

# The Union for the Mediterranean: A New Paradigm Anchored in the Tradition of Barcelona

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The Mediterranean, a region marked by a deep economic asymmetry, has been an area prolific in forums, initiatives, and cooperative framework designed to unite efforts to confront those important challenges that need to be dealt with. All of these efforts are driven by a creativity arising from a geographical setting marked by vast socio-economic differences.

This was the creativity and the drive that prompted the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995, in a context that seemed to favour peace on a regional level. This Process already implied a change of paradigm in a strict sense, since it broke from the principles that had defined cooperation policies since the 1970s, substituting this economistic vision with a much wider approach and proposing, for the first time, a true Euro-Mediterranean Partnership that boldly confronts Mediterranean problems in all their dimensions and complexities.

Thus, the old dream of many began to take shape, and a model of multilateralism arose that considers the Mediterranean as a regional unit, not only in economic, but also political, cultural, and civil society terms. It is a unit that avoids homogeneity and respects differences and identities and it is based on a novel political document, clearly relevant today: the 1995 Barcelona Declaration.

As a pioneering initiative, it is worth underscoring the fact that the Barcelona Process has allowed an exceptional channel for permanent political dialogue in the region to remain open, in addition to providing a notable framework for regional cooperation in areas such as education, trade, industry and culture, in which the creativity of civil society, through multiple forums and platforms, has played an essential role.

In short, it was a novel paradigm, just as the Union for the Mediterranean is now.

## **The Union for the Mediterranean: A New Institutional Dimension Adapted to the Needs of the Mediterranean**

Without a doubt, the birth certificate of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has a concrete date: Paris, 13 July 2008. During the summit of Heads of State and Government of the 43 countries that form the UfM, the main lines of its institutional framework were agreed upon, and they were ratified at the conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Marseille a few months later, in November. While the Paris Declaration implied the doctrinal launch of this new phase in Euro-Mediterranean relations, the Marseille ministerial meeting meant putting into practice the principles of this new institutional framework.

Many important decisions were made in Paris and Marseille, perhaps the most visible of which being the name change, which reflects precisely this change of paradigm. We have gone from a political “process” to laying the foundations of a true “union,” hence the denomination “Union for the Mediterranean,” which reflects the existing consensus that a qualitative leap has been made in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, while maintaining continuity. Another important commitment made at the Marseille summit was a resolute vocation for plurality: we agreed on the participation of new Partners –Monaco, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina– and we incorporated the Arab League as an observer with full participation at all levels. At the same time, and in an effort to reinforce the multilateral dimension, we agreed upon the participation of other actors in Euro-Mediterranean relations. The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) was provided with

greater prominence with the aim that little by little it would acquire a more relevant role in the decision-making process. Likewise, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Mediterranean was created, which was very relevant since many of the decisions that are Euro-Mediterranean in scope should be put into practice by sub-national government bodies of a local and regional nature.

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This plurality was reinforced by a strong bid for co-appropriation through a biannual system of co-presidencies, which in the first term have gone to France, for the northern side, and Egypt, in the south, an innovative factor that balances both shores, even more so at the institutional level. Likewise, the launch of a system of biannual summits of Heads of State and Government was agreed upon, and the second one (the third Euro-Mediterranean one) will take place in 2010 under the Spanish Presidency of the EU.

The system of co-presidencies is not the only organizational innovation; a true institutional structure was also created, in which the Secretariat, which is meant to play a key role and shall be based in Barcelona, is especially noteworthy. We are working very hard and dedicatedly to achieve this, because Spain has a clear calling to leadership in the Union for the Mediterranean. This foreign policy achievement is also an achievement for the coordinated action between the Spanish Government, the autonomous government of Catalonia, and the city of Barcelona, each making fundamental contributions within its own sphere of responsibility.

In the strictly political dimension, now more than ever it is necessary to return our sights to the Conference that less than a year ago united in Paris the Heads of State and Government of 43 countries and to the achievements made subsequently in Marseille, where a rapprochement of positions between Arabs and Israelis was reached. There, in

Marseille, only a month before the Gaza crisis broke out, a consensus formula was obtained and many differences were overcome. Especially important was the presence of Syria at the Paris summit, which, as we have seen, has evolved towards a normalization process in its foreign projection, and the fact that Israel accepted that the final declaration of Marseille mentioned the “importance of the Arab peace initiative” as a base for future negotiations. Many consider this a historic gesture, and it was truly stimulating to see an Israeli delegate extend his hand towards his Arab and Palestinian neighbours for peace.

Nevertheless, we must highlight the difficult political context in which we find ourselves in 2009 in the Mediterranean region, which has weighed down the beginnings of this new stage: in the Mediterranean setting, the terrible news from Gaza on 27 December 2008 was received with much concern and deep discouragement. The echoes from Gaza are still being heard and, as in all conflicts of such magnitude, they should continue to be heard for one main reason: so that the resonance of its harshness keeps it from happening again. We know that sensitivities run skin-deep and that it has become difficult to continue the efforts for institutional coordination and project promotion. However, there is too much at stake. And even though the advance towards Mediterranean integration has been affected by these regrettable events, we must avoid its interruption at all costs, multiplying our efforts in favour of peace in this and other forums.

Our message is clear and emphatic in the current circumstances: we understand the Arab sensitivity that has been translated into a halt of work meetings of the Union for the Mediterranean for practically half of the first semester of 2009; however, we think that it is not a time for closing doors but for keeping open the ones that already exist. That is why the Government of Spain has carried out an important effort in connection with the Gaza crisis, proportional to our degree of involvement in the UfM: we have committed more than 180 million euros for the next two years for reconstruction in Palestine in the framework of last March's Sharm el-Sheikh conference, subject to the formation of a Palestinian government of National Unity, a government capable, additionally, of directing reconstruction funds in Gaza. Palestinian reconciliation cannot wait, because the perpetuation of differences moves the possibility of creating a Palestinian state further and further away.

## **The Central Role of the Permanent Secretariat**

I could not fail to mention one of the main successes of this new phase, the permanent Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, promoted in spite of the difficulties previously indicated. Having given such a politically divided region a common institution with a deeply inclusive vocation is a significant success.

The permanent Secretariat is born precisely from the clear need for providing a Partnership of this magnitude with a common institution to promote and centralize its initiatives in order to make them concrete and visible. It was a demand already existing in our Partnership and expressed by the President of Spain at the 10th Anniversary Summit celebrated in Barcelona in 2005, which has crystallized with the Union for the Mediterranean.

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We are enormously pleased at the selection of Barcelona, a true Euro-Mediterranean capital, as the seat of this institution, but the more intense task of investing most of our efforts in guaranteeing its effectiveness is yet to come. It is a key factor for the good development of the UfM, as the success and strength of this new phase of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership will depend to a very high degree on the roots and strength of its Secretariat.

We must make an effort to build a representative, cohesive, proactive, executive and transparent Secretariat. The Secretariat has the important mission of making the UfM visible to its citizens by means of proposing and coordinating concrete projects that benefit Euro-Mediterranean societies in practice. Everyone, i.e. Spanish institutions –especially the Ministry that I represent, but also the rest of the ministries linked with UfM projects, Autonomous Communities and local governments–, EU Member States, southern Partner Countries, civil societies, the different forums and so on, must move in the

same direction. They all must grant a clear and manifest vote of confidence in favour of this Secretariat, a true bid in favour of a much more cohesive Mediterranean.

In an international context such as the current one, where the media plays such an important role and in which, on too many occasions, differences are stressed instead of emphasizing what unites us, I cannot fail to point out the symbolic importance of this Secretariat, from its legal nature as a common institution –in a deeply divided and conflictive region– to the very plurality of its composition, as it will be located in Europe, with a Secretary General from one of our southern partners, and with six Deputy Secretary Generals, one Palestinian and another Israeli, working side by side for the construction of a common future.

## **The Importance of the Projects and Their Relationship with the Secretariat**

At the June 2008 Paris summit six projects with which the UfM will be launched were approved. All six initiatives are of great importance for development in different fields: the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative, the Mediterranean Solar Plan, Development of Maritime and Land Highways, the Euro-Mediterranean University, the UfM Civil Protection Project and the De-pollution of the Mediterranean Project. These projects join those promoted by the European Commission since 1995 within the framework of the Barcelona Process and those developed within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the bilateral Action Plans.

The role of the Secretariat takes on great significance in connection with these initiatives. It will focus on identifying, seeking financing for, and monitoring Euro-Mediterranean projects, which can come from all fields, mainly the private sector, but without ruling out civil society or national and regional authorities. That is, partners can choose or propose the projects that are most suitable to their interests or specific development needs. Everyone, however, must abide by some common parameters of promotion of economic integration, interconnection of infrastructures, and social cohesion in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Spain has been the driving force behind the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative, along with Italy. It is a joint project giving support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) whose

objective is to encourage the creation of employment in Mediterranean Partner Countries, as well as to contribute social stability and economic integration of both shores of the Mediterranean, and to facilitate technological transfer. This initiative is, if such a thing is possible, even timelier in the current context of crisis, since SMEs and micro-enterprises represent the economic and social backbone of the region.

The Mediterranean Solar Plan is the other project to which Spain can make significant contributions due to the world leadership of our industry with regard to renewable energies. The Plan aims to boost the production of solar energy in North Africa through the assembly of solar thermal plants using European technology, from which both shores shall benefit in terms of the importation of clean energy, creation of jobs and transfer of technology.

Of course, all these projects will be developed in a manner parallel to the Euro-Mediterranean programmes that the Commission has administered since 1995, within the framework of the Partnership's four baskets: the Political and Security Basket, the Economic and Financial Basket, the Social and Cultural Basket, and the Liberty, Security and Justice Basket.

Working together, all of us lend the Foundation a renewed, reinforced magnitude in line with the challenges faced by the Euro-Mediterranean region, two of the biggest of which lie in the spheres of education and socio-cultural dialogue. The Foundation played a prominent role at the meeting of the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, which took place in Istanbul last April, and it is becoming consolidated as a pillar for meetings and as an opinion leader in Euro-Mediterranean relations, maintaining bridges of dialogue open even in the most adverse situations. With the inclusion of new members into the Union for the Mediterranean, the Foundation will be able to spread its activities to other geographical areas, making the most of the new Triennial Programme. The ALF intends to become an institution of reference for the UfM, acting primarily in the following fields: ideas and ideologies; education; cultural production; the media; religion, spirituality and values; and cities and diversity. It is important to emphasize as well the launch of the Observatory for Intercultural Trends, whose main goal is to improve mutual perceptions between the two shores, contributing to building up this institution as a centre of observation, analysis, and recommendation within the third basket of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

### **The Importance of the Socio-Cultural Dimension: The Anna Lindh Foundation**

I believe that the socio-cultural and educational dimensions of the Union for the Mediterranean, spheres that both represent a challenge of the first order in the Mediterranean, deserve a special mention. In this context the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures (ALF), which entered its second period of activity in 2009 –closing the temporary internal structural adjustment stage–, and which has emerged as a focal point of the Alliance of Civilizations in the Mediterranean, has become particularly important.

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### **Mediterranean Challenges for the Spanish Presidency of the EU**

In the first semester of 2010, Spain will take up the Presidency of the European Union. Hence, at the moment we are now deeply involved in developing our priorities for that period in a region that was, is, and will be a priority in our foreign policy. The coming year will be a decisive one, since the second summit of the Union for the Mediterranean will take place, during which the UfM's biannual work plan will have to be established, the one approved in 2005 having expired, and the permanent Secretariat will demonstrate its full operational capacity. This work programme will include action in the four areas of the former Barcelona Process (political and security, economic-cultural, socio-cultural, and justice and emigration) and will be fuelled by the different initiatives adopted in the sectoral ministerial meetings taking place during the last EU Presidencies, particularly the Swedish one. We face a series of challenges in different subjects. Regarding the creation of the Free Trade Area (FTA), as is well known, in 1995 the year 2010 was estab-

lished as the “target” date for the creation of a Euromed Free Trade Area, one of the pillars of our Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Despite the fact that next year we will still not have a complete free trade area, neither in sectoral coverage nor in geographical terms, we will probably have a finalized network of Association Agreements with the inclusion of Syria, which will contribute to our aspiration of strengthening north-south trade and initiating new and more powerful Association Agreements. All of this aims to lay the foundations for balanced south-south relations. Under the Spanish Presidency, the 2010 Trade Roadmap or a possible New Future Agenda (roadmap beyond 2010) will surely be established, the progress made in this field being consolidated in any case.

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In the socio-cultural basket, we will incorporate as horizontal priorities first order challenges for the Euro-Mediterranean region, in particular culture, the role of women in society, education and research, work and social security. Additionally, just as the President of Spain stated last June in his speech on the major Spanish foreign policy lines, we have begun work so that Euro-Mediterranean Charters for Food Security and Education may take shape by 2010.

Finally, the Summit will provide a magnificent opportunity to analyze how the Secretariat's early stage is going and the implementation of the projects that we undertook two years earlier at the Paris summit, fostering their development through viability studies and agreements with participating countries, increasing their financial backing and possibly introducing new initiatives.

### **Conclusion: A New Paradigm Anchored in the Tradition of Barcelona**

In conclusion, and in reference to the title of this monograph on the Mediterranean, the Union for the Mediterranean emerges as a new paradigm to strengthen Euro-Mediterranean relations, with a new practical and institutional dimension, following the launch of the Secretariat and innovative projects in six strategic areas.

This new stage of relations between both shores is not free from complexity and its rate can be slow in such a difficult regional situation, both politically and economically speaking. But it is precisely the strength of the consensus and of the co-appropriation that will permit us to overcome the difficulties and thoroughly deal with those matters that are of interest to both shores. Consensus, co-appropriation, and multilateralism are all words that refer to the Union for the Mediterranean. We must simply get to work on defining an agenda of challenges and common priorities allowing us to unite forces and define a joint agenda for the coming years that will meet the demands and priorities of the Euro-Mediterranean societies.