third basket, experts, officials and politicians in the region were more likely to find agreement either in less sensible sectors, or in drawing on past experiences of co-operation. In this context, it should be noted that the model on which the first 'Euromed' programmes were conceived followed that used for the decentralised co-operation programmes within the RMP framework that have been promoted since 1992. Although beset by all manner of shortcomings, and having been suspended finally in 1996 (Committee of Independent Experts 1999), these programmes were generally appreciated by their beneficiaries for the economic and technical contribution that they brought to the social development of the MPCs involved. Some of them, such as the *MED Media* programme, were also evaluated positively for the intercultural contribution that they had promoted between participants (European Commission 1997). The experience of these decentralised co-operation programmes, therefore, was able to provide a safe platform for the first implementations of ICD. On the one hand, under the regional approach championed by the EMP, the launch of revised programmes for co-operation in similar professional sectors was expected to bring to the whole Euro-Mediterranean space the positive experiences of mutual understanding that were achieved by the bilateral MED-Programmes. On the other hand, these programmes were also supposed to ensure new resources for the development of the economic, cultural, and social sectors, as requested by the MPCs. In light of this, the *MED Media* programme (1992-1996), which aimed to support the transfer of experience and know-how, in terms of media management, norms, and working conditions, to the MPCs, served as a precursor and blueprint for *Euromed Audiovisual* and its promotion of ICD.

Albeit helpful in kick-starting the implementation of ICD, the choice of very technical fields of co-operation has also meant less adherence to the general goal of ICD. For instance, there is a notable difference between *Euromed Heritage* and *Euromed Audiovisual*, on the one hand, and *Euromed Youth*, on the other. The first two programmes showed a very marked propensity for implementing ICD through co-operation in their technical aspects. Accordingly, they helped to support the development of cultural production sectors in the MPCs while, at the same time, they tended to implement ICD 'as a confidence-building measure at the level of professionals and experts' (Reinhardt 2002, 8). These programmes were evaluated as a generally positive example of regional co-operation (ARS Progetti and GHK 2004). However, from an ICD perspective, they were also criticised for choosing a specialist professional sector as, in so doing, they contributed little to bringing 'the people' of the Mediterranean together and to improving mutual perceptions (Schumacher 2007, 6). It should be noted that all the projects funded under *Euromed Heritage* and *Euromed Audiovisual* were ultimately aimed at preserving and promoting the cultures and traditions of all the peoples of the Mediterranean area, while encouraging mutual knowledge. In any case, the record of these programmes, in terms of ICD, was largely considered 'patchy and élite-oriented' (Philippart 2003).

In contrast, the 1999 launch of *Euromed Youth* marked a notable shift in the implementation record of ICD. From a qualitative perspective, the targeting of young people from both shores of the Mediterranean, rather than from a particular professional sector, secured more opportunities for the programme to reach out to the general public and to 'permeate the social fabric' (RHLAG 2003, 26). From a quantitative perspective, *Euromed Youth I* funded many more (smaller) projects and involved a larger number of people with employment, at average times, of the same amount of resources devoted to other programmes. On the contrary, *Euromed Heritage* and *Euromed Audiovisual*, also due to the expensive technical equipment required to operate in those sectors, preferred a limited number of macro projects, which involved smaller groups of experts and institutions. The evaluation reports commissioned by European institutions for *Euromed Youth I* showed a constant increase in the number of projects funded in the first edition of the programme (26 in 1999, 77 in 2000 and 108 in 2001) and, equally, in the number of beneficiaries involved. Drawing on data from interviews and questionnaires with stakeholders and beneficiaries, the report demonstrated that the activities supported by the programme had contributed to promoting the active participation of young people and to opening them up to new cultures and ideas (ECOTEC 2001, 40–44). On these grounds, *Euromed Youth* has been widely considered as the only regional programme that, during its initial phase, managed to implement ICD and build a level of mutual understanding between the two shores of the Mediterranean, fostering confidence-building, empowering young people through their acquisition

of intercultural competencies, and mobilising thousands of young people from the EU and the MPCs (Pace 2005; Schumacher. 2007).

A brief analysis of the financial resources of these programmes can also give an idea, with some degree of approximation, of the absolute and relative amounts of money destined for ICD. The total funds committed by the Commission to the implementation of *Euromed Heritage I*, *Euromed Audiovisual I* and *Euromed Youth I* amounted to about EUR 42 million. This sum was equivalent to little more than 1% of the overall EUR 3.4 billion committed by the EU to supporting both bilateral and regional co-operation under the MEDA I instrument. However, although cultural co-operation projects were also envisaged on a bilateral track (EMP 1996; EMP 2003), ICD was primarily a region-wide instrument. From this perspective, the percentage calculation of ICD funds, compared with the total of MEDA resources devoted to regional cooperation, amounted to about 11%<sup>6</sup>. These rough data allow two considerations: first, although the EMP was presented as an innovation by European institutions, mostly on account of the inclusion of a regional dimension in co-operation, the amounts of money devoted to bilateral co-operation remained as the bulk of the EU budget, especially in regard to the promotion of national projects under the second basket. For instance, the bilateral economic development project for Egyptian industrial modernisation alone received a budget of EUR 250 million (European Commission 2002). Secondly, within the inherent limits of regional co-operation and thus of the actual design of the EMP, ICD was poorly funded in absolute terms, but not in relative terms, especially when compared to other, allegedly, more strategic dimensions of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. For instance, the *MEDA Democracy* programme, launched in 1996 to support grassroots democratic reforms and human rights in the framework of the first basket of the EMP, received only EUR 4.6 million for its first (and only) edition (EMHRN 2000).

This analysis of the three Euromed programmes, taken both separately and as a whole, shows that the employment of ICD during its initial phase was severely hampered by the vague language with which the EU and MPCs defined its scope in the EMP. However, although deprived of a specific strategic orientation, the slow, piecemeal and, at times, contradictory process of implementation, as promoted by the European Commission in particular, helped ICD to gradually gain a foothold among EMP partners. By the end of this kick-start phase, the outcome of this process was a progressive increase in the influence and reach of ICD which finally began, if still only to a limited extent, to contribute to the EU's strategic goals in the Mediterranean.

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6 Funding devoted to regional co-operation under MEDA I and II ranged from 10 to 12% in that period (EuropeAid Co-operation Office 2001).

## Conclusion

The analysis above has shown that, at the end of the Cold War, the EU conceived of ICD as a strategic resource with which to defuse some of the emerging social and political tensions that concern the Mediterranean area in the long term.

In light of the reluctance of some MPCs to acknowledge the relevance of the intercultural dimension to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the launch of ICD in the EMP, although rendered toothless, in particular by the omission of specific strategic objectives, was a foreseen move on the part of the EU. ICD was introduced to the Barcelona Process as a flexible instrument in the hands of European institutions to progressively compensate the limits of traditional political, diplomatic and economic tools in addressing the new strategic targets of the proliferation of Islamic terrorism and the social consequences of migration and other challenges.

In fact when, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 2001 terror attacks in the US, the challenges and tensions discussed in this paper were further heightened by the resulting global scenario, European institutions, and some EU Mediterranean member states, found a 'window of opportunity' to push sceptical partner countries in the southern European neighbourhood to start developing and implementing ICD according to its original rationale. Since then, the EU has begun a new, more intense and visible phase in the promotion of ICD, which also goes beyond its Mediterranean policy, which has gradually developed into the current approach that has been adopted vis-à-vis this instrument.<sup>7</sup>

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7 To know more about the theory and practice of ICD in EU policies on the Mediterranean after the 2000s, see, for instance, Schumacher and Pace 2007; Bekemans et al. 2007, 231-446; de Perini 2012).

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