



Union pour la Méditerranée
Union for the Mediterranean
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط

Intervention at the closing dinner *Improving Dialogue and Cooperation with the Neighbours* of the Conference *Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy*, organized by the Bertelsmann Stiftung

By Fathallah Sijilmassi, Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean

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Dear Mr. Schüssel,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear friends,

I would like at the outset to thank **the Bertelsmann Stiftung, especially to its CEO, Mr. De Geus**, for organizing this important event.

It is a great pleasure to be here today among such distinguished participants. The quality and thoroughness of the debates that you have had today is a credit to the Bertelsmann Stiftung, whose experience and know-how is the best guarantee for a fruitful debate on the European Neighbourhood Policy, an issue that will inevitably occupy the agenda of EU Ministers in the upcoming months.



I would also like to seize this opportunity to thank Germany for their active and long-term commitment in the activities of the UfM Secretariat. German support is crucial for us to deliver on our mandate and thus I want to pay a special tribute to it.

It is also a great pleasure and honour **to take the floor just after Mr. Wolfgang Schüssel**, Former Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Austria, as well as former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria.

If I am not mistaken, Wolfgang, you were MFA of Austria back in 1995 when the Barcelona Declaration that launched the Euro-Mediterranean Process was adopted.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Next year we will be celebrating **the 20th anniversary of the launching of the Barcelona Process**, a very timely anniversary if I may say (should an anniversary ever be timely), not only in view of the unprecedented evolutions in the region in recent years both at political and socio-economic spheres, but also in light of the current discussions on a renewed European Neighborhood Policy, and a more adapted one to the reality in the region.

For the sake of a fruitful debate, I do actually recommend you to **re-read the Barcelona Declaration**. In my opinion, and despite a lapse of 20 years, almost everything there is still valid in what regards long-term socio-economic and political objectives; I bet



we would hardly have to fine-tune some parts of the text were we asked to update it to 2015.

Having said this, I would like to emphasize the fact that **the focus should no longer be put on what we do, but rather on how we do it.** It is no longer necessary to rethink the whole process, nor to launch new processes, but to rely on existing instruments to advance the cooperation foreseen within these frameworks.

And **I can safely say that the same applies to the updating/rebooting/reviewing process of the ENP.**

Let me humbly share with you, in this regard, some reflections stemming from my experience in the region:

1. Let's rely on existing instruments

As far as the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation is concerned, it is my understanding that there is already **a clear path, an already marked path,** since we already have the instruments at our disposal that should allow us to fully unlock the huge potential for cooperation in the region.

Being aware of the fact that the push for change across the region has been partly- I would even say mainly- driven by socio-economic factors, for people's hope for a better future, I think there is a **need for concrete action,** for tangible results on the ground, for projects with a real impact on citizen's wellbeing.



We are beginning to pass from abstract discourse to concrete action to tackle, for instance, youth unemployment, to concrete action to reach also a more inclusive growth in terms of environment and Climate Change, in terms of water consumption, or in terms of women empowerment, for instance.

Be aware that I am not only referring to challenges that Southern Mediterranean countries are facing: **I am actually referring to challenges that are also shared by Northern Mediterranean countries.**

This shared conviction on the need to jointly address these common challenges explains why, in the framework of the UfM, we have witnessed in the last 2 years **the regular holding of UfM sectorial ministerial conferences**, which have strongly contributed towards building a common Mediterranean agenda on a wide range of fields, notably women empowerment, transport, industrial cooperation, environment and climate change, and digital economy.

This current positive momentum not only showcases the shared commitment of all countries and stakeholders in the region to work on shared key topics and challenges; it also points to the existence of a **broad field of opportunities** in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation paving the way for concrete and effective cooperation in a growing number of sectors.

This is the path I was referring to: the one that allows to turn high-level decisions into concrete projects and initiatives, and to do it by drawing to the greatest extent on the synergies and



complementarities among all relevant actors and stakeholders in the region.

2. Co-ownership and variable geometry

A path that ensures that we uphold the principle of co-ownership in all our activities. This principle is at the very core of the UfM: North and South on equal political footing.

We gather all countries across the Euro-Med region, but we also do it in a way that helps enhance confidence and mutual respect among parties and stakeholders in the whole region. It is not by accident that the UfM's governance is inclusive and balanced. Our governance is indeed based on a co-presidency by the EU from the northern Mediterranean countries and Jordan from the southern Mediterranean countries, as co-ownership of the euro-Mediterranean process is one of the guiding principles of the UfM.

But at the same time we also work differently according to each country's national priorities and specificities. Since each country has its own interests: the **principle of variable geometry** allows to a group of countries who share the same interests and objectives to implement a specific project or initiative. This means that projects are only implemented in those countries interested, that these projects and initiatives are suited to the needs and expectations of each individual country.

3. Foster the regional dimension of the ENP



Let me share with you a one last reflection, based on **an outstanding figure**: if we take the UfM zone as a whole- that's it, all 28 EU member states plus the 15 Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries- and consider it as an economic bloc, taking into account all exchanges that take place within this zone: then 90% of trade exchanges take place between EU countries, 9% between EU countries and Southern Mediterranean countries, and only 1% between Southern Mediterranean countries.

This figure points directly to the main challenge the Euro-Mediterranean region is to face in the years to come: regional integration. **Regional integration should be the underlying objective on any endeavor in the region**, not only as a driver for economic growth in the South (and in the North as well, of course), but also as the best guarantee for political stability.

I would actually like to add a third reason to put regional integration at the top of the agenda: from an European perspective, I would **pay more attention to your neighbours' neighbours**. Whether on the level of economic potential or on the level of political stability in the Sahel-Sahara region, the Europe-Mediterranean-Africa junction is today more evident than ever before.

I would thus encourage all those in charge of updating the ENP to take into consideration this regional dimension, and to put it at the forefront of efforts to enhance cooperation in the region.



Conclusion

I would like to conclude by insisting on one fact: despite the great challenges still to be addressed in the region, we are in the right track and advancing at cruising speed.

But we can go further and faster so as to broaden the current positive movement in what regards Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. We must not lose momentum. To the contrary, we must accelerate our efforts and continue delivering on our mandate.

To do so, we need to use existing instruments and fully draw on the existing synergies among them, thereby rationalizing and optimizing the resources allocated in the region.