

EU scales down French plan for a Mediterranean Union

The European Commission is Tuesday due to unveil its proposals for a Union of the Mediterranean, scaling it down from a grandiose French plan for regional peace to a project-focused neighbourhood policy.

According to the European Union executive, the compromise approved by EU governments in March will inject new momentum into the bloc's little-known 13-year-old southern neighbourhood policy - known as the 'Barcelona Process'.

It will also give Mediterranean countries a greater say in how it is to run with the creation of a co-presidency and a joint secretariat.

The project will be open to all 27 EU member states, not just to those with borders on the Mediterranean Sea, and will hold top-level discussions every two years.

While no new EU funding will be made available, the Mediterranean Union will try to attract private-sector investors to help pay for its regional projects.

Due to be formally launched in Paris July 13, the union is intended to group such diverse countries such as Turkey and Spain, Slovenia and Libya, Israel and Syria.

One potential stumbling block is that all major decisions, including where to locate its headquarters, will have to be reached unanimously.

The original proposal put forward by French President Nicolas Sarkozy envisaged its members cooperating closely on such diverse issues as security, migration, the environment, energy, development, trade, and the fight against crime and terrorism.

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