

Guest Editorial

Enhancing Regional Dialogue and Cooperation within the Framework of the Union for the Mediterranean

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The European Union (EU) and the Mediterranean countries have, as neighbours, strong interconnected strategic interests. They share history, geography, large parts of common cultural heritage and references as well as increasing strategic common interests. The Euro-Mediterranean partnership has therefore always been at the forefront of both the EU's foreign policy as well as for the Mediterranean countries.

The increasing magnitude today of illegal migration challenges, fight against terrorism, as well as the need for a strengthened intercultural and interreligious dialogue, further highlight the importance of a comprehensive, balanced and concerted approach in the Euro-Mediterranean agenda, addressing the root causes of the security challenges, but also of the socio-economic and sustainable development issues in a structured approach fully encompassing the added value of regional cooperation.

The willingness by the countries of the region to have a common regional framework is today embodied in the Union for the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean organization composed of forty-three countries: twenty-eight countries of the EU and fifteen southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The alignment this year of the twentieth anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership with the reviewed European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) offers a unique opportunity to further strengthen the work undergone within the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and to seek deeper political commitment to develop this regional framework.

1 INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is a long running process marked by a sequence of 'renovated' attempts to articulate the relations amongst the EU and its

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North African and Middle Eastern neighbours, from the Global Mediterranean policy (1972–1992), to the Renovated Mediterranean policy (1992–1995), which culminated in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995.

The Barcelona Process undoubtedly fostered a new dynamic and was marked mainly by the conclusion of many association agreements and by an important financial bilateral cooperation later shaped under the global framework of the ENP.

The UfM was launched on 13 July 2008 in Paris as a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process but with the ambition of building on past experiences and lessons learned, as well as providing the basis for a new impetus in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. In addition to a renewed enhanced ambition, its two main innovations were a joint co-presidency shared between the two shores and the establishment of a joint permanent and operational Secretariat as a keystone for the partnership. Since 2012, the co-presidency of the UfM has been assumed by the EU on the northern side – ensuring an instrumental link with the ENP – and on the southern side by Jordan, allowing a fuller appropriation by the countries of the southern shore and enacting an effective co-ownership in the decision making process.

First permanent structure ever dedicated to the intergovernmental Mediterranean partnership, the Secretariat of the UfM based in Barcelona acts as an operational development institution for concrete projects and initiatives, as well as a platform for synergies, coordination and complementarily with other institutions and cooperation frameworks in the Mediterranean. It also ensures the follow up of regional policy dialogue. The many regional cooperation projects implemented and financed within the framework of the UfM in strategic priority areas such as business development, transport and urban development, water and environment, energy, women empowerment, higher education and research, illustrate the existence of wide opportunities to develop regional cooperation with the objective of tangible results on the ground.¹

2 2015, A CRUCIAL YEAR FOR THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP

It is safe to say that there is a common agreement that the Euro-Mediterranean region needs a continued mobilization of efforts, a confirmation of the political will to strengthen the institutional setup as well as an enhancement of the region building.

¹ *Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat's Activity Report 2014*, at: www.ufmsecretariat.org.

In 2015 and beyond, these objectives are more important to achieve than ever. The region is currently facing complex and serious challenges on an unprecedented scale linked to terrorism – fuelled by the war zones and crises in the region or in its immediate vicinity – the rising phenomena of extremism, intolerance and xenophobia and to the tragedy of illegal migration where thousands of people are risking their lives every week to cross the Mediterranean.

At the same time, it is a region with huge potential. The GDP of Europe, the Mediterranean and Africa combined equals that of the Americas as well as that of Asia. The Euro-Mediterranean region has a very dynamic young population which is a huge asset for the global competitiveness of the region.

This calls for a strengthened, pragmatic and impact-oriented cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The regional framework enables to collectively deal with the regional aspects of these common challenges.

To make it possible, three objectives need to be met:

- First, regional economic integration is to become a top priority. The Euro-Mediterranean region remains one of the least integrated economic zone in the world. A study conducted in 2014 by the UfM Secretariat reveals that out of 100% exchanges in the area, 90% take place within the EU, 9% between the North and the South and only 1% among southern Mediterranean countries themselves. Intra-regional trade between the southern Mediterranean countries and, particularly, within the Maghreb is still at one of the lowest levels on record: no more than 5%; with only 3% for intra-Maghreb trade, compared to other economic groups such as ASEAN with an internal trade level of 22%, or the MERCOSUR region (at 20%).² Sustainable growth and development sufficient to meet the needs of youth employment would not be achieved without an enlargement of the markets. Economic integration should therefore rank as a top priority with the aim to possibly reach a common economic space in the future.
- Second, synergies, complementarities and result-oriented coordination amongst all the different institutional players in the region are instrumental to increase the tangibility and visibility of the impact of regional integration efforts. Synergies have already been strengthened between UfM activities and the EU's regional programmes. Efforts will also continue to ensure greater coordination between financial instruments and the main

² Report for the Secretariat of the UfM by Dr Patricia Augier, Director of Research at AMU (Aix-Marseille University, France), Deputy President of the Scientific Committee of Femise, and Prof. Jean-Louis Reiffers, President of the Scientific Council of the Institute of the Mediterranean and President of the Scientific Committee of Femise, (June 2014).

European and International Financial Institutions. The coordination set up as well by the institutions involved in intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the UfM Headquarters in July 2015 at the initiative of Spain shows the way.

- Third, the full involvement of the various civil society stakeholders through UfM activities and the multi-partner approach is of paramount importance. All together, the private sector, NGOs, universities, students, researchers, parliamentarians, local authorities, social actors and decentralized cooperation stakeholders contribute decisively to the effectiveness of regional cooperation and will benefit the overall objective of mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue, development, peace and stability. Through the development of its activities, the UfM is actively engaged with these stakeholders.

3 THE MEDITERRANEAN IN THE GLOBAL AGENDA

For a long time, debates about the perspectives of the Mediterranean region have been centred on the region itself. It can no longer be the case in the future. The Euro-Mediterranean agenda and priorities have to take into consideration the global agenda and broaden the geo-strategic perspective.

Issues such as migration, terrorism, but also economic opportunities, indicate clearly that developments in sub-Saharan Africa for instance are central for the Euro-Mediterranean agenda. Dealing with these issues with a global approach, seeking long-term solution through growth, development and cooperation is clearly the way forward.

As the world is mobilized towards the COP21 in Paris and the COP22 in Morocco, and as the UN has defined the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the Euro-Mediterranean countries have the opportunity to collectively address the challenges for the region and implement solutions. The Mediterranean region's contribution to the global agenda is essential, being one of the 'hotspots' for climate change challenges as well as for issues such as youth unemployment and gender equality.

According to the report of the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, the cost of a 2 degrees global warming is estimated to be by 2050 between 0.5% and 2% of world GDP. Total investments in the next fifteen years (2015–2030) are estimated at around USD 300,000–400,000 billion and three

areas have clearly been identified for action: urban development, energy and agriculture.³

The UfM has already implemented activities in these areas within the framework of the UPFI programme (Urban Planning Finance Initiative) alongside the EU and major IFIs, as well as on energy and environment following ministerial meetings in 2014 and the launch of energy platforms in 2015.

Through a deeper regional integration, the Euro-Mediterranean region will also strengthen its competitiveness in the global economy. Many success stories illustrate eloquently the benefits of cross investments and the capacity to increase exports thereby contributing to more growth and jobs. The role played by the private sector to that effect is central.

Prosperity and stability in the Mediterranean is a major contribution to world's security and order. It is therefore of paramount importance for all to address the root causes of the sources of tensions and insecurity and to continue working on a sustainable and integrated agenda. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU and the southern Mediterranean countries who met in May 2015 in Barcelona at the headquarters of the UfM clearly stated these common objectives.

4 TOWARDS A NEW LONG-TERM VISION

2015 marks a significant and effective step forward in the Euro-Mediterranean relations. It is time to put in place some prospective vision for the next twenty years. The magnitude of the present challenges but also the wealth of the youth of the region leads us not only to act on the short-term emergencies but also to promote a long-term vision for the next twenty years.

Faced with the tragedy of illegal migration, extremism and terrorism, but also with the many economic opportunities, the long-term solutions clearly lie in development and growth: an inclusive development that supports the cohesion, both within the countries, and amongst them at the regional level. The paramount priority is employment for young people. A huge untapped human and economic potential capital in the region and many success stories remain barely visible. The fantastic vitality of Mediterranean societies still needs to be much better harnessed. The human, social and economic potential of the Mediterranean region – as it stretches into Africa – represents a major asset for the whole region.

Our collective responsibility is to adopt a strategic and proactive regional approach to our common future in the Mediterranean.

³ *Report of The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate*, in *La nouvelle économie climatique*, 34 (les Petits matins, 2015).

The time has come to look at the region with a renewed political ambition at the highest level and to use the framework of Union for the Mediterranean to address the challenges of the region.