

The Mediterranean: Past, Present and Future

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It is impossible to talk about diplomacy or international relations without mentioning the Mediterranean. In fact, the origin of today's diplomatic tools and instruments can be traced back to that part of the Levant, in present-day Syria, where a cuneiform tablet was discovered inscribed with a text referring to a protocol between the kingdoms of Ebla (Syria) and Hamazi (modern-day Iran). What a paradox, then, to "rediscover" the Mediterranean 2,500 years later and find Syria and Iran once again standing centre stage in the theatre of contemporary diplomacy. It is the very embodiment of the "eternal return"! Of course, the tablets are not the only evidence of the history of diplomacy and its ties to the Mediterranean. Classical Greek and Roman antiquity and the splendour of the city-states of the Italian Renaissance are likewise proof of the leading role the Mediterranean has played in the spheres of geostrategy and diplomacy. Indeed, the region's many contributions to the development of international activity go well beyond the scope of this article, which is chiefly focused on the recent past, present and future of the Mediterranean.

True, the *Mare Nostrum* faded from the international scene in the 19th century, and it was not until the formal independence of the coastal Arab states following WWII that its historical prominence was partially restored. However, the period of East-West bipolarity once again relegated it to a secondary role and to passing references to the presence of the US Navy's Sixth Fleet and the Soviet Navy's efforts to counter it. "The Mediterranean, that forgotten sea," as I have often noted in the past, did not become a meeting point until the tail end of the Soviet-Ameri-

can rivalry, when Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush met off the coast of Malta in what would ultimately be the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

It was not until Europe's timid awakening that the region once again became a focus of attention and the countries of the European Union took a new and critical interest in it. The awakening was not easy. Unsurprisingly, it was the southern countries that made the first attempts to develop a new policy towards the region.

In the 1990s, France, Italy and Spain undertook a review of the Mediterranean policy. This gave rise to the "5+5" Dialogue and other proposals for the Western Mediterranean. The different initiatives of the "Latin Arc" countries helped to raise the awareness of the other European countries. A few years later, following an unsuccessful attempt by the then Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis to establish a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) similar to the Helsinki Act for the countries of the East, the geographical and thematic framework of the Mediterranean initiatives was broadened. The European Union was to be present in its entirety, without excluding anyone, including, logically, Israel.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the strengthening of the instruments and policies towards Central and Eastern Europe also showed that the "South" could not be excluded from the new European neighbourhood architecture. Hence, the Barcelona Process, a "revolutionary" diplomatic process in terms of both its ambition and the driving concept behind it, was born. For the first time, a global approach was to be taken to the Euro-Mediterranean reality and efforts were made to address all the region's challenges, whether political or security-related, economic or financial, or, for the first time, human or cultural.

The desire to initiate "a process" was unanimous;

everyone was aware of the difficulties we faced and the need to gain time to create this Euro-Mediterranean space. The Barcelona Declaration was the expression of the political will and constituent commitment to jointly create a framework of peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity. The favourable climate of peace in the Middle East and the hope that the Arab-Israeli conflict would soon be resolved helped pave the way for it. When Arab-Israeli tensions flared back up and the process stagnated, it thus fell captive to the logic of obstruction and intransigence so common in the Middle East.

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The "Barcelona Process" had its high points and low points, but, looking back, I believe it can fairly be said that the highs outweighed the lows. None of its proposals or actions had negative consequences. All of its efforts were aimed at easing tensions and proposing solutions. True, greater political conviction and determination were needed, but the overall results were hardly negative.

Building on the legacy of the "Barcelona Process," the Summit of Euro-Mediterranean Heads of State and Government laid out the broad lines of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in Paris in June 2008. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's initial proposal was marked by an exaggerated voluntarism, which was later abandoned at the first signs of crisis. However, the idea itself was sound: let us forge a political union based on a meeting at the highest level of the heads of state and government every two years to strategically analyse the region's future. Only one such meeting was held. The more urgent it became for the heads of state and government to meet in order to tackle the crisis in the Middle East, the longer the meeting was postponed. The courage and political commitment required to take control of the region's future were lacking. The UfM was also intended to carry out specific projects related to infrastructure, solar power, the environment, cooperation, etc. Unfortunately, these projects never got off the ground.

To ensure institutional continuity, a Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean was set up in Barcelona, a key project that has not been allocated the necessary and appropriate resources. It took over from the "Barcelona Process" with an improved institutional format, new members and additional objectives, while retaining its main lines of action: political and security-related, economic and trade-related, social and cultural, and justice and interior affairs. The general guidelines of the "Barcelona Process" continued to set the course of Euro-Mediterranean policy, the overall objective of which, as laid down in the 1995 Declaration, of "turning the Mediterranean Basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity requires a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights, sustainable and balanced economic and social development, measures to combat poverty and promotion of greater understanding between cultures."

In this context, in 2011, the improbable became possible. The fall of President Ben Ali and the beginning of the so-called "Arab Spring" changed the region's strategic framework. For all these reasons, I believe it is once again time to redefine Euro-Mediterranean relations. The aforementioned Arab Spring offers us a new opportunity, but, above all, it obliges us to thoroughly review past policy. It is time to consider a new framework of relations.

The newly re-earned "independence" of certain Arab countries, the revolutions in the countries of North Africa and the transformation of their societies, requires us to recognise the political legitimacy of the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Indeed, the main factor that once impeded the advancement and deepening of the Barcelona Process was the lack of democratic and political legitimacy of the southern countries. Today, however, this factor has changed, and for the first time we have valid and representative interlocutors. Consequently, we must approach the relations in a completely different way, both formally and substantively.

At the formal level, we must do away with the North's aspiration to lead, for it is the "South" that must define and offer its vision of the future of these relations. Thus, it would only be appropriate for the actors from North Africa and those with the greatest legitimacy to be the first to call for the reconstruction of the Euro-Mediterranean space. One potentially attractive idea that might fit with this new reality would be to call a "Euro-Mediterranean Convention."

The Tunisian authorities could call the convention, as it was Tunisia that had the strength and courage to illuminate the path to democracy and the end of authoritarian regimes. It would also mean wiping the slate clean and inviting all relevant actors to participate: politicians, members of parliament, civil society, businesspeople, NGOs, journalists, representatives from the world of culture and the arts, etc. The convention could last some six months and conclude with the adoption of a text establishing the main guidelines for the future of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The proposals could address political, security, economic, financial, social and human issues.

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A strong Euro-Mediterranean policy would open the door to support and action to resolve existing political crises: the conflict in the Middle East, the Western Sahara question, Cyprus, etc. It would moreover make it possible to address 21st-century security issues, such as the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, arms control and disarmament agreements, terrorism, organised crime, corruption, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, etc.

To promote and encourage the emergence of a shared area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean, it is more necessary than ever to engage in a multilateral political dialogue, aimed at producing verifiable progress in the areas of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the exchange of good practice in those spheres. In the wake of the “Arab Spring,” the Mediterranean can and should become a space of democratic integration and respect for the principles of the rule of law, regardless of how its various political, judicial, economic and socio-cultural systems are organised. We can make it a global model of respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity and the equal rights of peoples. We have the capacity to open the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership up to active participation by civil society and to

strengthen cooperation between regional and local authorities.

With regard to economic and financial issues, the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP) is not enough. Nor is expanding the powers of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), since, in my view, what is needed is a Mediterranean Bank, a separate financial institution with public and private capital and resources from the European Union, the United States of America, the Persian Gulf, China, Japan, etc. The new bank could be set up as a partnership rather than under the sole authority of Brussels. The interest of the EIB or EBRD is not enough: in all these years no firm decision was ever made regarding an operating structure to finance strategic projects in the region nor was financial cooperation increased. The six major projects forming the core of the UfM initiative (depollution of the sea, land and maritime highways, civil protection, the Mediterranean Solar Plan, a cooperation network for research and higher education, and business development) require not only dialogue and political will, but also financial support and the necessary and essential public-private cooperation, as a driving force for the new Euro-Mediterranean reality.

Financial stimulus is needed to effectively promote sustainable and balanced socioeconomic development that will allow us to achieve the goal of an “area of shared prosperity.” Progress on tax issues might enable the creation of a free trade area (FTA) that would gradually eliminate customs barriers to trade in manufactured goods. Free trade should be encouraged, customs laws and procedures should be harmonised, and questionable technical obstacles to trade in services and agricultural products should be removed. Modernising agriculture in the countries on the south shore would make it possible to promote complementarities in the primary sector and even explore the possibility of promoting a common agricultural policy, a Euro-Mediterranean CAP. The aspiration to create an FTA might also contribute to the real and effective consolidation of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). Much has been made of the “cost of the non-Maghreb,” and certainly politicians, diplomats and technical experts are aware that such a Union would promote development in the region and serve as a catalyst for positive change throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region and in the international community as a whole.

The Mediterranean Business Development Initiative

should be launched to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the strengthening of which is essential to job creation, social stability and economic integration, as well as to facilitating the transfer of technology and innovation. What was once an innovative UfM project is no less applicable today, as it would provide SMEs with crucial support, which would in turn have a clear impact on economic development in the South and on the empowerment of women within the make-up of the economic model of the Euro-Mediterranean region.

For this model to be sustainable and viable, the region must design an energy mix and strengthen multilateral cooperation in this area, and not just on fossil fuels. An “energy partnership” might be considered to promote clean energies and make this mix coherent. Thus, interest must be maintained in the Mediterranean Solar Plan and the creation and improvement of the power grids connecting the two shores. The plan set the goal of reaching 20 GW of new renewable energy production capacity in order to achieve 20% clean energy consumption and to reduce dependence on hydrocarbons and emissions. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation has the capacity to develop human resources in conditions of equality and to promote exchanges between civil societies and mutual understanding between cultures. Accordingly, the Barcelona Declaration took into consideration the importance of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, as well as the role of the media in knowledge and understanding of cultures. We must promote progress in this direction in order to implement the resulting mutual knowledge, which can be furthered through cultural exchanges, language learning and educational programmes that contribute to social development and respect for fundamental civil and social rights. To this end, we have the Alliance of Civilisations, its national plans, and

the programmes of agencies and foundations that, like UNESCO, Anna Lindh, Casa Árabe, Casa Mediterráneo, the IEMed or the Toledo International Centre for Peace, to name but a few, work to make the Mediterranean a place of knowledge, meeting and exchange.

Obstacles to the mobility of citizens may thwart the aspirations of the Euro-Mediterranean community, as they lead to mistrust and suspicion and encourage protectionist tendencies and exacerbate nationalism and radicalism. A great “mobility pact” should thus be sought in the Mediterranean and migratory flows must be managed efficiently and securely. Such a proposal was put forward on 10 and 11 July 2006 at the Euro-African Conference on Migration and Development in Rabat. The participants pledged to take a comprehensive approach to immigration that took into consideration the needs and concerns of sending, receiving and transit countries and that encompassed everything from the defence of human rights to the commitment to programmes for social and economic development. The co-sponsors of the conference, Morocco and Spain, believed that Europe and Africa had enough experience in migration and that it was time to find the delicate balance between mobility and security. Just as the European Union liberalised visas for researchers, businesspeople, students, artists, etc., from the East, the Euro-Mediterranean region should strive to reach an agreement that would enable the fluid transit of people.

The future of the Euro-Mediterranean region may be a faithful reflection of the geostrategic changes expected in the 21st century. Indeed, it is an open book from which we can learn the lessons of the past and in which we can record the present, with civic will and political determination, and imagine future pages devoted to collaboration and cohesion.