

Geographical Overview | EU Mediterranean Countries

Emmanuel Macron: A Mediterranean Leader? French Policy towards the Mediterranean

Emmanuel Dupuy

President

Institut Prospective et Sécurité en Europe (IPSE), Paris

The European Union (EU) today, struggling and incapable of speaking with one voice, should transcend in these exceptional times of pandemic crisis, which is hitting the Mediterranean countries of the EU harder. Thus, it should show solidarity, union and efficiency, especially when it should be lending itself the means to become what it aspires to be: an example of more solidary global governance; otherwise it will cease to exist.

In this context, while we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process (1995) next November as well as the 60th anniversary of the independence of African states (1960), France, rid of its colonial “*super-ego*,” seems to be rediscovering a timid Mediterranean ambition.

Without waiting for the next French EU Presidency in the first half of 2022, the pandemic and migratory crises serve to reveal this strategic reality, or at least they should...

The Covid-19 Pandemic: Revealing the Need to Revisit France’s Mediterranean Policy in a Solidary, Integrated Manner?

This is particularly true in light of the health crisis associated with coronavirus as well as the thorny migratory issue. The Covid-19 pandemic thus reminds us that the EU, which failed to resolve the migratory crisis, will also suffer the backlash, given the spread of the virus through refugee camps in our southern and eastern, continental and maritime neighbourhood.

The Summit of the two shores in June 2019 in Marseille, which gathered some hundred civil society agents from countries in the “5+5 format” (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Malta for the Latin arc countries of the EU, and Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya for the South Mediterranean Shore), could lead to the belief that France is making harmonization of this shared space of economic development covering four time zones, the stability of the trans-Mediterranean geopolitical space, and the promotion of a geo-cultural approach common to today’s 430 million Mediterraneans (520 million in 2025, from 22 Mediterranean coastal states) a new-found priority of its foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the timid ambition of this Mediterranean revival falls well short of the ambitious Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) project christened at the 13 July 2008 Summit at the Grand Palais by Nicolas Sarkozy. Since then, the obstacles remain numerous and have somewhat called into question the initial ambitions of an approach meant to be innovative and inclusive of the 43 states (the 28 EU countries and 12 Mediterranean coastal countries) as well as for inter-governmental organizations and financial and inter-cultural institutions that currently structure the UfM (namely: the European Investment Bank - EIB, African Development Bank - ADB, World Bank, United Nations-UN, Gulf Cooperation Council - GCC, African Union - AU, Arab Maghreb Union - AMU, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation - OIC, UN Alliance of Civilizations, Anna Lindh Foundation).

The latter remain fully engaged in the six sectors considered a priority (business development, higher education and research, civil and social affairs, energy and climate action, transport and urban development, water and the environment) in order to limit social and economic asymmetries as well as to curb the growing gap between societies on the two shores.

This previous and current situation confirms that it was in fact more of a “project union rather than a union project.”

A Joint Civilizational Space Endangered, in Light of the Migratory Issue and the Diverging Responses in Apprehending It

From September 2015, 1.5 million people chose to cross the Mediterranean Sea in spite of a great risk. The Mediterranean is now less significant though constraining for the EU – with 100,000 migrants estimated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2019, of which, tragically, 2,500 died while crossing the Mediterranean. As a reminder, of the ten million Africans already living in Europe, five million are from North Africa, thus comprising half of the African migrants that have settled in Europe.

One of the most important issues that need to be dealt with urgently, although it has been relegated to the background of our indignations by the current health crisis, is that of the migratory crisis. Because, if we are threatened by coronavirus, the migrants are also threatened by it, and vice-versa. When the virus reaches the refugee camps at our gates, now closed (given the decision to lock down the borders of the 26 countries in the Schengen Area), where those who flee war or poverty are crammed (if this is not the case already), the consequences will be drastic for all. Here, again, interdependence is essential.

Regardless of Paris' grievances against Ankara, this sad reality is undeniable, obliging us to talk to Turkey. Despite President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ranting and his perfectly condemnable “migratory extortion,” Turkey remains an essential partner in this matter.

In signing an agreement in March 2016, accompanied by a financial package of 6 billion euros, with Ankara regarding the management of some 4 million refugees, 3.6 million of them Syrians, the EU decided to outsource the matter to Turkey, and this until 2026, let's not forget! The EU has, in fact, shown a tendency to sooner pay for delegated management of the migratory question.

Let us keep in mind as well that this matter is not some remote “human-rightist” fad, but well and truly a subject concerning all Europeans: Turkey shares 200 km of land border with Greece and 240 km with Bulgaria, and is disputing an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

with Greece and Cyprus, where recent, enormous discoveries of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean (50 billion m³, with the Leviathan, Aphrodite and Tamar natural gas fields, and the future EastMed natural gas pipeline to emerge from a consortium involving Egypt, Israel, Greece, Italy and France) render the area truly strategic for European energy independence. Syria is also our neighbour, whether we like it or not, by way of its EEZ adjoining Cyprus.

The coronavirus crisis, in any case, has the positive aspect that it leads us to question what we are and what we want to be and remain.

Europe Will Be Solidary or Will Not Be: The Future of Europe Lies in the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-African Area

The threat of a biased, contemptuous handling of the migratory issue, when it should involve subsidiarity and solidarity and be approached more inclusively with regard to our southern and eastern neighbourhood, with the point in case of the tens of thousands of migrants confined at the gates of Europe, should make us react in a humanitarian way. Far from making us forget this humanitarian crisis, the virus even highlights it.

Moreover, when discussing the reasons why the destiny of the 511 million Europeans is inexorably tied to that of the 1.3 billion Africans existing today, 2.5 billion by 2050, on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, the matter of the integrated economic area is often forgotten.

Nonetheless, the new President of the European Commission, Ursula van der Leyen, is right when she mentions, with regard to policy orientations for the next Commission (2019-2024), the reasons why the EU should have an inclusive policy vis-à-vis our southern neighbourhood: that of the emergence on the African continent of a vast market – now more open in view of the implementation (by 2022) of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – that is, a consumer market of approximately 3,000 billion euros per year.

Except that, here too, the asymmetry of the trade balance hampers this possibility. This will sadly be the case as long as 30% of African exports go to the EU whereas only 3% of EU exports are sent to Africa, 40% of which go to the Maghreb.

However, it is not a question of matching strategies on either side of the Mediterranean or distributing the good and bad points between our two shores – separated, it should be recalled, by only 14 km –, but rather acknowledging the lasting appeal of the great prospects offered by fluid, regular trans-Mediterranean trade.

Highlighting the Mediterranean as a Bridge Rather than a Barrier: Developing the Foundations of a New Euro-African Partnership

The point is simply to consider the need to work towards a mutual “strategic depth,” simultaneously African, Arab-Muslim, Judaeo-Christian, Mediterranean, Atlantic, Saharan, European and Asian...

The challenge is enormous: that of building a region integrated on a worldwide scale, linking Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe – grouped together under the acronym AME – in which each party finds its centrality and singularity without forgetting the importance of the sense of community.

The global economy and globalization demonstrate, moreover, that only integrated world regions such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Southern Common Market (Mercosur) in North and South America, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Asia can aim towards balanced development and sustainable and solidary growth among their members.

This new reality takes on full meaning, moreover, on the geopolitical and geo-economic levels as well as geo-cultural level. From this stems the need to conceive of Eurafrika, with the Mediterranean perceived as a bridge instead of a barrier between the European, Asian and African continents.

Its full realization will thus be the token of an area of shared prosperity, stability and security, capable of curbing the ills preventing its full development (resilient terrorist and narco-criminal threat, uncontrolled migration, economic asymmetry, poor state governance...).

The effective implementation – by 2022 – of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) should allow significant stepping up of intra-African commerce (not surpassing 12-16% today) and thereby raise the African continent – from an overall GDP of 2,450 bil-

lion euros today to some 3,500 billion by 2024 – on the global market, making it more competitive and attractive to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), whose volume is constantly falling on the African continent (65 billion dollars last year as compared to 72 billion in 2008, that is, eight times less than in Asia).

This is all provided that the ills burdening African economic development (economic asymmetry, monetary dependence, terrorism, poorly controlled demography, bad governance, erratic management of the migratory issue...) do not reduce the average continental growth rate (3.5% in 2019, 3% expected in 2020, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD), thus weakening the socio-economic foundations of the 54 African states.

The sharp and apparently steady fall of the price per oil barrel (20 dollars), in the context of the crisis associated with the coronavirus pandemic and a significant difference in approach between Moscow and Riyadh, will nevertheless destroy the development projects of numerous countries in Africa (Senegal, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Algeria, Libya...).

Mare Nostrum and Sahel Nostrum: Two Profoundly Intertwined Geopolitical, Geo-Economic and Geo-Cultural Areas

Today, the interaction between France's Mediterranean policy and its West African policy, transformed more specifically by its diplomatic and military agenda in the Sahel-Sahara region, seems to confirm a certain assimilation of public policies and a synergy of civil-military actions taken in parallel in the two regions.

In sum, the policy to which President Emmanuel Macron aspires for *Mare Nostrum* has become substantial with the one France intends to carry out to stabilize *Sahel Nostrum*.

The notion of *Mare Nostrum* should also be associated with that of *Sahel Nostrum*. The States bordering on that “Sea of Water” and this “Sea of Sand” are facing, moreover, the same common insecurities, among which the challenge of terrorism is the most significant.

After the attacks in Algeria (during the 1991-2002 Civil War, then against the UN building in Algiers in

2007, and the case of In Amenas in 2013), Morocco (Casablanca in 2003, Marrakesh in 2011), Tunisia (since 2015), Libya (2018), Egypt (since 2013), Côte d'Ivoire (2017), Benin (2019) and of course the five countries of the G5 Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina-Faso and Chad) since late 2012, not to mention Nigeria since the appearance of Boko Haram in 2009, terrorism is one of the main scourges affecting the African continent.

Improvement and stabilization of governance, reinforcement of the State, egalitarian and harmonious consideration of territories, renewal of the Citizens' Pact in each country, persistent struggle against corruption, relentless denunciation of kleptocracy, in addition to the creation of regional solidarity and the implementation of mechanisms and structures for cross-border coordination are only some of the solutions repeated at every opportunity, but only rarely implemented, to respond with greater efficiency to armed terrorist groups (ATGs), who most often build and consolidate their territorial rooting by legitimizing their capacity to replace the failing sovereign functions of states.

The connections between drug-trafficking organizations, Islam-related terrorist groups and secessionist movements born of bad governance, the gap between the centre and the periphery, and irredentist claims have now gone far beyond the Sahel-Sahara area to have an "impact" on and *de facto* "involve" all North and West African countries, inexorably linking Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean.

It is thus now in the search for sustainable, solidary shared solutions in the struggle against terrorism – combining military action and a global approach, connecting development aid to security – where one of the keys to the stability of the two continents resides, across the Mediterranean.

A New Wave of the Arab Spring Obliges France to Take into Greater Account the Deep Social Changes Occurring on the South Shore of the Mediterranean

The jolts of the Arab Spring since 2011 have caused a massive exodus of Tunisians, Algerians, Libyans and Egyptians. The consequences of the resulting Libyan crisis have certainly opened a new gap that will be difficult to close without a proactive policy of

sustainable, deep reconstruction of the country, first of all, of course, by re-opening lasting, solidary and inclusive prospects for its inhabitants.

We know the intrinsic causes behind the revolutionary and reformist processes. The causes are common.

They reside without any doubt in the eventually unacceptable gap between the people and an economic ultra-liberalism that, unregulated, oppresses collectively more than it enriches individually.

They can also be attributed to a social injustice that has become blatant at all levels of society and in particular those leaving citizens unregulated and unprotected, namely those feeling marginalized and excluded from development, youth and particularly young graduates remaining impervious to the wind-fall of growth whose results, though arising from a rentier economy, had nothing to envy of the economies along the North of the Mediterranean Basin.

They likewise certainly bear witness to a failed political democracy that shows few examples of a truly republican, inclusive, supportive and egalitarian outcome. This is the reality that the Summit of the two shores, and by the same token, the reorientation of French foreign policy towards the Mediterranean, can no longer ignore.

Nonetheless, France Is Not the Only One Having These Thoughts, and Is in Fierce Competition with Certain EU Partners

Spain has, rightly, decided to prioritize development aid to the South Mediterranean (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Palestine) and this despite the serious economic recession on the horizon in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. The presence of the former Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Borrell, at the head of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Brussels will surely help the new Spanish Foreign Minister, Arancha González Laya, in this goal. We know that Italy is likewise attempting to play its own role in the African continent, as demonstrated by the profound differences between Paris and Rome on the Libyan crisis.

Moreover, the image Paris has in the South Mediterranean is an additional factor towards its relegation. The barometer organized annually by Africa Leads, the French Council of Investors in Africa (CIAN) and

the IMMAR institute confirmed in its latest edition, presented last February, that France has been relegated to 7th place (behind Germany, the United States, Canada, China, Great Britain and Japan) of countries trusted by economic decision-makers.

The German Presidency of the G20 in 2017 and its forthcoming Presidency of the EU as of the second semester of 2020 should, from this perspective, confirm the German ambition regarding the African continent, much like its ambitious Compact with Africa (CwA) programme and the billion euros proposed by the German Chancellor to stimulate and encourage investment by small and medium-sized German enterprise in Africa, particularly North and West Africa.

Does the Future of the European Continent Thus Lie in Africa? This Is the French Perception, Anyway

As a conclusion, it is also important to emphasize that it is up to the Europeans' responsibility and to their insight to start thinking of themselves in a rather "vertical" logic, in a Euro-African perspective, for which the Mediterranean should be conceived at once as a bridge and a crossroads.

Indeed, the bad governance in each of the two areas (Atlantic/Sahel-Saharan and Maghrebi/Mediterranean) cannot be understood without taking into consideration their inherent convergences of flux and influx associated with the neighbouring instabilities between the two.

It is this "*strategic depth*," linked with improved consideration of the concept of "*deep security*," that France should take into account, associating state actors more closely with the realities and representations of non-governmental actors. Neither socio-economic development nor security can be conceived in isolation or within a "*Maginot Line*" mentality.

In sum, it is this "civil society," which has long been seeking a space for independent expression or substitution, which is now acting as the third pillar (next to that of the Executive and Legislative branches). Civil society has become an equal partner through the notion of human security, of securing territorial development, which affects the everyday lives of citizens.

Without doubt, it could also and above all be seen as the accomplishment, finally allowed by the advent of democracy along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, of Euro-African cooperation or even integration, both on the diplomatic level, linking 82 states (the 54 in the African continent and the 27 in a EU, to which Great Britain will remain associated), and the economic one.

This is the challenge, though risky, that seems to be motivating a certain reorientation of French foreign policy towards its southern neighbourhood.

Although it is a bit too early to perceive the beneficial effects for France, we can still agree that Emmanuel Macron's European impetus since his election in May 2017 has been decisive for "structurally" anchoring our Euro-Mediterranean ambition on the diplomatic level.