

Agence Europe: "Democracy and development are two sides of same coin"

EU Mediterranean policy will have to adapt to the new order that has become a demand since the Arab revolutions.

Rabat (Agence Europe) - There can be no economic development without political progress and no democracy without democratic institutions. EU Mediterranean policy will have to adapt to the new order that has become a demand since the Arab revolutions which broke out at the start of the year. The EU's Mediterranean policy and, first and foremost, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) will have to raise their game to meet the new challenge and focus more on dialogue with civil society. These are the main conclusions of the debate which took place in Rabat on 16-18 September on the initiative of the Moroccan Constitutional Law Association and the Moroccan Diplomatic Club, under the patronage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The debate provided the opportunity for discussion among distinguished politicians, including a former Egyptian deputy prime minister, former foreign ministers (Portugal, Tunisia and Mauritania), the new EU special representative for the Mediterranean, UfM Secretary General Youssef Amrani, and several constitutional law specialists.

The meeting also brought the announcement of definite intentions. These came mainly from the host, Moroccan Foreign Minister Taeb Fassi Fihri, who called for the Agadir Accord (which links four countries of the southern shore - Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan - "horizontally") to be strengthened by inviting liberated Libya to join as soon as possible. He called for the UfM to be energised with the goals set out by the Barcelona Declaration (of November 1995), in particular the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Democracy, being reiterated and the realisation of the "Deauville objectives" (firm commitment alongside the countries that have become democratic).

"There is no democracy without institutions and the first of these is the constitution." The basic texts are essential for the whole region, stated EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean Bernardino Leon, so that the change becomes "irreversible". The EU, he said, is determined to stand foursquare with those countries which take that path. He noted recent European decisions and proposals and the various direct support measures (among these, the appointment of a special representative for the Mediterranean and the creation of a task force, the first meeting of which will take place on 28 September, either in Tunis or Brussels). The main effort, however, must come from the countries of the region themselves, according to Leon, who noted that economic integration is a powerful driver of development. UfM Secretary General Amrani said that this was a "historic opportunity". "New instruments and new players will be needed." In an article published in a French newspaper, he called for "a new stage to be embarked on straight away". The UfM "can put in place new ownership processes by working

with all the stakeholders (states, international institutions, financial partners and civil society) to create structured platforms to develop major cooperation and regional integration initiatives". He also said that it had to be ensured that "the objectives and principles of the new EU neighbourhood policy converged with those which will guide the UfM".

Former Portuguese foreign minister Luis Amado said that he did not believe that the UfM could have any capacity for action in the "complex situation" which exists at present. To this must be added the international context which makes it impossible to tell how the changes taking place in global foreign affairs will finally end: "the situation we are facing is dangerous". He added to the mix the budgetary difficulties being faced by Europe which are curtailing its ability to take action.