

Regional Integration in the Western Mediterranean: the AMU and 5+5

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The figures speak for themselves; there can be no doubt that the Maghreb has the lowest level of integration of all regional groups. In actual fact, it has all the necessary elements and conditions, albeit to differing degrees, for successful regional integration, namely: the same cultural space, a common understanding, complementary economies, geographic proximity and a high number of consumers. Economic agents are calling for it, the political discourse is also favourable, although on occasions contradictory, and the support offered from other areas, international bodies and regional groups is enthusiastic; but still there is no progress.

The Added Value of Regional Integration

We are also aware of what has come to be known as the cost of this situation, the cost of the non-Maghreb (others prefer to speak in more positive terms of the added value regional integration would have), to which numerous studies and seminars have been dedicated, as well as the benefits that would arise from greater integration.¹

The fact is that the challenges and problems that are burdening the region require urgent solutions. It is not just a question of economic integration; desertification and climate change have meant, for example, that 80% of arable land is under threat of deser-

tification. The countries of the region are unable to slow their imports. Imports of food products alone exceed €30 billion, hence the importance of cooperation in, among others, the area of food security, which is increasingly crucial to breaking away from this reliance on imports.

Once more, we will try to understand the reasons behind this situation, and what can be done to create a more stable and prosperous region, especially for its youth, who wish for a future of opportunities, and not the frustration and discontent they face today.

The reality is that the project for the unification of the Maghreb is one that is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the region's peoples, through their myths and historical references, and re-emerged in the context of the struggles for independence.²

Since their inception, nationalist movements have always incorporated the Maghreb dimension into their ideologies and actions. This is the case for Tunisia's Destour and Neo-Destour, Messali Hadj's North African Star, originating from the Algerian FLN, and Morocco's Istiqlal, which in 1958 (FLN – Neo-Destour and Istiqlal) organised the Tangiers conference to support the Algerian cause during the Algerian War, reaffirming the common destiny of the Maghreb peoples. In a letter to the congress attendees, Mohammed V proposed the creation of a Maghreb federation.

During the struggle for independence, solidarity among the Maghreb nations created an entire generation committed to the Maghreb ideal, who, after independence, set to turning the dream of greater unification into a reality.

However, once the struggles for independence came to an end, the priority became that of strengthening their structures as independent states within

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¹ From the studies of the Moroccan GERM to the most recent seminars, Citpax-IEMed, Elcano Institute.

² BICHARA KHADER: *El Gran Magreb y Europa*, Ed-Quorum. 1992.

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the colonial borders; nations which, some would argue, people had fought and died for. From here arose the initial problems, which had hitherto lain dormant, although were often insinuated in talks aimed at gaining mutual support and subsequently winning independence.

The history of the region is replete with examples: the dispute over Mauritania, whose recognition by Morocco was not forthcoming until 1969; the territorial dispute between Tunisia and Algeria that went unresolved until 1970; the so-called Sand War between Algeria and Morocco, which was resolved in different stages, as of 1973, through the treaty concerning the state border between the two countries (ratified in 1973 by Algeria and only in 1989 by Morocco),³ or the comparable issue concerning the continental shelf in the Gulf of Gabès between Libya and Tunisia, which remained disputed until 1988.

Worthy of a separate mention is the conflict of the Western Sahara, and likewise Gaddafi's adopted stance, which was more pan-Arab and less Maghreb right from the beginning of his rule.

Furthermore, each state, protective of their sovereignty and independence, made decisions on economic policy without taking into account their neighbouring states, resulting in each following a different model.

All this explains why it took several attempts and changes on the international panorama (US-Russian dialogue, a fall in oil prices, accession perspectives of Spain and Portugal to the EEC) for the logic on economic integration to be put into practice. In June 1985, HM King Hassan II presented Morocco's candidature to the EC at the European Summit at Fontainebleau and in September of the same year the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) declared

that Algeria was ready to commit to economic integration and the union of the Maghreb in presenting a united front in the dialogue with Europe. The Saudi-brokered talks between Algeria and Morocco led to the Zeralda Summit in June 1988, which launched the process of the Arab Maghreb Union.

At the outset, five sub-committees were set up to study different aspects and problems arising from Maghreb unification: Finances and Customs, Economy, Education, Culture and Information, Social, Human and Security issues and Institutions.

Morocco and Algeria were to preside over the sub-committees related with the economy, Tunisia, security and Libya, institutions. Besides needing to keep some kind of balance in mind, this meant dealing with different standpoints, Libya's being more political and Morocco and Algeria's more economic, and the need to come to a compromise.

The Treaty of Marrakesh

The Marrakesh Summit in February 1989 adopted a declaration instituting the Arab Maghreb Union. Article 9 of this declaration refers, albeit without mentioning it, to the EEC as an example of a regional union that has progressed through carefully considered phases and which can be used as a model.

The Treaty of Marrakesh itself is structured in a Preamble of five points that reproduces some elements of the Declaration and 19 articles, ten of which refer to the organisation of the union, one to mutual defence, although in reality without a mechanism for applying it, two to security, four to final provisions and just two to real goals, articles 2 and 3.⁴

In summary, a union of states was set up (interpreted by some as a non-integration and thereby contradicting the economic goals it alleged to pursue), with the purpose of developing common practices in specific areas and working to achieve the free movement of people, services, goods and capital between them and without supranational institutions. Their supreme body and the only one established to take unanimous decisions is the Presidential Council.

³ The 1972 Rabat Declaration, which refers to the conclusion and signing of this treaty and the treaty for the use of the Gara-Djebilet mine (a joint enterprise was established to allow iron ore located in Algeria to be exported from a Moroccan port located in the Atlantic), speaks of the will to begin a period of agreement and cooperation and thereby realise the people's greatest aspirations regarding unification.

⁴ A detailed analysis of the Treaty, as well as its creation, can be found in the doctoral thesis of the then Crown Prince of Morocco MOHAMMED BEN EL HASSAN ALAOUI: *La coopération entre l'UE y les pays du Magreb*. ECL. Nathan 1994.

The first years of the AMU were characterised by an exuberance that led to the creation of numerous regulations. This initial impulse, however, would later be brought to an almost complete standstill.

Regarding the 38 agreements signed in the framework of the AMU, 21 are of an economic nature. However, the commercial transactions between the countries of the region continue to be marginal, less than 3%, while commercial trade with the EU has reached 65%.

Virtual Integration

After 25 years of existence, the achievements of the AMU can only be seen as disappointing; the mere mention of virtual integration confirms this. In reality, the progress registered has been more in the area of security than the economy.

The obstacles to its development have been practically the same ones that complicated its creation and launch.

Reoccurring political tensions have led to institutional paralysis. If the only decision-making body does not meet, then progress is not possible (it has not met since 1994). The intra-Maghreb relations have been subject to a process which, instead of generating confidence, has bred mistrust among its leaders. The policies aimed at reaffirming regional hegemony have separated more than they have united, as has the competition between the states to show their own successful economic and social model to be superior to that of their neighbour. Any consensus reached for the conflict of the Western Sahara not to influence the development of regional cooperation was but a fleeting one.⁵

At the same time, neither have economic conditions created the shared interests that could accelerate development and dampen political tensions. The convergence of economic policies towards a model of open economies has been insufficient and the structural adjustments implemented in the nineties did not lead to the desired progress in this sense. Although we are no longer dealing with different economic systems – Tunisia and Morocco on the one hand, and Algeria and Libya on the other – there

is still a tendency towards protectionism. Likewise, there is insufficient complementarity, and this does not generate the desired trade flows.

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Such an ambitious initiative also requires a solid legal framework, a balance between means and ambitions and a change in both public opinion and economic agents towards valuing the benefits of a more open market, without the protection it previously enjoyed.

Regional integration is led from above, but must also come from below, hence the importance of the role played by the respective civil societies.

In this regard, at least, there is movement in the region. The Maghreb Entrepreneurs Forum, which has met for the third time this year in Marrakesh (the first two took place in Algeria and Tunisia) has launched the Maghreb Initiative on Trade and Investment with the aim of bringing fresh dynamics and relaunching the economic integration process, outlined in a series of measures to be carried out over a period of one to five years.

At this point, it is worth asking whether rather than revitalising the AMU, it should instead be re-established.

Revitalise or Re-establish the AMU?

The people have changed. None of the Heads of State present at the meetings in Zeralda in 1988 and Marrakech in 1989 are present on today's political scene. There have also been major changes in the political reality of the Maghreb, which means that the issue of regional integration is no longer the exclusive domain of the political elites.

The Tunisian President Marzouki has been the first to call for regional cooperation, touring the other four Maghreb countries to highlight this need and see how far the idea can be taken. In so doing, he has overcome Tunisia's historically muted stance on the

⁵ On the Maghreb and the conflict in the Western Sahara see memoirs of the Algerian MFA Ahmed-Taleb-Ibrahimi. *Memoires d'un Algerien*. Volume 3, page 163-265. Ed. Casbah-Argel 2013.

subject, in favour of becoming a driving force behind the idea.

Consequently, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the AMU met in Rabat and then travelled to Libya. Although the meeting should be interpreted more as a reaction to the situation in the Maghreb and the trip as a show of solidarity with Libya than as a moment of understanding and unity with regard to the AMU, they talked of the need to reform the organisation and proposed programmes to reinforce cooperation, related to the area of security.

Although this falls way short of organising a meeting at the Summit, it reveals a closer understanding that if the region does not move towards integration it will not have a future.

There are still elements, of a political nature, that obstruct the AMU's reactivation, with particular relevance to security. Above all, these affect Morocco and Algeria, which is why these two countries need to know how to handle and differentiate their security interests in a way that does not steer them away from their goal of greater integration.

This focus, as well as the clarification of political conditions, demanded to relaunch cooperation, could be a springboard to overcoming the difficulties that have delayed the process until now and opening the door to it being relaunched or re-established.

The Maghreb is an economic actor with little weight on the international economic stage and must respond to two frameworks, that of world globalisation and the European-focused Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area, which occupies an intermediate space between the regional and the global.

This is why another framework, that of the Maghreb project, must be relaunched thus allowing the demands of the other frameworks to be more easily met.⁶

The EU and Regional Integration

The EU is the Maghreb's main trading partner, and although European cooperation, and even more so that of the Member States, is often focused more on the national panorama than the regional one, this dimension has taken on increasing importance.

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and in particular to Maghreb integration. Above all, this is thanks to the Neighbourhood (and all the policies that implies) and the fact that, unlike other actors, it does not see the region as just a market place.

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There is no contradiction, as some claim, between a united Maghreb and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), in the same way that there is not one between the processes of vertical and horizontal integration.

The perspectives for closer cooperation between the EU and countries of the Maghreb both on the bilateral and regional level are real, and in 2013 were evidenced by the Joint Communication Supporting closer cooperation and regional integration in the Maghreb. Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia were discussed as countries of the Maghreb and a list of priorities for reinforcing cooperation was agreed.

The countries of the Maghreb should respond to the EU's offer to support regional cooperation on the basis of concrete ideas and proposals.

The 5+5

In this context of dialogue and support for regional integration is the so-called 5+5 dialogue. Established in 1990, this forum for informal dialogue has brought together the five countries from the northern shore (Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal) and the five countries from the AMU.

Already in 1983, the French Foreign Affairs Minister Claude Cheysson had informed the southern countries of President Mitterrand's idea of the six countries of the Western Mediterranean (France, Spain, Italy, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) meeting regularly to bring up issues of common interest and as a show of solidarity in the Mediterranean region, which

⁶ OUALALOU, FATHALLAH. *Après Barcelone le Magreb est nécessaire*. Ed. Toubkal Casablanca. 1st Edition 1996.

was not to replace the solidarity already existing between the different countries.

These meetings were to be considered as a step towards a global Mediterranean agreement, which was hard to imagine at the time because of issues with Cyprus and Palestine.

The reactions were not overly enthusiastic and Algeria in particular placed more importance in its relations with non-aligned Mediterranean countries and solutions to the problems, i.e. the right to self-determination, respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity and a dialogue that was more focused on economic problems and North-South dialogue.

But the idea took shape and the French proposal, backed by Spain and Italy, would lead to the first Ministerial Conference in Rome in 1990, initially paving the way to an informal 4+5 dialogue, which almost immediately became the 5+5 Dialogue, through the addition of Malta.

The new regional context of the Western Mediterranean (creation of the AMU in 1989 and consolidation of the Mediterranean flank of the European community project in 1986 with the accession of Spain and Portugal) together with the ongoing problems in the Eastern Mediterranean, precluding a global Mediterranean focus, revealed the usefulness, indeed the need, for an informal framework of dialogue and cooperation built on solid foundations, which took into account the new globalised reality and the inevitable interdependence of crucial issues such as security in the Mediterranean.

More reticent at the outset than any other country, Algeria enthusiastically assumed the presidency in 1991 and hosted the second Ministerial Meeting in the same year.

What had been a promising start was hampered by sanctions imposed on Libya by the Security Council following the Lockerbie disaster, which paralysed the dialogue's activities.

Faced with this situation and Egypt's interest in being present in all Mediterranean fora, France and Egypt launched the Mediterranean Forum in 1994, which was not burdened by the presence of Libya and incorporated an Eastern Mediterranean dimension, thereby sidestepping the Palestinian conflict.

A year later, in 1995, the Barcelona Process was launched as a multi-lateral framework of relations between the EU and its Mediterranean members. This, the most ambitious initiative in the Euro-Medi-

terranean area, had a global and coordinated focus, and was based on two assumptions: first, that the southern and eastern borders of the EU had to be restabilised without drawing false parallels, and second, that changes were needed for the EU to maintain its relations with its Mediterranean neighbours, while Central and Eastern Europe were becoming progressively integrated.

This was also the beginning of a process that aimed to overcome the bilateralism vs multilateralism binomial through multi-bilateralism.

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Apparently superfluous and unnecessary when compared with other Mediterranean initiatives, the 5+5 initiative seemed destined to disappear. However, when international sanctions against Libya were lifted, it was reactivated at the ministerial conference held in Lisbon in 2001, the first after a long hiatus of ten years. The meeting served to relaunch the 5+5 dialogue and, with regard to fostering integration in the Western Mediterranean, offered the added value that it both re-established Euro-Maghreb dialogue and included the presence of Libya (unlike the Mediterranean Forum).

In 2002, Libya held its first MFA meeting, also the first meeting since the attacks of 11 September 2001, which reinforced dialogue and tested Libya's readiness to normalise its position in the international community.

The next stage was the first Summit of Heads of State and Government, which took place in Tunisia (2003) and concluded with a Joint Declaration by all participants confirming the following axes of dialogue: Stability, Maghreb Economic Cooperation and Integration, Social and Human Cooperation (immigration), Dialogue between Cultures and Civilisations, and Political Dialogue on major issues. Also in attendance at the meeting was the President of the European Commission.

From Reflection to Strengthened Cooperation

This agenda has been enriched by the inclusion of new issues and with the permanent participation of the European Commission in all sectors of the dialogue. The initiative has thereby been strengthened as a think tank for issues relevant to the Mediterranean architecture, transcending the merely governmental sphere and opening to other actors such as business associations, the media and youth organisations, as well as academic observatories, which would go on to develop their own networks.

The dialogue which began between MFAs has widened to include areas that are not just political, taking advantage of their informal and flexible character to promote strengthened cooperation of an eminent-ly operative and practical nature, which can be translated into concrete actions.

It has developed in the areas of the Interior, Immigration, Transport, Defence, Tourism, Education and Research, the Environment and Energy, Agriculture and Food Security, as well as including representatives of national parliaments. There is an interest in widening these formats in the near future.

Likewise, some of these formations have already been given technical support structures, as is the case for transport with the CETMO (Centre for Transportation Studies for the Western Mediterranean), and formalised relations with other institutions in the Mediterranean sphere. Action plans have also been developed, including activities carried out by defence ministries with a greater reach.

The second Summit of Heads of State and Government met in Malta (October 2012) in the context of changes in the region, which were duly noted (the situation in Syria was given particular emphasis), and reiterated its support for Maghreb integration. Issues concerning the economy, education and youth, considered to be fundamental to the development of the Mediterranean, were central to the discussions.

Some of its initiatives have been considered as a model of regional cooperation as they tackle basic and widely shared aspects that are fundamental to Maghreb integration, such as investments, SMEs and immigration, but also strategic affairs like defence, transport, energy and water.

At no time has the forum weakened the globalising principle of Mediterranean cooperation. In fact, the opposite is the case: it contributes ideas and experiences, strengthens the Maghreb's position in Europe and gives a more relevant role to southern Europe. In recent years it has also shown that by creating connections with the EU it offers an added value that strengthens its operability, as well as that of the EU, in the region.

It is criticised at times for not discussing thorny bilateral issues (Western Sahara, closure of land borders between Algeria and Morocco) but sheds light on certain issues on the international agenda (Iraq, Syria, Terrorism), which rather than creating problems, opens interesting perspectives thanks to the importance given to formalising agreements, even when the positions involved are very different.

Today the 5+5 is the forum for dialogue and cooperation that creates the highest level of consensus among the Southern Partners. Its vitality responds to a flexible focus and participation based on shared interests, and, even without formal structures, it gives greater coherence to South-South integration strategies.

The forum has become an essential link in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and an example of how reinforced cooperation can contribute towards horizontal integration. The step from reflection to action is taken based on common interests and interaction with other mechanisms of regional cooperation.

The new dynamic initiated by the Union for the Mediterranean with the implementation of projects that respond to socio-economic challenges and the goal of regional integration, based on the concept of variable geometry, opens new perspectives for establishing complementarities and underlining the contribution of the 5+5 to regional integration.