

# **Berlin Brainstorming Meeting**

Europäische Akademie, Berlin, 15 July 2005

## **Summary**

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The project is to be seen in five distinctive modes ordered into a programme of five consecutive stages: 1. the vision; 2. the core idea; 3. “the feasibility study”; 4. the political process; 5. the result. The brainstorming meeting on 15 July 2005 sought to clarify issues related to the first three points. It focused on general concerns, such as the idea of a ‘Community’ and which countries should be covered by it, as well as on the three main subjects of ‘water’, ‘energy’, and ‘environment’. Underlying this discussion were two elementary questions: (a) Can the idea and the proposed approach lead to real integration? (b) Can the project realistically offer any advantages for the countries in the region?

The project was defined as a functional, policy-oriented project that aims at developing practical suggestions to put forward to political decision-makers. There are attractions as well as resistances to the ‘Community’ idea in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. A careful choice of terminology is needed. Various terms were offered as alternatives to ‘Community’ which was feared to provoke resentment. Conceptually, the project is based on a top-down approach. However, for the acceptance of the project within the respective countries, the role of local civil society groups is important.

The geographical scope of the project should not be limited nor fractured from the outset. While principally concentrating on the Mediterranean, the choice of the final target region also depends on which of the three elements - energy, water or environment – will be given priority in the process. A specific focus on oil, for instance, would ask for a wider regional approach. It might on the other hand be necessary for pragmatic reasons to start the project with a small group of countries. The idea of an ‘inner circle’ and an ‘outer circle’ of countries, which could then be approached with different priorities, was suggested. This should however not be in conflict with the conceptual approach that considers the region as a unit.

The focus on all three subjects (energy, water and environment) taken together was felt by some to be too wide-ranging for a successful project. However, as others noted, leaving out one or the other of the three areas of water, energy and environment might lead to problems on a conceptual level. One of the major attractions of the project is precisely the fact that it approaches the issue of regional cooperation on such a big scale.

In regard to the issue of ‘environment’ it was pointed out that the subject was high on the agenda in European discourse but that it plays only a marginal role in other regions. On the other hand countries seeking investments and close trade ties with European countries and the EU have already had to build in ecological considerations into their policies for at least a decade.

The concept of sustainability brings advantages to the project in that it leads to a reconceptualisation of 'water' and 'energy'; however, it was also pointed out that a clear definition for the given context would be needed. A further discussion of the issue is planned for a meeting in autumn.

Whereas environment and energy, especially oil, are issues that clearly cover the region as a whole, water differs in that it is more locally defined, depending on shared river basins and water-sheds. A more sub-regional or water-shed approach considering smaller clusters of countries is needed. It is questionable how far the project can and should focus on ideological, ethical and social dimensions of water and ensuing conflicts. Having in mind the purpose of the project, it is advisable to take it out of an 'emotional' context and place it in a market perspective. Consequently, to focus on the development of an alternative water market concept provides a necessary opening to the theme of integration and cooperation.

As for 'energy', the discussion mainly focused on 'renewable energies', and specifically on solar energy. In combination with issues of development (including support for R&D in the region), environment protection and water desalination, solar energy could have a prominent place in the project. It remains to be seen if that would amount to a leading "trigger" role in the energy, water and environment (EWE) cluster. Electricity and electrical grids as a component for regional integration are also a matter of interest for the project. Oil and gas belong to an altogether different category of assets (or deficiencies), at the same time more national and global, and therefore will not be focused on specifically.

The Institute of International Relations Prague (IIR) will take lead in the research of the institutional/governance dimension of the project. The aim is to evaluate the prospects of integration in MENA and provide concrete recommendations regarding future integration strategies in the region. This will be done firstly by focusing on the successful integration projects in Europe and elsewhere, by identifying the factors that make a successful integration possible and by assessing the relative importance of those factors. Secondly, previous or existing integration attempts in the Middle East will be reviewed. The question to be considered is if the pro-integration factors identified elsewhere exist in MENA and whether they could play a similar role.

Organisationally and in regard to cooperation with other relevant projects and initiatives, such as the Barcelona process, the project should stay independent. However, informal linkages and synergies will be sought.

A small round-table debate of experts to explore the water market concept is planned at the Forum 2000 meeting in Prague in autumn 2005. The next meeting of the project group is scheduled for October 2005 in Prague.