

# A Heterodox Vision for the Mediterranean

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“Si l'histoire du passé pouvait servir à éclairer le présent, notre siècle serait des plus heureux, tant il y a d'histoires en tous genres” (If past history could serve to illuminate the present, our century would be one of the happiest, because there are so many histories of all sorts) Pierre-Jules Stahl, in *Les pensées et réflexions diverses* (1841).<sup>1</sup>

Next year, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first association agreements, signed by Mediterranean third countries of the Maghreb and the European Economic Community.

During this long period, we witnessed a number of events that marked history: the birth of ARPANET, the precursor to Internet, in California, the October War of 1973, Chernobyl, people walking on the moon, US withdrawal from Vietnam, the appearance of AIDS, the 1987 and 2008 stock market crashes, the emergence of China and the other BRIC countries, 9/11, the smartphone phenomenon and social networking sites, the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany, the birth of the Euro and the enlargement of the EU, the Arab Spring, religious terrorism, etc. Each of these events has had its consequences on world geopolitics and economy, as well as on social balances.

In our Mediterranean area, American intervention in Iraq, Rabin's assassination, the war in Syria and the West's bombing of Libya have woken the old demons born of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and above all, have exacerbated the lag behind other regions of the world insofar as human development, competitiveness and growth.

The status quo dating back to the strategies deployed by France and Britain within the Sykes-Picot Agreement is a thing of the past. Though the two European powers of the last century had drawn the outlines of the new Middle East by sounding the death knell for Ottoman multiculturalism, they never managed to turn the entirely fabricated geographic states into national realities with a marked individual identity. The institutional models then imposed had not allowed the creation of the required harmony between ethnic and religious minorities within the framework of democratic spaces protecting human rights and liberties. Britain and France always preferred subservient regimes allowing them to play with the partitions imposed in the name of their strategic and political interests as per the colonialist ideology of the period. The humiliation felt by the populations dispossessed of their caliphal frame of reference with the end of the Ottoman Empire generated all sorts of rejection and resentment towards the West. Schools of political thought emerging in this context to provide the alternative to Turkish caliphal governance explored all forms of nationalism: the Muslim Brotherhood with their political Islam project, the Socialist Baath party in the Sham countries, Kemalism, Wahhabism, Pan-Arab Nasserism and all the other independentist movements. Their ideologies occupy a broad spectrum ranging from Salafism to secular Islam, from liberal thought to the most orthodox communism. This review of history is necessary because, in its approach to Mediterranean issues, Europe has always favoured the policy of the ostrich, when what is necessary is to deal with the political complexity of the South Shore. Whether because of the poorly handled legacy of the independence wars, the imperative of energy security or political stability, or

<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Jules STAHL, quoted in C. M. A. DUGRIVEL. *Pensées diverses*. Paris: Debécourt, 1841, p. 94.

other geopolitical factors, Europe has never managed to depart from the doctrine of status quo in its dialogue with the South.

After having abandoned the unilateral mercantilist approach characterizing Europe's Mediterranean policies before the Barcelona Process, the latter never succeeded in exercising regional leadership due to the profound divisions inherent to the EU's Foreign and Common Security Policy. The long crisis in transatlantic dialogue, taking root with President Nixon, has left the field open for the US to exercise strategic control with no competition in our region. The end of the Cold War has not substantially changed the course of things.

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Barcelona 1995 heralded the beginning of a Copernican revolution in the Mediterranean. Sustained by the dream of peace in the Middle East, the opening of South Shore economies within the framework of structural adjustment policies and the liberalization of global trade as part of the Marrakesh Agreements, the Barcelona Process entitled all ambitions and utopias.

Conceived in the context of the Washington Consensus, the Barcelona Process attempted to put an end to the asymmetry of political relations between the two shores, on the basis of co-responsibility and the aim of shared prosperity in peace and security. A strategic partnership was thus established, resting on three (political, economic-financial and cultural) pillars. The creation of a Mediterranean Free Trade Area was the central line of the process. It was based on an implicit paradigm whereby the opening up of the South Shore economy to the market laws would necessarily entail a democratic adjustment that would sound the death knell for dictatorships.

Although during the negotiation of the Barcelona Declaration, it had not been possible to include the famous political conditionality clause (human rights, democracy, etc.), simply citing it instead in the pre-

amble, the EU knew perfectly well that it was still early for political reform in the South. The Islamist terrorist attacks in certain EU Member States rendered collaboration with the regimes in power more pertinent and necessary due to their function as buffers against violence and insecurity.

The South Shore countries having chosen the path of reform felt somewhat wronged by the EU's monolithic approach, which eliminated all differentiation from its Euro-Mediterranean policy. The South was thus treated as a monolithic bloc, which it is not, with no consideration for the cultural differences between the Mashreq and the Maghreb, nor the deeper nuances separating southern countries in their choice of level of proximity to Europe.

The absence of a unified mechanism for negotiation on the level of southern third countries eventually emptied the concept of an egalitarian partnership of substance and ended up reinforcing the bilateral dimension of the partnership to the detriment of its multilateral ambitions.

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on the eve of the conclusion of the Barcelona Agreement (1995) seemed like a bad omen for the aim of peace and stability in the Mediterranean and above all constituted a major question mark over the viability of the political foundations of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The intifada in occupied territories only bogged down the Process even more, in its situation as a permanent hostage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Because it has neglected this fundamental aspect and yet promised a project-based approach as a new dimension of the EU's Mediterranean policy, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is nearly politically paralyzed. Its overly restrictive mandate has not allowed it to prevent or remedy the dramatic situation in which the South Shore is immersed today. It is therefore in the domain of the obvious to assert that the Mediterranean needs a new impetus, different approaches and renewed political will, most likely based on new paradigms.

It would be wrong to 'throw the baby out with the bath water.' The goals of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration are even more pertinent now. The approach intended by the promoters of the UfM is not inconsistent with the letter or spirit of the Declaration. The conceptual progress made as part of the reforms to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) are indisputably moving in the right direction. Nonethe-

less, all of this is insufficient to allow the Mediterranean to break the status quo and leave behind the immobilism that today constitute a real threat to common security.

In any case, the centres of power in the majority of the countries in the South have undergone a profound metamorphosis. The Arab Spring has delegitimized the forces that had governed in the post-independence stage (nationalist parties). The more or less recognized or accepted secular oppositions met the same fate as the social-democratic European left: they are no longer capable of playing their role of social shock absorber. Now, Arab public opinions are in direct confrontation with the established systems, assisted by an unprecedented democratization of information technology. The 'digital' representation of the people's will is neutralizing constitutional institutions. It is increasingly becoming the only path of political expression, certainly without a legitimate basis, but terribly effective for destabilizing governing regimes or targeting politicians to discredit them. Post-revolt political reforms are running out of steam. Some are now advocating societal models based more on authoritarian liberalism: the market without Western-style democracy. The inability of legitimate governments born of the Arab Spring to restore macro-economic balance and to absorb electioneering social expenses that have burdened budgets without sustainable funding, the difficulty of reassuring investors, financial backers and tourists, and the failure of measures to restore the competitiveness of traditional export sectors are all factors contributing to creating a sense of frustration and disenchantment. Registered unemployment, especially among youth, has reached such severe levels (over 50% in certain cases) that it is reason for serious concern. Participation levels recorded at the last elections are an indicator of the patent level of scepticism towards the political class.

In this context, it is clear that the aim of progressively catching up with the standard of living of the North Shore is inexorably disappearing, at a time when inequalities between income classes and regional development levels have never been so pronounced.

The consequences of such economic and social underperformance on economic migratory flows are undeniable. These movements, whose political effects combine with the masses of refugees leaving

unsecure areas (Syria, Libya, the Sahel...), lend arguments, however fallacious they may be, to the populist movements that are currently reshaping the European political landscape. These movements, fed by the sub-primes crisis and the eurozone growth failure, are gradually relegating the issue of the Mediterranean to the backburner of European strategic priorities.

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None of the scholars of southern Europe dares imagine what impact a European Parliament dominated by populism will have on our region, on the future of the solidarity imperative, on common action against terrorism, etc. European left-wing parties that supported the Palestinian people and strengthened the peace camp or advocated a balanced Mediterranean policy, for instance, have lost their political influence. In order to survive politically, centre-right parties driven by bilateral interests have a tendency to shift towards the minefields of the radical right. There is now a major risk that the Mediterranean become an orphan in the future European political landscape. On the South Shore, the emergence of political Islam after the Arab revolts has generated attitudes ranging from mistrust to rejection of the West in general and the EU in particular. In this panorama, hardly a cause for joy, it is clear that, among the majority of institutions specializing in Mediterranean issues and politicians that can still be heard, there is broad consensus on the urgency of a new initiative based on new paradigms and new approaches. These actors substitute, in a fashion, a political class stunned by the emergence of populism, becoming mute when it comes to the Mediterranean and who laboriously try to contain the damage caused by the migratory issue to their traditional electorate.

Far be it from me to do an inventory here of the numerous proposals that have been aired. I will only discuss the ones that seem to be to be perfectly coherent with the wholly personal vision that I will de-

scribe hereafter in all humility, with the unwavering desire to nurture such a vital, life-saving debate.

### The Prerequisites for a New Mediterranean Project

De Gaulle said that “politics and economy are as linked as action and life.”

Transposed to the Mediterranean context, this aphorism means that the political prerequisite for any initiative whatsoever is fundamental. Entrusting the responsibility to the EU, with the current lethargic state of its founding project, and to a South Shore immersed in uncertainty would end up being the chronicle of a failure foretold.

**It is therefore in the domain of the obvious to assert that the Mediterranean needs a new impetus, different approaches and renewed political will, most likely based on new paradigm**

It would thus be difficult to find an alternative to a process of political dialogue based on the Helsinki goals without the encumbrance of its *modus operandi*, appropriate for a very different situation. The aim would be, in this case, to invent a mechanism with functions different from Helsinki: conflict resolution, confidence-building measures, humanitarian projects, reconstruction of the infrastructures devastated by civil wars, etc. On this level, the Palestinian question will undoubtedly be the most sensitive stumbling block, given the decay of the peace process and the breakdown of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue after the American embassy moved to Jerusalem.

To attain this goal, the suggested idea would be to create an independent task force, chaired by a high-consensus figure who may or may not be from the Mediterranean, but who enjoys the confidence of the powers now operating in our region (USA, Russia, Iran, China?). The chairperson should likewise have the support of all the belligerent parties in the Mediterranean: Israel, Palestine, Syria, Libya, etc...

This taskforce should consist of people recognized for their independent spirit and neutrality and be co-opted by all the states of the Mediterranean Basin in addition to the EU Member States. Its mission, conceived within an exploratory framework, will be to identify confidence-building measures, a negotiation format and a roadmap that would lead to an intergovernmental conference for stability, peace and security in the Mediterranean.

- Among the confidence-building measures, there is one in the cultural or religious sphere regarding the Islamophobia driving Western populism. In this sense, a programme agreed to among the two shores to combat blanket judgement and reciprocal ignorance is vital. It is possible today to neutralize the narrative fostering exclusion and revisiting fundamental human rights in the name of a social design recalling the dark pages of our tormented history. The use of social networks is a very promising possibility. We could add a project for a multilingual on-line Mediterranean university that could be grafted onto the two existing institutions. This option could offer unsuspected opportunities for the rapprochement of the peoples of the ‘*mare nostrum*.’ Reconciling Islam and Europe and the South Shore with Europe are prerequisites for peace and stability. Mobilizing civil societies on both shores in a proactive approach is fundamental.

- Coupling these initiatives to a generalized Med-Erasmus would be beneficial for everyone.

- In parallel to this political dialogue, within the framework of institutions and programmes in effect (the UfM, ENP...), a Mediterranean emergency plan should be conceived, revolving around common policy or regional projects. For instance:

- A Euro-Mediterranean electricity market that would complete the Europe-South Shore interconnection loop. This initiative would allow southern countries access to the extra electricity available in Europe, to provide an intelligent solution to the backup problems posed by the use of renewable energy and create a co-development project where everyone would win. This project would constitute a sort of transitory measure preceding the adoption of a common Mediterranean energy policy – a major geopolitical concern and an abiding source of strategic conflict.

- A common, jointly agreed initiative to manage the olive oil sector targeting the world market by increasing quality production to meet a rapidly growing demand and even turn the unhealthy climate of competition prevailing today with no objective reason into a virtuous synergy.

### What is important at this point is to promote initiatives able to foster living and acting together and above all, to show public opinion in both the North and the South that the Mediterranean Partnership is an opportunity and not a threat

- A common sustainable development policy for the Mediterranean agricultural space (horticulture, citrus fruit, etc.). The demographic decline of Europe, water resource problems and the demand for organic products allow a win/win policy to be considered that would safeguard existing farms, increase opportunities for new markets and save natural resources. The same approach could be progressively implemented to embrace another sensitive sector, that of the fisheries. These two sectors have always been points of friction due to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the privileges generated. It is time to rethink the challenges of this sector, so charged with political emotions and categorical struggles.

These are some sectoral ideas to keep in mind. There are many others to come in this spirit, on such issues as logistics, high technology, desertification and climate change. What is important at this point is to promote initiatives able to foster living and acting together and above all, to show public opinion in both the North and the South that the Mediterranean Partnership is an opportunity and not a threat. In the above, you have surely noticed that the topic of migratory flows was ignored. This was a choice motivated by the state of current debate in the EU.

The irrationality, ignorance and violence of the proposals put forth by populism can only call for patience. It will be an element on the agenda of the new political dialogue proposed in this article.

Another issue has likewise been set aside. This is the funding of the common actions and emergency programme. If the approach proposed were to be accepted, the funding strategy would clearly be part of the global negotiation. I will thus not repeat the old project of a Mediterranean Bank, nor go back to the dialogue of the deaf that characterized the financial facet of the Euromed Partnership and the ENP. In any case, the margin for southern countries' negotiating the amounts was nearly non-existent. Reflection should be made, however, on the new funding models to be conceived for future projects. This reflection should revolve around the following aspects:

- How can the necessary reforms in the South be financed without resorting to aggressive adjustment measures which public opinion can no longer accept (this is the case in Tunisia)?
- How can financial products be created for the projects carried out on the basis of private-public partnership (PPP)?
- How can money transfers by émigré populations be used more effectively?
- Shouldn't we be thinking of an ECOFIN-Med that would allow coordination of macroeconomic policy of both shores, support reform and foster shared growth and prosperity?

By way of conclusion, I would like to emphasize the urgent need for action in our region, in the context of a new holistic, shared vision. Policies should assume their responsibilities in this regard.

This action can no longer be based on states alone. We must involve enterprise, civil society, universities, local authorities, etc. (The latter would gain from organizing a permanent forum to deal jointly with the challenges of urbanization, competitiveness of territories, areas in decline, etc.).

If within this vision, we fail to generate popular enthusiasm and broad support for a new Mediterranean, we will have to prepare for a particularly difficult tomorrow.