

# THE UFM: A UNION OF PROJECTS... BUT WHICH PROJECTS?

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The first Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Summit (13th July 2008) was a media success for France. Nicolas Sarkozy's project, announced in February 2007, had just been inaugurated with the support of its 43 participants. The initial idea of a Mediterranean Union did, however, have to undergo a great number of alterations before being rechristened "The Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean". At the Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers (Marseilles 2008), the reference to Barcelona disappeared.

As of late 2008, two Euro-Mediterranean policies have coexisted. On the one hand, is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), based on the 27+1 equation, with a country action plan and indicative programme relationship and involving only some multilateralism (transregional and cross-border cooperation). On the other hand, there is the UfM, based on intergovernmentalism (which implies a process of de-communitarisation), based on co-ownership and equality and concerning the concerted management of public goods (the environment, water, energy), specific structuring, visible and regional projects (civil protection, land and sea motorways) or shared ambitions (universities and research).

These projects can be carried out on a voluntary basis within the framework of strengthened sub-regional cooperation (the notion of variable geometry). Though it is not the aim of this article to highlight the institutional and financial difficulties that have prevented the UfM from taking wing to date, they have nonetheless played a significant role. Co-ownership injects, in principle, a dose of politicization in a project that is, after all, primarily economy-oriented, whereas the financial crisis prevailing in Europe reduces flexibility by reducing the resources required for the projects. Moreover, the resignation of the first Secretary General, Ambassador Massa'deh, and the eviction of Mubarak, Co-Chairman of the UfM, have left both the position of Secretary General of the UfM and the Co-Presidency vacant.<sup>1</sup>

## I. Policy Issues Relating to Euro-Mediterranean Architecture

I would like to discuss three other issues that seem crucial to the entire Euro-Mediterranean architecture.

### 1.1. How Should We Appraise the Barcelona Process?

The first issue relates to the following aspects of the Barcelona Process: the Barcelona Declaration, the MEDA Regulation, Euro-Mediterranean institutions, the civil society fabric, etc. We know that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has had mixed results: its Social and Cultural Basket suffered the after-effects of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the invasion of Iraq (2003), namely rampant Islamophobia in Europe. Its Political and Security Basket was contaminated by the derailment of the peace process, whereas its Economic Component, despite some improvements, suffered from deep inconsistency, given that the Euromed proved, in fact, to be a counter-model of successful, thorough regionalization. Indeed, the

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1. This article was written before the appointment of Youssef Amrani as Secretary General of the UfM in May 2011.

verticality of South-North relations did not decrease, intra-zone trade remained insignificant, inter-industry trade was reduced to a trickle, foreign investment turned away from the area (except towards the end of the period) and, since 2008, the effects of the European economic crisis are being transferred to Southern partners. In short, the Euro-Mediterranean area has remained superficial, commercial and non-productive.

But despite all of the shortcomings, errors, and limitations of the Barcelona Process, 15 years of ministerial conferences, contact among members of the civil society fabric, conferences and seminars, and activities by networks such as the Forum of Euro-Mediterranean Economic Institutes (FEMISE) and the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) could not but allow the emergence of what should be called the Barcelona acquis.

Moreover, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004, partially includes it in its action plans. But what about the UfM? Can the UfM manage the diplomatic dimension of relations between Northern and Southern partners? Does it facilitate the involvement of civil society and allow the establishment of networks of women, researchers, journalists, artists, etc.? Does the UfM strengthen cultural and social dialogue? Does it allow political issues to be addressed and will it provide the opportunity to forge a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States? Nothing could be less certain.

### **1.2. The Southern Shore of the Mediterranean: A Community of Values and Interests**

The second issue concerns UfM projects. There is a sense that all projects are based on a convergence of interests. But what about the convergence of values? The issue of “shared values” has been kept under wraps. But the Arab revolutions emerged, reminding European diplomacy, too obsessed with order and stability, that the notion of “shared values” really means something to Arab people, as opposed to empty slogans.

Moreover, the UfM implicitly recognizes the complementarity of natural resource endowments (energy, in particular the Mediterranean Solar Plan), but what about other complementarities, such as demographic complementarity (mobility), or educational (university, research), agricultural (food), or even political (Community of Democratic States) complementarities. Due to its multi-dimensional, holistic nature, the Barcelona Process pinned together these complementarities, even if it failed to implement them. Because of its bilateral, conservative nature, the ENP is not the appropriate policy for strengthening these complementarities. Due to its à la carte, multilateral philosophy, the UfM suffers the same shortcoming.

### **1.3. What Lessons Can Be Drawn from the Uprisings?**

This brings us to the third issue. The UfM cannot be locked into a functional, variable-geometry, sectoral approach. It should be based on a community of interests and values, combining the principles of efficiency, profitability and utility with those of solidarity, mobility and citizenship. The young Arab revolutionaries are sending us clear messages: they want to become real citizens of responsible states, and they are asking for the EU’s solidarity. Translated into simple notions: young Arabs want freedom, democracy and a job that fits their qualifications, or in its absence, they wish to have access to the fourth freedom, that of circulation.

That is why the UfM’s first real line of action should be the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that create quality jobs for the millions of young graduates of the area. Of course, this is not within the category of major structural projects, but can such projects do without SMEs?

This emphasis on small- and medium-sized enterprises is not intended to diminish the importance of strategic projects such as the Solar Plan or a land motorway from Casablanca to Gaza, or a possible high-speed railway line (Rabat-Alexandria). It stresses the importance of creating employment for the millions of graduates in the area, a large percentage of whom are now idle. It highlights the important role of cities, regions and local authorities, who must be involved

in the construction of a Mediterranean of shared prosperity. And, finally, it stresses that the transformation of the millions of young unemployed Mediterranean workers into productive agents and active consumers could give new impetus to European growth, now at half mast. Apart from the transfer of know-how and show-how that the release of business energy involves, it is a “new structuring of the North-South area” that is at stake, with a view to partnership for democracy and shared prosperity.

The EU has, in fact, established a series of instruments designed to stimulate innovation (Medibtikar – the Euromed Innovation and Technology Programme, with a budget of 7.24 million euros) and promote investment (FEMIP – Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership – and Invest in Med, with budgets of 33 and 9 million euros, respectively). However, these initiatives should be better endowed with sufficient resources and other instruments should be created.

The second endeavour should be agricultural and rural development, the only thing capable of restoring agriculture in the South to the capacity of feeding the population and preventing the desertification of the countryside.

And, finally, the third line of action should be the management of human mobility in the Mediterranean. The countries of the North must understand that this is an essential issue in the countries of the South, where the obstacles to circulating in the direction of Europe are clear to be seen. How can we speak of a Union for the Mediterranean to populations who are not allowed to leave their countries? These populations need such mobility, without which regional integration shall remain fictional.

In addition to these work areas, there is also the educational line of action, which calls for multiplying school, university and laboratory partnerships. This would require facilitating student, researcher and professor mobility, granting fellowships, fostering double-degree programmes and creating specialised libraries.

Again, speaking of new lines of action does not mean outright rejection of the major projects assigned priority at the first UfM Summit in Paris. Indeed, who can doubt the usefulness of projects on renewable energy (including wind and solar), on the operation and management of water resources or on de-pollution, transport and civil protection? However, many of these projects could well be promoted by the private sector, with the UfM acting as a coordination and monitoring agent.

## II. Conclusion

Young Mediterranean people today want companies that employ them, an agriculture that feeds them, quality education that prepares them for market requirements, an ecosystem that protects them and a hospitable Mediterranean to welcome them. I stress this latter point because, if there is a “structuring project” of Mediterranean identity to be built at all, it will certainly be one of negotiated, coordinated and realistic mobility. Between a deterrent, “fortress Europe”, and a “colander Europe”, there is a middle path (circular, temporary and contractual migration, targeted migration, etc). Europe is not Mother Teresa – we know this. But its borders have become deadly – this is borne out every day by the corpses washing up on beaches. The entire challenge of the UfM lies in this fact: that a common destiny is not based on charity, let alone on isolationism – it is first and foremost an act of will. For the time being, however, the lack of a shared political will appears to be the “best shared” thing on both shores of the Mediterranean.