



Civil Society's Expectations

We are currently facing a state of “interregnum”, in which the old is already dead or dying, but the new has not yet been born

Antonio Gramsci

Remembering the twenty years since the 1st Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, held in Barcelona in late 1995, is undoubtedly an exercise in reflection more than a motive for disappointment or dejection. Rethinking the process, recognising the failings but also the seeds of change that have been sown, is very necessary to jointly confront the 21st century in a real Partnership, and not with a “prêt-à-porter” Master Plan.

The Barcelona Process or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership mainly aimed to achieve a certain convergence in the Euromed area, despite the differences, through financial and political means. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the Conference Declaration was that, for the first time, civil society was seen as a key factor for the development and democratisation of the southern countries. Although the political results have not been the best and the future is uncertain, it is difficult to deny the strength of this Partnership to promote changes, even of mentalities.

The Mediterranean region has become the epicentre of a global crisis and a laboratory of new forms of social and political mobilisation. Few studies have attempted to link the discontent in the Arab world with the events in the north of the Mediterranean. In the West, the miraculous decades made citizens into passive consumers, and European leaders minimised the magnitude of the crisis, fleeing from any unpopular measure when it would have been less painful, thereby worsening the intensity of the recession. The dormant civil society in the northern Mediterranean has had to wake up and make its voice heard: the platforms of citizens and groups are once again acting in the neighbourhoods and have expanded with the social media. Similar events were seen in Turkey in June 2013 in Taksim Square: the slogans and demands of the citizens, mostly youths, did not fit with the traditional patterns of Turkish politics. Their messages were not against conservatism or Islam, but rather questioned the neoliberal urban project and the government's paternalistic and authoritarian conception. As Zygmunt Bauman points out in her article about today's Europe included in this issue: “There seems to be a vacuum between power and politics, which in the end leads to a lack of leadership, and citizens lose faith in the state's ability to take decisions and deliver promises. Problems are increasingly becoming global while the instruments of political action are still constrained to



the nation-state. How then can we deal with a set of problems whose origin is far beyond the borders of the European Union?"

In another context, most political analysts, when talking about the Arab revolutions, have emphasised aspects of the political repression and have minimised the changes linked to economic restructuring. Perhaps the Arab uprisings have not had intellectual founding fathers, such as Stéphane Hessel, but neither have they only been the result of socioeconomic aspects related to unemployed youths. Moreover, and here we are speaking of democracy, the powers that control democratic knowledge in their respective countries are being questioned. The social media has played a crucial role in the emergence, organisation and dissemination of the Arab Spring. As Khaled Hroub explains, the launch of Al-Jazeera in English in 2006 meant not only the internal coverage of the region but also a challenge to the control of the western media. However, the expansion of media coverage did not itself bring opportunities for change, given that the political scene was still frozen and limited to the elites. From spring 2011, the activist and broadcast media complemented each other, allowing coverage in areas it would have been unfeasible to reach without losing the capacity of the established media. The social media has managed to optimise the capacity for mobilisation, challenge state control and security technologies, and incorporate new journalists and unprecedented contents.

However, the context that led to the Barcelona Process has changed as the revolutions in the Arab countries since 2011 are altering the power dynamic in the Arab world. They are also creating a wave of violence that is hard to solve, as in the case of Syria and Libya, and a new refugee problem throughout the Mediterranean. Terrorism used in the name of religion when it is a struggle of tactical powers is becoming, together with other variables, a global problem. It is here that the reflection and new visions become urgent. The Partnership should not only be linked to security, but also to new forms of education and a global vision and, at the same time, specific and local participation. In this respect, civil society is a decisive actor of the changes in the region and the human dimension is emerging as a central part of the possible responses to the challenges posed. Hence it is once again necessary to understand the degree of citizen ownership of each project. Therefore, rather than celebrating the 20th anniversary, we have dedicated a large number of articles to a reflection on the importance of civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

In the early 2000s, the IEMed published the study *La sociedad civil en Marruecos, la emergencia de los nuevos actores* ("Civil Society in Morocco, the Emergence of the New Actors", Icaria, 2002) to contribute to the debate on civil society in the Mediterranean area. The introduction argued: "[This debate] is not only of interest to southern countries but also European ones, at a time when globalisation is challenging local economies and cultures. The emergence of new platforms committed to sustainable development, the environment and human rights outside the conventional parties, as well as the voices now being heard in favour of world ethics, involve the need to take a more complex view of civil movements appearing in the southern Mediterranean.

Associations with management capacity obliging governments to commit to projects presented and managed locally.”

Perhaps, as Cengiz Günay and Mohamed Kerrou suggest, there is a classic western conception of civil society that has also dominated the idea of what civil society should be in the Middle East. This conception has clearly defined the European Union policies for the southern Mediterranean countries that began with the 1995 Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The experiences and events of the last twenty years in the region have shown the need to move away from Eurocentric normative approaches and be open to Muslim associations, non-institutionalised movements, individual networks and agents of different strata and cosmovisions. Perhaps if we had had a more complex vision we would have avoided greater surprises, not only of the springs but also the reason for the Jihadist movement.

A new earthquake is once again challenging the European Union, whose humanism, a fundamental value, is being seriously questioned. Not only over the economic crisis, but also the terrible situations unleashed by the wars in Sub-Saharan Africa, Libya and the Middle East, with the millions of displaced people they bring and the exiled people who risk their life. Javier de Lucas analyses this gloomy panorama in our dossier: currently, the waters of the Mediterranean are the most dangerous in the world in number of dead and missing among those who embark in the south in an attempt to reach European shores. Added to this serious problem is the position of the governments of the European Mediterranean countries in terms of migration and asylum policies, characterised by an obsession with absolute control of their borders, so they can only be crossed by immigrants expressly desired and who comply with all the legal requisites to do so.

If we speak of civil society, perhaps it is the southern women's associations, despite the ruling patriarchy, that in the last ten years have managed to improve their rights. This is clear in the diverse countries of the Maghreb, for example Tunisia, where women ensured that a Constitution that sought to reduce their rights was not approved. As distance runners, they know that the race is long and the effort enormous. Because the 1995 Barcelona Declaration made human rights in general the cornerstone of the Partnership but hardly mentioned the rights of women, apart from underlining the fundamental role they have played in the development of and the need to promote their active participation in economic and social life. However, achieving the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is inconceivable without the full participation of women. The lack of egalitarian legislation and retrograde mentalities are a real obstacle to the full exercise of citizenship by women.

Therefore, we present two qualitative reports by the Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (FFEM, in French), an organisation created with the objective of promoting the struggle of the actors involved in gender equality through the sharing of already existing resources and fostering new actions and knowledge. The FFEM has prepared a first report monitoring the commitments to equality between men and women acquired by governments of the Union for the Mediterranean in the 3rd Ministerial Conference on



the role of women in society, held in 2013 in Paris. The reports are structured along three main lines: participation of women in economic, professional and social life; participation in political life; and, lastly, gender-based violence. We have chosen two reports for this issue of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, those of Morocco and Turkey; the Moroccan report focuses on violence against women, while the Turkish report studies the participation of women in economic life.

In October 2015, the Climate Summit will be held in Paris, in which the Kyoto Protocol will be revised, a change of paradigm necessary for the future of our descendents. Ecology is an important stumbling block in terms of the need to strengthen shared values that should be kept in mind on both shores of the Mediterranean, this tempestuous sea described by Homer almost three thousand years ago. However, in order to be actors of change, in other words, of peace, shared development and dialogue, as the Barcelona Declaration stated, civil society must be vigilant and promote sustainable scenarios.

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