

Union for the Mediterranean: Challenges and Ambitions

Keys

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The Difficult Political Context of a Convulsive Beginning

After the convulsion caused by the French proposal to create a Mediterranean Union isolated from the Barcelona Process (Toulon speech, February 2007), the year 2008 ended with the sensation that the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) would result in a strengthened Barcelona Process that was to provide new impetus to Euro-Mediterranean relations in regional development (Marseille Declaration, November 2008), characterised by a commitment to greater pragmatism, greater realism and greater visibility.

The challenge was significant, as it involved setting into motion a new management structure with new institutions, including a co-presidency representing the EU and the Mediterranean Member Countries. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU Presidency comprises the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission (at the Heads of State and Government level), the High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission (at the Foreign Affairs Minister level) and the rotating Presidency held by the respective Member Country, which presides over the General Affairs Council and Ministerial sectoral meetings. Attending them as a permanent organ is a Committee of Senior Officials, which at a political level forms a key component of the new Euro-Mediterranean institution. The

two-biannual summits must decide on the strategic policy. A new Secretariat, based in Barcelona, will be coordinated with the co-presidency and provide support to UfM tasks.

Moreover, 2009 was not an easy year for the UfM, which saw its institutional development slowed down on more than one occasion due to the difficult political circumstances.

Two major events had a very important bearing on the proper development of the UfM during 2009: the persistence of major conflicts in the region and the global economic and financial crisis.

Firstly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict paralysed the process for a large part of 2009. After the UfM summit held in Paris in July 2008, in which the Arab League participated as observer, the aim of the associated Arab Mediterranean Countries was that the Arab League be granted observer status at all Euro-Mediterranean meetings (and not only at biannual summits). Israeli opposition to this proposal paralysed the progress of the UfM for several months; all Euro-Med Committee meetings, Senior Officials' meetings and Ministerial meetings were cancelled or postponed. The situation was finally resolved by an agreement reached at the Ministerial Conference of Marseille in November, in which the Arab League was invited to attend all the meetings as a permanent observer.¹ However, the subsequent Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip that took place between December 2008 and January 2009 once again blocked the normal functioning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the application of the decisions adopted in relation to the UfM. The outcome of the general elections in Israel and the new coalition government formed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has certainly not

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¹ "Ministers decide that the League of Arab States shall participate in all meetings at all levels of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, therefore contributing positively to the objectives of the process, namely the achievement of peace, prosperity and stability in the Mediterranean region." Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference – Final Declaration, 4 November 2008.

contributed to improving the climate or the situation. The economic and financial crisis has also had major effects on the development of the UfM. During the whole founding period, the UfM project has been seriously affected by the restrictive budgetary policies of all the States and institutions involved.

As a consequence, during the first half of 2009, Euro-Mediterranean activity was practically at a standstill. Work was not resumed until 25 June, when the first UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development was held in Paris and July 2009, when a meeting of Economy and Finance Ministers took place. Thus the impasse in UfM deployment was overcome and it was given the boost it needed to become operative. In this regard, the appointment of Ahmad Masa'deh as General Secretary of the UfM was an important, symbolic step forward. Still remaining on the agenda, however, were the approval of the Secretariat's statutes and the budget, and the appointment of the assistant general secretaries, essential decisions for the Secretariat to be able to begin operating.

The Lisbon Treaty and Spanish Presidency Enter into Force; The Resumption of the UfM's Institutional Process

Although the European Union is one of the main world economic players, this leadership role does not have the same bearing in the political sphere. The European Union does not speak in a single voice within international organisations due to the fact that the States have not yet been capable of ceding their sovereignty in this and so many other aspects but rather manage their national policy independently. This tension between the development of EU supra-nationality in new areas and the resistance to cede any degree of sovereignty by the Member States typifies the evolution of the EU. European policy towards the Mediterranean is no exception to this phenomenon. The Lisbon Treaty that came into force on the 1 December 2009 represents a major step forward in the process of European construction. After eight years of debate on what should be included in the text, the Treaty enables progress towards a true European Union with a high level of supra-nationality, with more responsibilities and sovereignty transferred to the level of the Union.

As regards external relations, one of the weak points that has always been attacked by the euroskeptics,

Lisbon means the European Union should equip itself with the instruments to become a global player. It will then have the bodies and institutions suitable for devising and conducting its common foreign policy efficiently and reliably.

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Lisbon represents important changes regarding European foreign action. The first and most obvious is the creation of a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.. The High Representative, a post currently occupied by the British politician, Catherine Ashton, directs what could be called the European Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has both a political dimension with decision-making powers (Foreign Affairs Council) and an executive dimension. The latter aspect is exemplified by the new European External Action Service, made up of officials from the European Commission, the European Council and EU Member States. At the same time, delegations of the European Union (formerly of the Commission) are being given a greater role, becoming embassies of the European Union in third countries. Finally, the Treaty also provides the general lines for the future European Defence Agency. Without the development of a truly European defence policy, however, it will likely be difficult to develop an efficient common foreign policy and therefore, the former will set the pace for the latter. The EU position on the Middle East is an obvious example.

In the context of the UfM we could say that, just as the Lisbon Treaty opens the way to a new stage in the process of European integration, so the Union for the Mediterranean sets about applying a model of multilateralism that contemplates the Euro-Mediterranean space as a regional unit in not only the economic framework, but also the political, cultural and civil society setting. Metaphorically speaking, the change of name from European Partnership or Association to Union for the Mediterranean also represents a change in paradigm: we have gone from a political process based on cooperation among partners to laying the foundations of a Union that has the

ambition of creating a progressive process of integration. Thus, the journey that had been started with each partner bilaterally through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2005 becomes a journey in the multilateral or Euro-Mediterranean regional sphere. The UfM is also endowed with a true institutional structure in its permanent Secretariat, which maintains continuity and proposes and then undertakes the projects decided by the summits and ministerial conferences. The Secretariat also has the crucial task of making the UfM more visible to the public.

The Declaration of Marseille establishes that “From the EU side, the co-presidency must be compatible with the external representation of the European Union in accordance with the Treaty provisions in force.”² However, we find ourselves in the situation, by virtue of the Lisbon Treaty, whereby the length of the Presidency is of two and a half years. On the other hand, in accordance with the text of the Marseille Declaration, the co-president of the Mediterranean countries will be appointed by consensus for a period of two years. These differences in duration of office and condition (election as opposed to appointment by consensus) may be an obstacle in the decision-making process. Moreover, as we will see, the functions of the co-presidencies must be clearly defined along with their links to the EU Presidencies and the European Foreign Affairs Council.

By the same token, the functions and complementary aspects of the UfM Secretariat and the European Commission must be fully defined. What seems clear is that the Commission will continue to play a leading role in bilateral relations with Mediterranean Partner Countries through the pre-accession and accession negotiations, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the related financial instruments. As we see, however, the European Commission will have to maintain a very active role in the Mediterranean Region in collaboration with the UfM Secretariat.

On 1 January 2010, Spain took on the EU Council Presidency for the fourth time at a critical point in the European integration project, with the great responsibility of setting the Lisbon Treaty into motion. The Presidency considered four main objectives: economic recovery; carrying out the Lisbon Treaty; Social Europe; and finally, strengthening European Union Foreign Policy in order to make Europe a real global player, actively participating in the shaping of the new

model of world governance and efficiently responding to current opportunities and challenges.

The launching of the UfM Secretariat in Barcelona and the passing of its statutes was also considered a fundamental task by the Spanish Presidency; the Secretariat is essential not only for the institutionalisation and visibility of the UfM, but also for promoting the implementation and financing of the six projects approved.

Advantages and Challenges of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in the New Stage

The UfM Proposal:

A New Benchmark for the Mediterranean?

The creation of the UfM, mainly as a result of the impetus of the French Presidency, has entailed certain changes in the nature and functioning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. As is well known, the original French approach was based on a re-nationalisation of European Mediterranean policy, in excluding the non-coastal European countries and the European Union as such, and in the application of a gradualist or “functionalist” method, inspired by the very beginnings of the European construction beginning in 1948 with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) as per the proposals of Jean Monnet and the other “founding fathers”. In the case of the Mediterranean Union proposal, this “functionalist” approach involved avoiding political problems that may bring confrontation and focusing on several major projects that would be practical, useful to people and highly visible, and would generate the desired “de facto solidarity” that in turn would boost new stages of integration in the future.

As is also well known, the entire Mediterranean Union approach as proposed by President N. Sarkozy was deeply amended. Firstly, at the proposal of the main desired partners – Spain and Italy – at a tripartite summit in Rome on 20 December 2007, the project was renamed “Union for the Mediterranean” in order to tone down the original ambition of eradicating and replacing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and to initiate its accommodation to the whole Acquis and experience accumulated since 1995. Later, the other EU Member States, and in

² Marseille Declaration, available at: http://ue2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/import/1103_ministerielle_Euromed/Final_Statement_Mediterranean_Union_EN.pdf

particular German Chancellor Angela Merkel, eventually convinced president Sarkozy that the UfM could not exclude other Europeans or the EU itself. At their meeting in Hannover on the 3 March 2008, the German Chancellor and the French President finally agreed that a new political Union that would exclude the European Union could not be established by EU Members; that the new project had to be a project of the entire EU; that EU funds could not be used to finance projects that were not EU projects and; above all else, that it would be very dangerous, according to Chancellor Merkel herself, to have two separate zones of influence, leaving the Mediterranean for France and having Germany focus on Eastern Europe. This could open up a fissure in Europe and give tacit support to the continent's old familiar demons. At its summit on 14 March 2008, the European Council definitively adopted the Franco-German agreement – following Chancellor Merkel's demands but accepting the French proposals as well – to create a new model, now renamed "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean", with a North-South co-presidency and a Permanent Secretariat. This is precisely what was done at the Paris Summit, the founding meeting of the UfM, on 13 July 2008, and at the first Euromed Ministerial meeting in Marseille on 3 and 4 November.

The Risk of a Depoliticised Union of Projects: Where Are the Reforms?

The outcome of this whole process is that the UfM is the continuation of the Barcelona Process in its multilateral dimension – since the dimension of bilateral relations with each partner country through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was not taken up by the UfM – with the addition of the large projects and new institutions "dimension", particularly the Secretariat. However, there is now also a strong tendency to dismiss conditionality as a basic Partnership trait according to the political principles and values that had informed the Barcelona Process since 1995, and a strong tendency by the EU Member States towards re-nationalisation of what, as the Barcelona Process, had been a European Union policy directed by ministerial conferences and executed by the Commission.

The establishment of major multilateral Mediterranean regional projects – in fact, major programmes – has the advantage of lending the Partnership greater visibility, as well as greater pragmatism.

It involves doing things that are visible, tangible, and useful to people and therefore of interest to public opinion. These projects – such as motorway or port infrastructures, the development of alternative energy, the de-pollution of the Mediterranean and a sustainable environment, civil protection, higher education and research, or boosting the economy by providing support for small and medium-sized enterprise – have the potential to make a great impact on economic development in the area and would facilitate the exchange and movement of people and goods, thus increasing integration de facto throughout the region.

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However, this increased pragmatism and functional focus may lead to relegating political matters "that are not practical," i.e., that cannot be seen and therefore do not interest the public. In the project of construction of the European Union that is intended to serve as an example, democratic ideals and conditionality were central and have continued to be so for over sixty years, both in the deepening of European integration and in its enlargement by the acceptance of new members. The starting point had been the negative European experiences from the period when these values had been lacking and oppression and terrible confrontations prevailed on the European continent, which had dragged the entire world into war. Democratic values and human rights have always been a cornerstone of European construction since the first proposals back in 1945; in the treaties, in the legal mechanisms and in the criteria of requirements for countries wishing to join the club. And this had also been the case with the Barcelona Process beginning in 1995.

Starting with the Final Declaration of Barcelona in 1995, it was clear that the project being undertaken was that of fostering the modernisation of Mediterranean countries through their association with Europe and their inclusion in an area of progress, stability and prevalence of democratic values and societies, inspired and encouraged by the success of Euro-

pean Union construction since 1948. This insistence on democratic values and conditionality appears repeatedly in the Final Declaration of Barcelona and in the Association Agreements established with each country, particularly in Article 2, identical in each Agreement and cited at every Association Council with each country, as well as holding sway in the design and management of the cooperation projects included in the respective Action Plans.

Democracy and human rights are not just a pretty principle in which to believe, but the key and fundamental ingredient for good governance, both economically and politically speaking, and for the progress of countries, as well as constituting the best foundation for their peaceful coexistence. This is why it is so important, at this new stage of the Barcelona Process that the UfM represents, that the focus on the “project dimension” not relegate the importance and need for reforms of institutions and of the policies applied in the Mediterranean countries; reforms for which technical assistance and European funding is available to southern Mediterranean countries; indeed, reforms that are the same as those applied in the northern Mediterranean countries as the basis of their progress through adaptation to the *acquis communautaire* in their accession process.

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The excess desire for pragmatism and exaggerated focus on the “project dimension,” has led to the final selection of six major projects approved by the UfM Summit in Paris precisely relegating the major issues of Euro-Mediterranean integration, despite expressing the wish to build a Union. There is a risk that, obsessed with the major projects, we forget the global vision of the Partnership, with all the issues included in the three classical baskets of politics, economics and intercultural dialogue, and in the fourth basket, of migrations, justice and home affairs, added in 2005.

The Risks of Inter-Governmentalism: The UfM – a European Union and Euro-Mediterranean Project

As well as the excessive pragmatism of the projects dimension, the other major danger of the dynamic introduced by the new institutional organisation of the UfM is inter-governmentalism.

This inter-governmentalist risk can primarily be ascribed to the following factors:

- a) The major new role assigned to summits, which are extremely useful for furthering items on the agenda but which also lend great visibility, above all, to the Presidencies and Heads of State and Government. The latter represent the national governments and their countries in an eminent, symbolic manner, in the North in detriment to their representation of the EU, and in both North and South, in detriment to the role they should assume as leaders and representatives of the UfM itself. Representing the community and community interests, both European (EU) and Euro-Mediterranean (UfM), remains very much in the background. Also contributing to this factor is the rather irrelevant role played by the Commission and the new EU permanent presidencies in this first stage of the UfM.
- b) The classic Barcelona Process was an association based on the policy of EU Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The presidency was then held by the rotating European Council Presidency and its permanent body was in fact the European Commission, which prepared and developed the proposals, funded the projects and negotiated, if necessary, with the associated countries. This continued beyond the classic Barcelona Process when a bilateral branch of its own was developed as from 2005 through the ENP. The latter is implemented by applying the Treaties of Association, which themselves emerged from the Barcelona Process, in order to deepen the EU’s bilateral relations with each country. This greater bilateralism of the ENP responded to the need to avoid the impact of the difficulties of south-south integration on the Partnership and enable progress through cooperation with the individual countries despite the traditional antagonism that had prevented the signing and implementation of general Euro-Mediterranean agreements jointly with all the Mediterranean Partner Countries, with mutual South-South concessions, as the EU Member States did amongst themselves. Simply con-

sider the difficulties in progressing in the construction of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), which have not been surmounted to date although the AMU is the most advanced example of a South-South integration project.

It should again be emphasised that, for Europe, the ENP is an EU policy, even more so than the Barcelona Process during its classical period prior to 2005. In any case, both before and after the deployment of the ENP, the presidency of the Barcelona Process was carried out as a European Union Presidency and as Presidency of the Partnership, and the policies envisaged were in application of EU responsibilities as exercised by the Commission, particularly in Trade and Development Cooperation Policies. With the UfM this entire model has been turned inverted, in the first place in order to rebalance the Partnership in favour of the South, with the North-South Co-Presidency system. This means that a country from the South, to date Egypt, acts as co-president representing the countries of the South. However, the lack of reflexes and community awareness as developed within the EU for sixty years, the very lack of a community or union of the southern countries, means that the southern co-presidency constantly displays the tendency to behave and exercise its duties according to its national vision and interests.

- c) On the other hand, in the North, the European Co-Presidency, to date France, is heir to an original project (the Mediterranean Union) of a much more French nationalist nature. This stance continues impregnating, even unconsciously, its approach and proposals. The inter-governmental nature of the UfM developed even more when the French co-presidency continued in place after the half-year term of the French EU Presidency expired at the end of 2008, in contradiction to the stipulations established in the Final Declarations of Paris and Marseille. The French UfM Co-Presidency has replaced the role expected to be played by the subsequent EU Presidencies, first the Czech EU Presidency and then the Swedish one, and, the post-Lisbon stage beginning with this status-quo situation, replacing the Spanish Presidency as well. And since the ministerial conference and above all the summit planned for June 2010 in Barcelona have been postponed, the French-Egyptian Co-Presidency continues, at least until the summit, now scheduled for Novem-

ber. Clearly, France no longer occupies the EU Presidency and it is therefore obvious that, although France as the UfM Co-President can represent the European countries, it is much less clear that it is representing the European Union as such. The EU institutions – the rotating Presidency, the permanent Presidency and the Commission – provide support to the French UfM Presidency, but to date without much “verve”. A much greater trend towards “de-European Unionization” or re-nationalisation of European positions and policies in the UfM is emerging.

There is therefore a great need to reorganize the office of the Northern UfM Co-Presidency once the Lisbon Treaty enters into force. The Northern Co-Presidency of the UfM must effectively take on the role of representative of the EU, more than that of the individual Member States and in particular more than that of its own point of view. What the UfM needs from the EU is, above all, the contribution of policies and budgets that are from the European Union and not its Member States. The same should be ensured for the Southern Co-Presidency, which should represent the common interests of the Southern UfM Countries rather than their own point of view and national interest.

For a Partnership of the EU and the “South”

If we do not want the Partnership to lose strength and become distorted, its “Euromed” nature must be preserved, that is to say the Partnership of the European Union and its Member States with the Mediterranean Partner Countries, which now include the new UfM countries from the Balkans: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania; as well as Monaco and Mauritania. This major enlargement with (for the time being) Non-EU European countries tends to dilute the EU nature of the Northern Co-Presidency because it would seem that, as they are European, the “Northern” Presidency should represent them as well. For this reason it must be stressed that, as it stands today, they are Mediterranean Partner Countries and it is fallacious to speak of “northern” and “southern” co-presidencies. These terms imply inappropriately designating the Balkan countries as southern countries, just as Cyprus and Malta were not in their turn, nor is Turkey (for the time being, as it is a candidate for accession to the EU), a country clearly located on the north coast of the Mediterranean.

If the Euromed nature were not preserved, if the Partnership, now the UfM, were to lose its nature of pact between the European Union and its Member States on the one hand, and the Mediterranean Partner Countries on the other hand, we would enter a scenario different to that of the “Euromed” Partnership. Similar to President Sarkozy’s wishes from the start, we would be returning to an intergovernmental model where the “northern” party would consist of the European countries, whether EU members or not, and the southern party, the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries, including Turkey, with EU institutions having a merely residual presence. Furthermore, it is not just a question of money, which is important enough considering the EC and the EIB, but also a matter of the very nature of the project. With the treaties in force, arising from the Barcelona Process, we are offering the Partner Countries integration into the European Economic Area by means of their progressive adaptation to the EU *acquis*. And this must apply to both the ENP and the UfM, the two current branches of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership that are continuing the Barcelona Process. If the UfM loses its EU nature in the North, it will have lost the essence of its potential, unless it wishes to simply be a structure furthering a series of specific applied projects; in this case, the Partnership would continue evolving outside of the UfM, through the ENP and its future developments. Indeed, one of the major risks of the UfM is now the *disengagement* of EU institutions, in particular the European Commission. In the classical Barcelona Process the role of the EU Presidency and European Commission was essential. The Commission negotiated the ENP with the countries (and continues to do so), controlled the MEDA Committee and funded the projects. Now the Commission participates only marginally in the UfM (as just another institution?) and therefore also finances only marginally, providing strictly limited funds. The EC must play the role pertaining to it if the UfM is to be for Europe a Union policy to which it must contribute its responsibilities, which Member States have ceded it, its management and its budget. Otherwise, what would become marginal would be the UfM and the only important Euro-Mediterranean policy would be the ENP, although this is not very visible from Europe because the programmes and the projects of the ENP are carried out on site in the Partner Countries according to the agreements embodied in the respective Action Plans. It must be kept in mind that what clearly interests the southern countries is the relationship with the EU

rather than with a UfM that does not represent them or, in fact, the governments of member countries. Within the EU, it is the Commission and not the national governments that holds the competences of trade policy and, increasingly, of the regulatory framework that informs everything that interests the Southern Mediterranean Countries insofar as product certification, investment, migration, remittances, visas, tourism, fisheries, etc., regardless of the fact that the Member States then implement the policies. It should also be kept in mind that there is a growing tendency among EU countries to “European-Unionize” the policies when problems actually arise, in order to have a single, stronger voice *vis-à-vis* the southern countries. This has been the case in issues relating to fisheries, immigration control, national security, etc. Within the EU, there are therefore forces at work operating in favour of re-nationalisation and others in favour of “EU-isation” of different policies.

Finally, there is a curious matter, contradictory to a certain extent, about the UfM project. It is a multilateral project that focuses on several major projects. However, the projects must be carried out somewhere, except for cleanup operations on the high seas, and in this regard, will have to be agreed and carried out with each government concerned. All the more so if the funding is above all via loans from the EIB or other international financial institutions; there will clearly have to be someone – the “owner” of the project – with whom to negotiate and agree on the project, a party that will take out the loan and commit to return it, regardless of how much of concession the loan may be. This is why it would be difficult for the UfM to further pure “multilateral” projects based on loans, projects that would simultaneously be singular and multilateral in nature. On the other hand, if projects in a country are undertaken via donated funds from the EU (which means the Commission), it seems this would have to be carried out through the ENP, to be mutually established by the Commission as donator and the government of the recipient Partner Country and to be included in the respective Action Plan. Hence, it is an urgent priority to clarify how the UfM projects are to be negotiated and financed. In any case, it seems the European Commission will have a major role to play.

Attaining a Greater North-South Balance in the Association

One of the major advantages claimed by the UfM is that of offering a greater North-South balance, guar-

anteed precisely by the system of co-presidency as applied at summits and in the UfM associated bodies. However, this major advantage also entails some major risks.

The UfM is a truly ambitious project, but it must be coherent and realistic if the declared aims are to result in positive results and not frustrated expectations

First of all, there is indeed a rebalance of power in the UfM insofar as the southern countries have been granted equal power, which is indeed positive. Given that the key to the whole Euromed project to achieve the modernisation and progress of the associated countries is to achieve the effective application of reform policies and the modernisation of their economic, social and political institutions, it does not seem clear that these policies can be the priority of relatively or wholly undemocratic governments, whose first priority is not reform but the perpetuation of power.

Since these governments generally are indeed interested in economic progress, as long as it strengthens and does not threaten their stability, the conclusion is that reform policy will be limited and, by the same token, inefficient for producing a Rule of Law, attracting investment, creating employment and development, etc.

Secondly, the greater power of the governments of the South, which they had not requested for precisely this reason, makes the whole Process, now the UfM, much more hostage to the conflicts in the area and in particular the conflict in the Middle East. The taking of tough positions by Arab governments against Israel has always been one of the few sources of their much-sought after legitimacy.

In a much more intergovernmental model such as the UfM, both the Southern Co-Presidency and the other Partner Countries of the South, now with power to block the mechanism, can do nothing other than block it to express rejection of specific Israel actions. The problem lies, now and in the past, in that the southern countries are the beneficiaries of the entire Partnership exercise, which exists precisely for this reason, i.e. to help them. Therefore, the exercising of their main power, blocking, is detrimental to the south-

ern countries themselves and not the European ones. At the same time, it does notably strengthen regimes and governments in power before public opinion in their respective countries, deeply moved, and with much reason, by the situation of their Palestinian brothers.

Conclusions

It can be concluded, at this foundational stage of the UfM, that anything is possible, whether it be the progress or the regression of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The launching of the UfM project, although confusing and contradictory in many points, has entailed greater political projection of Euro-Mediterranean relations. During the first stage of the launch in 2008 in Paris and in Marseille, its geographic scope and nature were clearly established. It was clearly stipulated that it comprised all the EU Member States, in addition to the Partner Countries, whose number increased, and that the nature of the project was that of the authentic continuation of the Barcelona Process, in the sense that, for the Europeans, it had to be an EU policy, which is the fundamental competence of the European Commission. It was also made clear that what was being done with the UfM was to strengthen the institutional structure of the project, with biannual summits and the General Secretariat, and to strengthen the content and visibility of the multilateral dimension of the Partnership through the new "major projects" dimension.

The UfM is a truly ambitious project, but it must be coherent and realistic if the declared aims are to result in positive results and not frustrated expectations. In this regard, the first major contradiction, in principle now overcome, was that of wanting to build a (Mediterranean) Union among countries having no diplomatic relations between them, as in the case of all the Arab countries with Israel, except for Jordan, Egypt and Mauritania. Moreover, some of them are still technically, legally, at war with Israel, with whom they have not signed a peace treaty, such as Syria and Lebanon, who also have part of their territory occupied militarily. It was already a miracle, an exception on the international stage, that this did not impede the functioning of the Barcelona Process, the only sphere where Arab and Israeli delegations met regularly outside the United Nations. The Barcelona Process did not stop working during the invasion and destruction of the south of Lebanon or during

any other time of the crisis. The attempt to move on from a Process to a Union among countries that do not have diplomatic relations was truly an excess of ambition that was lacking in coherence and knowledge of the real situation. The UfM will now need to deal skilfully and flexibly to overcome with this inconvenience by lending a great deal of autonomy to the Secretariat, whose mandate and work should be fundamentally technical, and there will also need to be a much deeper involvement by all the parties, especially the EU, in advancing the peace process in the Middle East.

In addition to this prerequisite, now that the General Secretariat is getting settled in Barcelona, certain important points of the UfM's institutional organisation that affect different aspects must be clarified.

Objectives: What Are the UfM's Main Objectives?

In Paris and Marseille it was repeatedly stated, at the insistence of all the delegations, that the main objectives of the UfM were those of the Barcelona Process, upon whose principles and legacy the new stage had to be built. However, it is not congruent to say that the main objectives are those of the Barcelona Process and then adopt a list of applied projects of a fundamentally economic nature that marginalise the major themes of the first and third basket of the Barcelona Process. Moreover, in the second basket, there is a risk of focussing too much on applied projects and too little on economic policies and institutions.

- With regard to the first main objective – building an area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean – there is a lack, as was always the case, of a stronger positioning of the UfM on the Middle East conflict. Moreover, the risk should be avoided of lending exclusive attention to the pragmatic, utilitarian “major projects” at the expense of forgetting democratic conditionality and the need for economic, political and social reforms.
- With regard to the second main objective – creating an area of shared progress – we already have some important projects on the UfM agenda, but we should not lose sight of the main objectives of economic integration in the area, beginning with the general model of economic integration through the multilateral Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Zone.
- With regard to the third basket, it should be kept in mind that, after everything we have ex-

perienced since 2001, intercultural dialogue and mutual knowledge and comprehension are today more necessary than ever. Among the six major UfM projects, there is nothing pertaining to the third pillar except the sixth project referring to higher education and research. Hence, projects of the third pillar must once again be given the full priority necessary not only for integrating and modernising economies but also and above all, for harmonising Euro-Mediterranean mentalities and societies, including fostering greater tolerance and openness in the northern countries as well.

UfM Institutions and Responsibilities

We must also move forward as quickly as possible in clarifying some questions relating to the institutions, in the first place, the Co-Presidencies. At present, for the North, there is the ad hoc UfM French Co-Presidency that is still ongoing, the six-monthly rotating Member State Presidency and the permanent EU Presidency (in which the Council Presidency, the High Representative and the Commission President coexist). And in the South, there is the Co-Presidency, which should find a way of acting more as a UfM community. A new southern co-presidency must also be established, such that Egypt is prevented from having to repeat its term, which would transfer to the UfM the tendency towards self-succession that seems to exist in the country's internal policy.

As regards the General Secretariat, as a key component of the UfM, it must complete its institutional structure, have a sufficient operative budget and avoid the danger of becoming excessively intergovernmental, above all since, initially, the Deputy Secretaries General have in fact been designated by their respective governments, and that all the staff will, in principle, be proposed, sent by way of a mission and paid by the governments of the respective countries. This is clearly a situation that must be overcome if the General Secretariat and the UfM itself are to eventually function properly.

Greater clarification is also needed in the sphere of competences. In the classical Barcelona Process stage, the issues were clear because everything fell under a single Euro-Mediterranean policy. Now we have the ENP for the bilateral programmes, whereas multilateral programmes are, in principle, the responsibility of the UfM. The Secretariat has the responsi-

bility for the six major projects, but it must be clarified as to how all the others will be managed. The Commission continues running the multilateral programmes it had already established, encompassing them within the ENP Action Plans for the Mediterranean Region. It seems, however, that many other issues will arise in the additional task entrusted the Secretariat, of identifying and preparing new projects to be submitted for consideration and possible approval by the Committee of Senior Officials, the Ministerial Conferences and the Summits. Will the Commission entrust the Secretariat to design and carry out multilateral programmes financed primarily by the Commission? The issue of funding also entails reflecting on the crucial relations that must exist between the Commission and the General Secretariat, as well as between the latter and the European Investment Bank. On which projects should they collaborate and how should the funds be shared out? What should collaboration be effected with other member states or partner countries or with international institutions? Since the projects will be implemented in a particular country, what relationship should there be between UfM and ENP projects (and institutions and budgets)? And finally, are the summits and ministerial meetings to be UfM summits or Euro-Mediterranean summits including the ENP as was the case during the classical Barcelona Process stage, since they consider and take political decisions about many subjects that must be developed through Neighbourhood Policy? We have already discussed the fact that the co-presidencies should operate more as UfM co-presidencies and less as national co-presidencies. Above all, the European Commission must assume UfM projects as its own, whether it carries them out directly or through a commission to the UfM General Secretariat.

The UfM is an enormously ambitious project and is therefore also highly complex, and the risks are as great as the opportunities. The project's future opportunities depend on the appropriate approach to these issues being taken now, at the foundational stage.

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