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JANUARY
2020

BARCELONA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN, A SECOND CHANCE

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November 2020 will mark the 25th anniversary of one of the most important milestones in cooperation between the countries on the two shores of the Mediterranean, the so-called Barcelona Process.

What opportunities, obstacles and goals are to be considered in the coming months to try to revive some of that initial spirit? How can the city of Barcelona contribute to the necessary revitalization, redirection or even reinvention of Euro-Mediterranean relations?

This document articulates five action areas with the hope of enabling new collaboration and facilitating the generation of new ideas: inclusion, diversity and plurality; sustainability and social justice; solidarity, reconstruction and reconciliation; innovation and knowledge; and creativity and artistic expression.

Resources are limited and must be used wisely. If, rather than cooperating, local, regional and state governments see the Mediterranean as a battlefield on which to establish their own profiles at the expense of others, the success of any initiatives each has undertaken will be seriously hampered.

After decades of failure, any progress will be a victory.

Barcelona has tied its name to the Mediterranean. This is true in many fields, international relations among them. In geopolitical terms, Barcelona's geographical location may be an opportunity or a risk. If the dynamics of cooperation and development prevail in the Mediterranean, it sits at the centre of a space of progress. However, in a Mediterranean riven by conflict and inequality, Barcelona finds it has an uncomfortable front-line position. But the city is Mediterranean not only in its geography, but also its people. Barcelona presents itself as a proudly diverse city and its Mediterranean-ness is a fundamental part of constructing that identity, being synonymous with mixing, exchange and hybridisation. Barcelona is also militantly Mediterranean. It is a rare Mediterranean initiative that does not involve the city, its institutions and its social and intellectual fabric. *Barcelonins* are not and have not been indifferent to the situations in other parts of the basin, from solidarity towards the Balkans in the 1990s to the current humanitarian crisis related to immigration and refugees. It is to be expected, then, that this spirit will continue to shape Barcelona's international projection.

Why now?

November 2020 will mark the 25th anniversary of one of the most important milestones in cooperation between the countries on the two shores of the Mediterranean. Back then, representatives of these countries met in Barcelona and agreed a declaration and a work programme. This may seem like a relatively normal thing – there is no shortage of international meetings. What made 1995 exceptional was the presence around the table of Israelis and Palestinians, Turks and Cypriots, and Moroccans and Algerians. What they agreed then may seem grandiose and perhaps far removed from today's reality, with talk of making the Mediter-

anean a space of peace, shared prosperity and cultural and human exchange. But, however the results are evaluated, what stands out is that a dynamic of collaboration, enthusiasm and ambition was generated that is now sorely lacking. This is why many referred to the “spirit of Barcelona”. This spirit also alludes to the cooperation between local, regional and state governments, a strategy that also bore fruits when preparing for the 1992 Olympic Games. These governments knew how to seek out alliances with European institutions and between civil societies on both shores. Can this spirit be revived? If so, will Barcelona again play a leading role? And, more importantly, what challenges would have to be faced twenty-five years on?

This document seeks to contribute to a debate the city has joined somewhat late, perhaps distracted by political debates and controversies closer to home, and perhaps also tired after years of unsuccessful attempts to revitalise Euro-Mediterranean relations. But it’s never too late. There is more to this than the 25th anniversary of an international meeting. It concerns the need to defend multilateralism and cooperation at a time when more powerful actors, starting with the president of the United States, are committed to unilateralism, threats and confrontation. It is about climate emergen-

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cies, with the Mediterranean one of the planet’s most vulnerable corners due to the risk of desertification, extreme weather events and rising sea levels. This is also the Mediterranean of those who drown in it, often fleeing situations of conflict and even slavery. A Mediterranean of inequalities. Inequalities between northern and southern countries are often spoken about, but social, territorial, gender and generational inequalities must not be forgotten. The 2011 protests across the Arab world are not so long ago, and the Algerians, Sudanese, Lebanese and Iraqis may well remember 2019 in similar terms. New conflicts have also stacked up in the Mediterranean, with Syria the most extreme case, and with none of the old ones being resolved. More conflicts means new victims.

The region faces so many challenges that it is easy to be overwhelmed. The main risk is of inaction, prioritising other areas where returns are expected to be faster or more certain. But Barcelona’s Mediterranean reflex

exists. It is inevitable – and desirable – that as November 2020 approaches, policymakers and the city’s social fabric will feel that something needs to be done. But what, and through which alliances? Before addressing where we can move forward, let us briefly revisit where we are coming from.

The precedents

Since we are talking about regaining and updating the spirit of 1995, we must understand what made the impossible possible 25 years ago. No single explanatory factor exists, so it may be useful to explore different analytical levels. Key contextual factors at global level were the post-Cold War climate, the confidence in multilateral instruments, and peace dividends. There was also a desire expressed by intellectuals and politicians not to replace the walls that had fallen with a new iron curtain in the Mediterranean. On the southern side of the basin, the most significant event was the opportunity for peace in Palestine that followed the signing of the Oslo Agreement. It was a window that began to close with the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin just days before the Barcelona conference. In the European Union, there was a growing willingness to

act in the international arena and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was being constructed. This was also the period when the EU began to think seriously about enlargement to the east, leading the southern Europe countries to begin to mobilise to avoid being displaced. Hence their insistence that European Mediterranean policy should be awarded more resources and ambition. Spain, which occupied the EU’s rotating presidency during the second half of 1995, was

one of the most active states. Barcelona and Catalonia sought international prominence, and the Mediterranean was the natural space in which to project it. Added to this, a series of individual leaders were in place who pushed jointly, from different levels of government or from outside the institutions, to make this project a reality, to complement it or even to provide a counterbalance to it. Such was the case, for example, of the first Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum and the Alternative Mediterranean Conference. Everything added up.

The hopes of 1995 soon began to fade: in 1996 Israel bombed Beirut once more, and the 1997 ministerial conference in Malta was a failure. But the Euro-Mediterranean project had gained a life of its own, in part thanks to the institutional inertia of the European Commission but also driven by the enthusiasm of those who had invested so much in it and who did not give up on it. Many of these people made regular calls to reinvigorate Euro-Mediterranean relations. Their attempts left

a bitter aftertaste and even created some fatigue. Let's briefly review them.

In 2005, a decade on, Spain and the then holder of the EU presidency sought to convene a first summit of heads of state and government in Barcelona. This was a level higher than 1995, when the figures around the table had been foreign ministers. Calling on the countries in the format of a summit invested it with greater political ambition, but turnout was low (Mahmoud Abbas was the only representative of an Arab country at the level of head of state or government) and although a new action plan was agreed, the spirit of 1995 had vanished.

Then it was the turn of France and Nicolas Sarkozy, and the initial idea of creating a Mediterranean Union between coastal countries, as first proposed in a speech in Toulon in 2007. This was intended to be a new organisation, separate from the European Union, which would focus on specific projects such as water or energy. But, behind the scenes, the French president's ambition was also to cement his own profile, and in doing so he did not hesitate to resort to populist tropes, saying that if previous Mediterranean initiatives had failed, it was the fault of Brussels bureaucrats. Naturally, an initiative proposed in these terms was poorly received at the Commission and in the countries excluded, starting with Germany. Following months of manifold pressures a balance was reached: Sarkozy could hold a grand summit in Paris in July 2008, but all EU members would be invited and what began there would be no more than the continuation of the Barcelona Process. The Mediterranean Union became the Union for the Mediterranean. A few months later, when ministers met in Marseilles to get things underway, among other things, it was agreed that the secretariat of this new initiative would be based in the city of Barcelona, further reaffirming the continuity with the previous stage.

Two years later, in 2010, Spain once again held the EU's rotating presidency, and sought to dispel any doubts and regain centrality. The Spanish government set itself the goal of bringing the European and Mediterranean leaders back to Barcelona. It failed. The outbreak of the economic crisis in Europe did little to increase ambition, but it was the climate created by the Israeli operation in Gaza a year earlier that proved fatal for Spanish efforts. Arab delegations warned in private conversations that nothing could convince them to go to Barcelona and have their picture taken with Netanyahu. Perhaps they were also beginning to feel the discomfort in their streets, which were to explode a few months later in the 2011 Arab uprisings.

The past decade has been marked by overlapping crises that have led European and Mediterranean leaders to focus on internal problems and left too little time to devote to Euro-Mediterranean relations. Just as many critical situations have arisen in the south – various waves of protest, regional conflicts, counter-revolutionary reactions – as in the north – the Greek bailout, Brexit, the rise of populism and the so-called migrant crisis. Indeed, after years of underestimating the importance of what was happening on the other side of the Mediterranean, in 2015 European leaders finally began to react. The arrival of over a million refugees, on the one hand, and terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and other cities, on the other, rang alarms. But the security-focus of the response made it easy for authoritarian regimes to take advantage. In such a tricky context and with meagre financial resources, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean struggled to keep the co-operation alive, but has lacked the authority and the resources to alter pre-existing dynamics. To be sure, projects have been promoted and meetings of all kinds have been held, but the main recipients are a number of actors who are already convinced of the value of such cooperation. Other initiatives have arisen from other sectors, as well as the local actors who have made ARLEM (Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assem-

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bly) and the Medcities network the main platforms for mutual co-operation and articulating proposals on the general cooperation framework.

The most recent revitalisation attempt was made by Emmanuel Macron in June 2019. Despite later lowering expectations, it was Macron who called the Summit of the Two Shores in Marseille. Again, the idea was for civil society and governments to work together to generate new projects. The novelty was the reduced geographical area formed of the southern European countries and those of the Maghreb, which came to be known as the 5+5. In spite of Macron's personal involvement, the results of this initiative were also poor. A summit was mooted but in the end the meeting was convened at ministerial level and some countries sent second-tier representatives. The projects promoted also failed to offer much change from what the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean was already doing.

Any actor interested in (re)promoting Euro-Mediterranean cooperation can draw five lessons from these precedents:

- Broad partnerships between levels of government in different countries do not guarantee success on their own, but without them it is very difficult for initiatives to thrive. The exclusion of key players can be an insurmountable obstacle.
- Adverse regional contexts can hinder the success or even the launch of a new initiative. But while this is an element to consider, it should be remembered that situations can change at any time (in one direction or another). Complicated regional settings must not therefore be the decisive element in deciding whether

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to push a particular initiative or not, especially when working with extended time scales.

- Any actor seeking to promote such an initiative must guarantee they can secure involvement at the highest level. Without political impetus and leadership, other actors will be reluctant to respond.
- The obsession with holding high-level meetings and the obligatory photograph sessions increase the risk of failure. Expectations can be quickly frustrated if the focus is reduced to a single day, increasing the risk of failure and fatigue.
- Civil society has been involved since the Barcelona Process was launched, but it does not want to be merely window dressing. It is safe to count on the people and institutions that have remained active in this area and are involved in all kinds of Euro-Mediterranean initiatives. The challenge is to go beyond the comfort of the *usual suspects* and involve more diverse actors.

2020: the opportunities

The calendar. As November 2020 approaches, the pressure for the city of Barcelona to do something at Mediterranean level will increase. It would be strange if the year commemorating the launch of the Barcelona Process did not prompt reflections on the need to revitalise, redirect or reinvent Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The place. Barcelona plays host to the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, as well as other Mediterranean networks and institutions that have asked for this impetus in 2020. It has accumulated capital as a city, in general terms, but also as an actor that is committed to the Mediterranean. Impetus from Barcelona will be seen as natural and is expect-

ed. Barcelona excels in areas that are not necessarily associated with the Mediterranean agenda: smart cities, the Mobile World Congress, sports, biomedicine and the great intellectual debates on diversity and cosmopolitanism, among others. Perhaps 2020 will be the moment to “Mediterraneanise” these areas of excellence.

The agenda. Many factors invite us to think in Mediterranean terms and to do so urgently. The clearest cases are the refugee situation, the management of migratory flows, environmental degradation and climate change. In these spaces, activism, both inside and outside the city, is particularly dynamic. Globally, the 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals) offers a multilateral conceptual framework that is easily applicable to the Mediterranean.

Global transformations in areas such as connectivity, digitalisation and decarbonisation must also be considered, all of which are particularly relevant in the Mediterranean area. Then there is the new wave of protests in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Iraq, which have once again reminded us that hopes of change remain alive in many societies in the Arab world. In some ways, the protests in these countries are a reminder that doing nothing and trusting authoritarian systems to control the situation is not a sustainable option in the long run.

The consensuses: At a time when politics in Spain, Catalonia and Barcelona is marked by division, the Mediterranean agenda can be one of the few areas of consensus and even act as a measure of confidence for rebuilding institutional bridges. Precedents may also be invoked that show that the ability to work together is the guarantee of success.

Room for manoeuvre. National governments are often receptive to initiatives they would be unable to lead themselves because of their potential to raise suspicion in other states. In such circumstances, and where there is a climate of dialogue and inter-institutional cooperation, a division of labour may be conceived. This may allow more daring initiatives to be promoted locally and in collaboration with civil society.

The Brussels factor: Ursula Von der Leyen’s more “geopolitical commission” will be fully activated in 2020. Josep Borrell’s appointment as high representative suggests, a priori, that there is likely to be interest in the Mediterranean. Discussion of new financial prospects, the launch of what is called the new single instrument, which should enable the foreign policy budget to be run more nimbly, and the desire to pursue a more ambitious policy towards Africa will condition any initiative in the Mediterranean field and should, in principle, provide momentum.

Expectations. After decades of failure, any progress will be a victory. Even if fruitless initiatives are proposed, responsibility for failure is less likely to fall on those who attempt to revitalise the Euro-Mediterranean framework, than on the adverse context.

2020: the obstacles

Fatigue. The poor results of past attempts to revitalise Euro-Mediterranean relations has a dangerous effect on convincing senior political and social decision-makers that this should be a priority. Efforts and resources devoted to one issue are diverted from other areas. Those most attentive to Mediterranean affairs even wonder whether Barcelona (or any other actor seeking to lead this process) can succeed where even Macron failed.

Inertia. For precisely the reason that 25 years have passed since the Barcelona Process began, inertia is powerful in both frameworks of thought and action strategies. The same speeches and metaphors are repeated. Similar initiatives are rehashed with new glosses put on them or incorporating a new voice or other. We have reached a point when capitalising on the legacy of the past means we need to recover our creativity and strive to imagine new proposals and new forms of cooperation.

Smugness. Barcelona has abused the idea that it is the capital of the Mediterranean. Believing that you are a capital is not enough to make it so – others must recognise it too. No doubt Barcelona is a reference point, but more than thinking in terms of capitals, which leads to a hierarchical mindset, we should think in terms of a network. And Barcelona has the potential to be one of the strongest and most integral hubs in the web of actors who can and want to drive the Mediterranean agenda forward. To do this, connectivity will be key and it must be asked whether enough has been done to connect the entire institutional, social, economic and cultural fabric of the city with counterparts in other Mediterranean cities. And if not enough has been done, it is time that was fixed.

Echo chambers. Inside and outside the city, a community of people and institutions exists that is convinced that co-operation is needed on a Euro-Mediterranean basis. They are not only convinced, the idea is what gives their work meaning. This means that some sectors will naturally mobilise around any attempt to give new impetus to the Mediterranean agenda, but it also means that a risk is run of being trapped in an echo chamber in which the same discourses resound crisply but struggle to reach

other sectors. Taking Mediterranean discourse and thinking to new sectors is a major challenge.

Division. The Mediterranean used to be presented as an opportunity for building consensus and bridges in a politically fragmented scenario, but it is those divisions that may hinder progress of any initiative of that type. If, rather than cooperating, local, regional and state governments see the Mediterranean as a battlefield on which to establish their own profiles at the expense of others, the success of any initiatives each has undertaken will be seriously hampered.

Discussion of new financial prospects, the launch of what is called the new single instrument, which should enable the foreign policy budget to be run more nimbly, and the desire to pursue a more ambitious policy towards Africa will condition any initiative in the Mediterranean field and should, in principle, provide momentum.

The alternatives. In Barcelona, the notion that the Mediterranean is the optimum – or even natural – parameter for developing a cooperation agenda for the South is rarely questioned. But in other spaces they think in Euro-Arab, Euro-African or Euro-Maghreb terms, or even in terms of a geopolitical region such as the Middle East and North Africa. If the goal is to promote a Mediterranean agenda, this plurality of views must be taken into consideration and synergies must be sought with those promoting them.

Resources. The obstacle in this field is obvious enough: resources are limited and must be used wisely. Attempts are often made to solve this by rechanneling resources allocated for other purposes or by expecting the social and economic fabric to invest. Such paths need to be explored but no actor seeking to push this agenda will be credible if they fail to mobilise extra resources for handling unforeseen circumstances.

Asymmetry. If Barcelona wants to promote a Mediterranean agenda, its natural partners are other local governments. However, the level of decentralisation of the countries on the southern shore is very uneven and their mayors' margin of political autonomy is very small. Without giving up on the idea that the Mediterranean agenda needs a municipalist boost, the reality means a wider network of allies must be sought.

The surprises. As we have seen, a change of context at Mediterranean, European or local levels can upset plans and best intentions. But since surprises are by nature unpredictable, it is necessary to be aware of the kinds of difficulties that may arise and do preparatory

work on contingency planning. An initiative that is not limited to a single major event but extends over time is less vulnerable to these external factors.

The possible agenda and the necessary alliances

Analysing the precedents and drawing the necessary lessons is the first thing any actor must do, but this is especially true for Barcelona if it seeks to make a commitment to the Mediterranean in 2020. Retrospective reflection should help establish the goals of this com-

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mitment and thereby channel efforts and resources in one direction or another. A renewed work agenda should result. For that, alliances must be drawn up, both inside and outside the city.

No matter how much effort and goodwill Barcelona applies, the situation in the Mediterranean will not radically change. The power and legitimacy are lacking to alter power relations, resolve entrenched conflicts and prevent the suffering of many anonymous citizens hundreds or thousands of kilometres away. Does this mean it would be better to do nothing? Not at all. But **achievable goals** must be set. This *nota* proposes two in particular:

(1) Rediscover and revive the city's Mediterranean reflexes and impulses. Too often Mediterranean-ness is invoked merely rhetorically, while economic, cultural and social actors turn their backs on their closest neighbours. If, thanks to local impetus, curiosity is piqued, knowledge is broadened, new doors are opened and new relationships are created, and if actors beyond what we call the *usual suspects* begin to think about the Mediterranean along with their other mental frameworks (global, obviously, but also European and in terms of opening up to Latin America), a seed will be planted that will continue to bear fruit beyond 2020.

(2) Incubate transformative ideas and projects. Following in the footsteps of the successful Biennial de Pensament, 2020 must be used to make Barcelona a meeting point for diverse, representative and perhaps discordant voices. And that includes government representatives, economic actors, activists and cultural institutions. Despite their differences, these voices are likely to agree that a mindset of dialogue and cooperation is the right one for meeting the challenges this region faces, and they should be asked to bring proposals to the table for overcoming

the current blockages. To do this, barriers must be broken down and the usual cycles that often leave us enslaved to past hopes and endeavours must be left behind. Those who do not think about the Mediterranean must be encouraged to do so and to propose ideas that are groundbreaking and potentially transformative.

One of the clearest examples of how the mental frameworks inherited from the Barcelona Process can condition creativity and the generation of new ideas is the idea of the three baskets. This concept is obscure for those who have never worked in the Euro-Mediterranean area but natural for those who have. The three baskets represent three broad working areas – political and security, economic and financial, and cultural and human on which a broad partnership can be built.

The three baskets translate into the three objectives from 1995: a space of peace, shared prosperity and social and cultural exchange. It is often said that all three baskets and three goals remain valid. This is true. The question that needs to be asked is whether they are sufficient, whether other issues need to be included in the agenda, and whether their formulation should be more closely aligned with the concerns of citizens on both shores of the Mediterranean. As with the objectives above, what follows is a new conceptualisation articulated in five action areas with the hope of enabling new collaboration and facilitating the generation of new ideas. The order is not hierarchical and although they may recall the three baskets (it is no coincidence that the author of this piece was also trained in 1995 thinking) many of them straddle two or more baskets. Each of these five action areas comprises several challenges:

- **Inclusion, diversity and plurality.** In recent years, in both the north and south of the Mediterranean, processes have occurred of polarisation or social fragmentation. While some spaces have taken significant strides in recognising and valuing the diversity of ideas, beliefs, origins, appearance and sexual orientation, in many others, the conditions for minorities and those considered a threat by those in power have remained harsh or even deteriorated. The rise of xenophobic nationalism, populism and sectarianism has made these processes even more transnational. Evoking a shared Mediterranean that is synonymous with mixing and coexistence brings this issue to the table and invites us to find ways to strengthen processes of openness and inclusion where they arise and to break spirals of confrontation and exclusion in other places.
- **Sustainability and social justice.** These two areas mobilise large numbers of citizens. The Arab Spring, protests against austerity policies in southern Europe and recent mobilisations to stop global warming are

the clearest examples. It is curious that the EU, defined as a model of social protection and a leader on climate issues, has not placed these two issues at the heart of its Mediterranean agenda. What is more, new movements and new voices are emerging in these fields and the challenges are shared by both sides of the Mediterranean (albeit varying in magnitude). These are also issues that need to be considered in an urban context, as cities are spaces where inequalities become even more visible and where environmental degradation directly affects citizens' living conditions (pollution, adaptation to extreme weather events, etc.). However, we must remember that inequalities take many forms: social, territorial, generational and gender-based. Social justice must incorporate these other dimensions. At multilateral level the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a guide. Although they cut across all five working areas this paper proposes, it is here that the relevance of the SDGs is clearest. One advantage of the SDGs is that it is easier for individual states to work on sensitive issues if they are addressed under this umbrella, precisely because all the countries in the Euro-Mediterranean area have previously endorsed this agenda.

- **Solidarity, reconstruction and reconciliation.** One of the novelties on the Mediterranean agenda is the proliferation of conflicts over the past decade and their enormous material and human cost. The Euro-Mediterranean space has too many constraints to be the area in which attempts are made to find solutions to these conflicts. But it may provide a framework for accompaniment or for generating new dynamics. It is also a place to reiterate the desire for dialogue and an alternative to unilateralism and conflict. In this regard, the initiatives launched in 2020 should include the strengthening of solidarity networks and should complement the current international discussion on how to physically rebuild conflict-ridden spaces by promoting reconciliation processes.
- **Innovation and knowledge.** As Mediterranean countries and societies devote their energy to imminent emergencies, they risk the major processes of global transformation passing them by. That is why innovation and knowledge policies must be strengthened. Here it may be useful to start by inviting Barcelona's institutions that are leaders in their fields to include the Mediterranean as a space for building alliances and for testing innovative initiatives. Some of the issues that need to be emphasised are connectivity, digitalisation and the energy transition. Such institutions will certainly be much better placed to identify which topics are most relevant or have the most potential.

- **Creativity and artistic expression.** These two concepts are often associated with the Mediterranean, partly because it is also synonymous with mixing and exchange. However, great mutual ignorance about artistic creation persists, particularly from north to south. Culture and art are vehicles for common longings and frustrations. This is a space with great potential, which has too often been kept at a secondary level in Euro-Mediterranean relations. It is in these areas where it is easiest to reach beyond expert communities and involve the entire citizenry. This is also where taboos begin to break down and new mental

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frameworks are born. Hence, efforts should not be restricted to misnamed "high culture" and more transgressive voices should be given space.

To bring this work programme to fruition, to which other priorities could and should be added, efforts must be made jointly. As mentioned before, building **alliances** is a necessary although not sufficient condition for tackling a project of this nature with certain guarantees. Alliances must be forged between different levels of government and must incorporate, from a very early stage, the most dynamic players in the economic, social and cultural fabric of the city. The decisions that can be made from Barcelona must serve as a driver or an umbrella, but success will depend on the appropriation of this agenda by a large group of actors. And when seeking alliances beyond the city, Barcelona must be humble. If it continually insists that it is or wants to be *the* capital of the Mediterranean, this will not help to build alliances with other cities that also claim this role. That is why, in Mediterranean terms, and in many others, Barcelona may be better off thinking of itself as a joint that articulates and connects efforts to progress towards shared goals.

