

"The Mediterranean seeks a political project" states Duran Lleida in El País

Barcelona - Will the Arab revolutions topple the invisible wall that separates the two Mediterranean shores? In order to do this, Europe must contribute towards it, helping the North African evolution towards democracy and progress.

Like Pirandello, whose characters were searching for an author, or like Proust in his search of lost time, the Mediterranean is searching for a political project.

The revolutions that crystallized on 14 and 25 January 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt represent the end of an era and with it, the need to redefine Euro-Mediterranean relations. The Arab world will never be the same and the hitherto difficult balance between the cooperation and trade brought about by Europe, the security ensured by the U.S. and the stability guaranteed by some Arab countries, has been disrupted. Suddenly, as if the Arab world had fully entered into universal history, as if the desire for democracy and freedom that have been the theme of European history, had finally crossed the Mediterranean. However, the flight towards democracy is full of turmoil. Libya is experiencing an episode of civil confrontation whose end is uncertain. Egypt has just begun a complex transition. Tunisia prepares elections for a parliament that will draft a new constitution, but the economic crisis could shatter a fragile social consensus.

Some have said that the North African revolutions were as unpredictable as the fall of the Berlin Wall. The question now is how the events we are witnessing will provoke the fall of the invisible wall that separates the two sides of the Mediterranean, and if the creation of a common Euro-Mediterranean area is possible. Certainly, the difference between a project and a dream is that the former has the means for its realization. We are putting a considerable part of our future at risk if we fail to make transform this dream into a project. They are our neighbours, our largest supplier of energy, they constitute the largest source of immigration, we share a sea and the same cultural and natural heritage of incalculable value and, above all, we share an historical destiny.

The Barcelona Declaration of 1995 laid the foundations for a new way of understanding Europe's relations with the non-European Mediterranean. A three-pillar structure was designed: political dialogue was used as an euphemism to describe the need for Mediterranean partners to bring about democratic reforms. An economic pillar resulting from the creation of a free trade area accompanied by commercial financial cooperation to help the transition to a market economy. The third pillar was the social and cultural dialogue that acknowledged the importance of overcoming the so-called clash of civilizations. Despite justified criticisms, the outcome of the Barcelona Process is not negative. Partnership agreements were

reached with all southern countries except Syria; the free trade area advanced in spite of very stagnant south-south trade; the Anna Lindh Foundation in Alexandria laid the first institutional stone of a cultural dialogue aimed at overcoming stereotypes about cultures that both ignore and fascinate each other.

The Union for the Mediterranean came into being in 2008. It was President Sarkozy's initiative for a new Mediterranean policy, based on the belief that there would be no political changes in southern regimes. Despite this error of perspective however, the initiative had a very significant contribution: it institutionalised Euro-Mediterranean relations. For the first time a common organization was created: the Barcelona Secretariat, and a governmental structure based on the parity principal: the north-south Co-Presidency. These represent two indisputable successes. France and the EU believe, and so do we, that Europe was built with institutions and that the Mediterranean cannot move forward without them, even if we take into account the big obstacle that represents the Middle Eastern conflict. Sarkozy's and former Minister Moratinos' determination enabled the success of the Paris Summit in 2008. Barcelona emerged as the capital of the initiative and the headquarters of the Secretariat at the Palacio de Pedralbes were inaugurated.

The question now is: what must we do to meet the Mediterranean challenge? How can we help create a Euro-Mediterranean area, which is crucial for our future? Can Spain, Catalonia and Barcelona embody the bridge that is needed?

The objective is economic and political convergence towards Europe. Without real economic and political convergence we will not be able to claim that Euro-Mediterranean cooperation has been successful. The per capita income steps from 1 to 14 that separate Spain from Morocco, or the steps from 1 to 20 such as the one between Gaza and Israel are not sustainable for those at the top nor for those at the bottom. To achieve this convergence we must use five tools.

From a political point of view, the emergence of the Arab spring, political changes and the prospects for democratisation are a great opportunity. The UfM should be the regional framework to promote democratisation. Spain, Portugal, Greece together with the Eastern European countries can share their experiences of democratic transition. The EU, through the UfM, should provide cooperation and political and financial support.

The second tool is financial aid. The southern Mediterranean needs satisfactory aid plan. The current financial transfers from Europe are scarce, only four euros per inhabitant per year. This aid will be particularly important in the coming years if the food crisis deepens.

The third instrument is trade. Europe managed to overcome 75 years of wars with the creation of the European economic project, born in 1950 from the Schumann Declaration. The southern Mediterranean needs its Schumann, an integrative view for only 5% of the foreign trade of the southern Mediterranean countries is among them. Partnership agreements signed following the Barcelona Declaration must be fully implemented and open to agriculture and services.

Investments towards the southern Mediterranean must take off. The region's investment deficit represents 7% of the regional GDP, but investments require a minimum level of security. An investment guarantee instrument must be created in the framework of the UfM. Mobility is another major priority. Without mobility, businesspeople, students and professionals from the south will feel discriminated and the potential for interaction and growth will suffer the consequences. An agreement to properly regulate mobility and migration is essential.

France and Egypt, the current UfM Co-Presidents, seek successors. Only the EU is well placed to assume this role. European policy towards the Mediterranean must "recommunitarise", as was the tradition of the Barcelona Process, correcting the primary defect of the primitive sarkozian approach of the UfM. Or, in other words, its excessive Franco-French approach and renationalising thrust of its Euro-Mediterranean policy. To the south, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco or even Turkey could succeed Egypt and work closely with the EU so that the Union for the Mediterranean produces the required projects. The Barcelona Secretariat must work to identify and promote such projects. Along with the six major UfM projects approved at the Paris Summit, a major program to support the political, economic and social transition of those countries should be launched.

The great historian of the Mediterranean Fernand Braudel said that throughout history, the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean have never developed and progressed in parallel. When the south flourished at the peak of the Arab civilization, Europe, to the north, found itself amidst the darkest years of the Middle Ages. In contrast, when Europe began to expand and grow, the south fainted and declined. It is about time that the north and the south work together to share their growth and progress. No matter what context, Europe and our southern partners are happily condemned to cooperate. We have the tools, we must now undertake the task to put together the political will. It is time to act to ensure that the awakening of the Arab Mediterranean becomes an opportunity for even if some doubt it, Democracy and Progress also speak Arabic.

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