

The Union for the Mediterranean in 2017: Stocktaking and Consolidation

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At a time of political divisiveness, challenge to multilateralism and global disbandment, the co-presidency of the Union for the Mediterranean successfully managed to convene a foreign affairs ministerial conference for the second consecutive year, in Barcelona, early 2017, in the context of a broader Regional Forum that gathered public decision-makers and regional stakeholders.

From the initial launch of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), nine years ago in Paris, to the third UfM foreign affairs ministerial conference in Barcelona in 2017, the UfM has undergone considerable changes, which have substantially modified its physiognomy and refined its political significance. More importantly, drastic political and economic events have completely altered the landscape of both the northern and southern Mediterranean countries in which the UfM operates.

The Union for the Mediterranean was born as a balloon that had lost its air, amidst a pompous Summit of Heads of State and Government in Paris, the only one so far that has gathered all 43 Euro-Mediterranean countries. Indeed, the headlines that (former French President) Sarkozy's project managed to grab were transformed by the politics and diplomacy of negotiations into a downsized project of much lesser impact and tainted with a strong flavour of intergovernmentalism. The previous Barcelona Process had been underpinned by a set of principles regarding human

rights, good governance and international law that had been subscribed by all the parties involved. In contrast, the UfM abandoned the pursuit of political and legal reforms in the region, which mirror the EU's mission, and instead is focused on the political dialogue among "equal" partners and on the implementation of concrete projects. The latter appears to be in line with classical functionalist thinking: the belief that flexible and transnational institutions with clear practical functions can ameliorate international economic stagnation and security tensions¹.

Yet the first three years after the Summit were witness to a political stalemate due to the crisis in Gaza and the endurance of the Arab-Israeli conflict. So it was business as usual in the region, with the consequence that the main institutional provisions laid down in the Paris Declaration (biennial UfM Summits and ministerial meetings) could not be brought into play.

It was not until 2012 that the general environment started to change and factors of both an exogenous and endogenous nature were able to propel the UfM:

1. The wave of uprisings in the Arab Mediterranean countries triggered a first rethinking of the ENP in 2011. The EU better understood the additivity that the UfM could bring into the reviewed strategy towards the southern Mediterranean countries in pursuing state and societal resilience through economic and social development.
2. The decision that the UfM co-presidency would be taken over by the EU and Jordan was extremely positive. Whilst Jordan is a relatively stable country that provides ownership of the initiative vis-à-vis the Arab group of UfM countries, the EU (notably the EEAS, but also the EC

¹ MITRANY, David. *The road to security* London: National Peace Council, 1944.

and the EIB) plays a pivotal role in steering the organization and ensuring visibility and the inclusion of the UfM in the EU strategy towards the southern Mediterranean countries.

3. The consecutive appointment of two Moroccans at the helm of the UfM Secretariat in Barcelona was also reassuring. In particular, the decision, in March 2012, to appoint Fathallah Sijilmassi as UfM Secretary General was a blessing for the institution, not least because it offered fresh evidence of Morocco's commitment towards the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Is the Union for the Mediterranean Experiencing a *Spring Mood*?

Between 2012 and 2016, the Union for the Mediterranean expanded considerably: feasibility studies were prepared and countless high-level meetings and seminars were regularly held to discuss a wide range of issues. To these manifold activities, one has to add the project-oriented conferences, and the identification, appraisal, labelling and promotion of regional pilot-projects. Under the dynamic leadership of Secretary General Sijilmassi, the Secretariat has undergone severe and deep transformations, both at strategic and structural levels, strengthening its capacities, partnerships and achievements. This has yielded concrete results and given new momentum to the regional cooperation.

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The aforementioned expansion came with the recognition of the catalytic role that the UfM plays in regional cooperation and integration processes. A

number of high-level official documents of the EU and other multilateral organizations, reassert this role and mandate the UfM to undertake certain actions, as shown in Table 2.

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The years 2015 and 2016 emerged as a turning point for the short history of the UfM: the first UfM projects were effectively implemented thereby delivering on the core mandate for which the UfM had been established; the EU took public account of the value that the UfM entails in its policy towards the southern neighbourhood²; and, most importantly, the UfM managed to convene, albeit on an informal basis, a Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs³, the first one in this format of the 43 member countries since November 2008. In the course of the latter, Member States requested that the UfM Secretary General prepare a UfM Roadmap for action⁴ with a view to broadening the organization's thematic scope, which would be discussed throughout 2016 and eventually adopted at the beginning of 2017.

Indeed, it was not an easy exercise for the UfM co-presidency to resume the Ministerial Conferences on Foreign Affairs, having proven impossible since January 2009, when the then-Egyptian co-presidency had indefinitely postponed all political meetings of the UfM, namely Summits and Ministerial meetings of Foreign Affairs. At that time, the group of Arab countries considered it self-evident that the Arab delegations, and especially the Palestinian Authority, could not attend political meetings in which an Israeli delegation was also taking part.

² See further references in Table 2 on the Joint Communication "Review of the Neighbourhood Policy" and the adopted strategy "A Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign Affairs and Security Policy"

³ 26 November 2015 in Barcelona

⁴ <http://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/UfM-Roadmap-23-JAN-2017.pdf>

TABLE 2 | List of References to the UfM in High-Level Documents

Name of the organization	Document title	Type of document	Date of adoption	Page reference
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 7th Ministerial meeting	20 - 21 April 2009	pp. 2 and 5
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 8th Ministerial meeting	15 - 16 April 2010	p. 5
EU	Resolution of the European Parliament on the UfM	Adopted resolution in plenary of the EP	20-may-10	all
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	16 September 2010	p. 5
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	4 February 2011	p. 14
EU	A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean	Joint Communication of the HRVP and EC	8 March 2011	pp. 12-13 and 16
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	11 March 2011	p. 6
EU	A new response to a changing Neighbourhood	Joint Communication of the HRVP and EC	25 May 2011	pp. 13, 16 and 18
G8	Declaration of the G8 on the Arab Spring	Declaration of the G8 Summit	26 May 2011	p. 5
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	23 - 24 June 2011	p. 14
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	23 October 2011	p. 9
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 9th Ministerial meeting	20 February 2012	pp. 9-10
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	1 - 2 March 2012	p. 11
EU	Resolution of the European Parliament on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies	Adopted resolution in plenary of the EP	3 July 2012	pp. 3, 4, 6 and 7
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Summit of Heads of State and Government	Conclusions adopted by the 2nd Summit	5 - 6 October 2012	pp. 2, 7, 11 and 12
EU	Conclusions of the European Council Summit	Conclusions adopted by the EU Council	7 - 8 February 2013	p. 7
EU	European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a Stronger Partnership	Joint Communication of the HRVP and EC	20 March 2013	pp. 12 and 17
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 10th Ministerial meeting	16 April 2013	pp. 6, 10 and 11
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 11th Ministerial meeting	22 May 2014	pp. 10-11
EU-LAS	Declaration	Declaration adopted at the EU-LAS foreign ministerial meeting	10 - 11 June 2014	p. 5
EU	Resolution of the European Parliament on security challenges in the MENA	Adopted resolution in plenary of the EP	9 July 2015	pp. 8 and 15
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 12th Ministerial meeting	7 October 2015	pp. 5 and 7
EU	Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy	Joint Communication of the HRVP and EC	18 November 2015	pp. 3, 18 and 20
EU	A Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	Strategy presented at the European Council	28 June 2016	p. 34
EU	Resolution of the European Parliament on the situation in Tunisia	Adopted resolution in plenary of the EP	14 September 2016	pp. 8 and 10
5+5 Dialogue	Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of Foreign Affairs	Conclusions adopted at the 13th Ministerial meeting	28 October 2016	pp. 2 and 5
EU-LAS	Declaration	Declaration adopted at the EU-LAS foreign ministerial meeting	20 December 2016	p. 3
EU-7	Madrid Declaration	Declaration adopted at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of Southern EU Countries	10 April 2017	p. 5

Source: prepared by the author from personal archive

TABLE 3 List of UfM Ministerial Meetings (until May 2017) by Competence Area

Competence area* of the UfM Ministerial Meetings	Date	Location
Foreign Affairs (informal meeting)	3-4 November 2008	Marseille (France)
	26 November 2015	Barcelona (Spain)
	23 January 2017	Barcelona (Spain)
Blue Economy	17 November 2015	Brussels (Belgium)
Digital Economy	30 September 2014	Brussels (Belgium)
Employment and Labour	10 November 2008	Marrakesh (Morocco)
	22 November 2010	Brussels (Belgium)
	27 September 2016	Dead Sea (Jordan)
Energy	11 December 2013	Brussels (Belgium)
	1 December 2016	Rome (Italy)
Environment and Climate Change	13 May 2014	Athens (Greece)
Industrial Cooperation	6 November 2008	Nice (France)
	12 May 2011	Valletta (Malta)
	19 February 2014	Brussels (Belgium)
Regional Cooperation and Planning	2 June 2016	Dead Sea (Jordan)
Research and Innovation	3-4 May 2017	Valletta (Malta)
Strengthening the Role of Women in Society	12 November 2009	Marrakesh (Morocco)
	12 September 2013	Paris (France)
Sustainable Urban Development	10 November 2011	Strasbourg (France)
	21-22 May 2017	Cairo (Egypt)
Trade	9 December 2009	Brussels (Belgium)
	11 September 2010	Brussels (Belgium)
Transport	14 November 2013	Strasbourg (France)
Water Management	22 December 2008	Sweimeh (Jordan)
	13 April 2010	Barcelona (Spain)
	27 April 2017	Valletta (Malta)

Source: prepared by the author from personal archive.

*Before the decision 6702/2/12 MED 8 PESC 202 adopted by the Council of the EU of 27 February 2012, some of the Ministerial meetings were still held under the framework of the previous "Euro-Mediterranean Partnership".

In this lengthy time-lapse, a few weeks after the last Israeli legislative elections in March 2015 and taking advantage of the fact that the government formation was still under negotiation, HRVP Federica Mogherini seized the opportunity to hold consultations with the foreign ministers of the southern Mediterranean countries on the review of the ENP. During the meeting that took place at the UfM headquarters in Barcelona, with both Arab Mediterranean and Israeli delegations in attendance, the need to reinforce the UfM at the political level was explicitly expressed. Six months afterwards, UfM ministerial meetings on foreign affairs were successfully resumed. Table 3 shows the list of UfM ministerial meetings held since the launch of the UfM by competence area.

Concluding Remarks: the Union for the Mediterranean at a Crossroads

Multilateralism is not in fashion nowadays. The UfM was conceived to upgrade the political level

of EU relations with the southern Mediterranean countries. The main problem is that the Mediterranean region as a political construct is under question. The European Union has underpinned a "core-periphery" (EU toward neighbours) policy that works primarily on a bilateral track, instead of reaffirming, in practice, that common (regional) pressing challenges need further regionalization as regards debates, policies and decision-making. *Moving from the technocratic floor to the political arena.* The UfM as the other EU policies toward the region have been de-politicized in recent years. Whilst the latter follows a logical path with a view to softening some of the relations with certain southern Mediterranean partner countries, there are growing demands to enhance regional dialogue on political and stability related issues. Considering that Summitry remains unattainable for the time being, one could thus envisage the possibility of densifying the political strategic dialogue at the Senior Official Meetings, convening Joint Strategic Permanent Committee meetings in Brus-

sels⁵, strengthening the mandate of the PA-UfM and holding informal ministerial meetings on the margins of the UNGA in order to lever political debate and decision-making.

The years 2015 and 2016 emerged as a turning point for the short history of the UfM: the first UfM projects were effectively implemented thereby delivering on the core mandate for which the UfM had been established

A UfM Roadmap for action, as a hammer to break the glass ceiling of 2008. The regional landscape at the time the Paris and Marseille Declarations were adopted has little in common with the one of 2017. The endorsement of the Roadmap by the last ministerial meeting in Barcelona constitutes a significant leap forward in the alignment of UfM priorities with those laid down in the EU Global Strategy, and more specifically in the ENP review of 2015. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of the Roadmap as regard to fields such as migration, mobility and prevention of extremism and terrorism is to be carefully monitored in order to avoid the Roadmap becoming an empty marketing shell rather than an effective political propeller.

Smooth transition of generals in the Secretariat. The most critical institutional turning point for the UfM in the short term is the replacement of its current Secretary General, whose mandate ends before the summer 2018. There is no room for eventual failure and it will not be easy to find a replacement as skillful and competent as the current Secretary General, and who complies with the political criterion. The post is still up for grabs.

It is no secret that a fully-fledged operational Secretariat with 47 labelled regional projects requires a better equipped infrastructure

An underfinanced and understaffed Secretariat in Barcelona. While considerable progress has been made in this endeavour, for instance the recent announcement that the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) had allocated a €6.5-million multiannual fund to support UfM core activities, it is no secret that a fully-fledged operational Secretariat with 47 labelled regional projects requires a better equipped infrastructure. Hence, the creation of a dedicated financial mechanism (i.e. Trust Fund) that enables funds to be pooled from interested contributors is of paramount importance to be able to reward the UfM label, alongside a more flexible set of rules to hire long-term expert personnel.

⁵ Envisioned in the Paris Declaration (2008), the Joint Permanent Committee is a body that brings together Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the EU with the mission to react rapidly if an exceptional situation arises in the region that requires the consultation of Euro-Mediterranean partners.