



## **El Cano Royal Institute**

### **“Euro-Mediterranean relations: a look back and a looming regional emergency?”**

**June 9, 2020 - 10h00**

#### **Intervention of the Secretary General of the UfM**

- Let me start by thanking the El Cano Royal institute, and particularly its director Charles Powell, for the opportunity to participate in this very timely debate on the Euro-Mediterranean relations.
- Particularly important to focus on Euro-Mediterranean cooperation as we commemorate this year the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.
- As you so well put it in the working paper prepared by Bichara Khader and Haizam Amirah-Fernandez, that serves as base for our reflections today, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was, by far, the most ambitious and comprehensive cooperation initiative that we had seen at a regional level.
- Its 3 pillars, later complemented by a 4th pillar by 2005, represented a truly structured and overarching effort to promote cooperation, political engagement and regional integration in order to build a common area of peace, stability and prosperity.
- These objectives are today as important as they were 25 years ago.



And looking back, we should learn from our missteps and shortcomings but we should also look into the accomplishments and the advantages that derive from the existence of this partnership.

- Of course, there were a number of issues that had to be addressed, starting with the asymmetric nature of the relationship between Europe and its neighbors, at political, economic and financial level.
- A partnership can only deserve the full engagement of all its members if they are able to establish a symbiotic relation that is equally beneficial to all and in which all members have the same weight.
- That was partly one of the advancements that I recognize in the Union for the Mediterranean, as it was approved in the Summit of Paris (which, of course, was significantly different from the early drawings of President Sarkozy), as it took over the responsibility of reinforcing this partnership.
- The establishment of the Co-Presidency and the principles of co-ownership and of variable geometry for the development of projects and initiatives, more than mere rhetorical principles, represented a real shift of paradigm in the construction of a true partnership.
- Paraphrasing a sentence for your assessment text: the Union for the Mediterranean represents the evolution of a partnership “for the neighbors” to a partnership “with the neighbors”, in which all members participate in equal footing and define, conjointly, the sectors and priorities of their cooperation.
- Some may say that the UfM is focusing too much on projects - it would be more accurate to say “on sectors” - and that it neglects the political dialogue. Honestly, I think this is an inaccurate criticism.



Even though the UfM, as an inter-Governmental institution, refrains from lecturing or meddling in the internal situation of its members, we do have room for discussion on the most important issues on the regional agenda.

Even if its limited, the UfM is nevertheless the only forum where the regional states can share their views on Libya, on Syria and, of course, on the israeli-palestinian relations.

There are no other fora where this is done.

And this should be acknowledged.

- But by finding common ground on the sectoral cooperation, the UfM has managed to advance its agenda, avoiding the risk of paralysis.
- Indeed, its unique methodology and the focus on non-contentious issues have allowed the UfM, for instance, to have a palestinian Deputy Secretary General working together with an israeli Deputy Secretary General, or to have labeled projects in both Palestine and Israel (and the label has to be decided by consensus).
- The most important role of the UfM is that of a reminder, a voice of conscience, recalling that regional challenges demand regional answers.

That States, alone, are helpless to address them.

And that even the EU, by itself, cannot give the answers that are needed.

The UfM, as a comprehensive and overarching platform for regional cooperation and integration, keeps doing its work - like a little ant, relentlessly preparing for winter - to give member states the tools needed to promote the regional approach.

- And this regional approach is today more important than ever.



The present pandemic has proven that all countries, regardless of their wealth or their weakness, are all vulnerable.

And that we are only as strong as our weakest link.

- We relaunched, last year, the regional dialogue of director-generals responsible for Civil Protection.

This is an area that we feel should be given a renewed focus, because we all have to benefit from more regional coordination, from sharing of good practices and from better regional preparedness for sanitary crisis and other natural disasters.

- The pandemic hit the Euro-Mediterranean region with particular violence, Spain, Italy, France, are all amongst the most heavily hit countries in the World. But also in the south of the Mediterranean, countries like Egypt, Algeria or Morocco are still struggling with the infection rates and haven't reached the peak yet.
- But we have to have our eyes already in the aftermath.

The impact of the pandemic on the economy will have devastating effects, this is a clear reality, and we have to do whatever we can to mitigate it.

- We are particularly worried about the negative effects on trade, on production, on business development and especially on the job market.
- Industry and Services almost stopped.  
Entire sectors, like tourism, were paralyzed.

There was a dramatic fall of external and domestic demand, reduction in trade, disruption of production, fall in consumer and investor confidence, tightening of financial conditions, and a significant oil price drop.

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- This is why we find it particularly important to focus on economic recovery on a broader regional level.

We have launched a report with the OECD to help on the assessment of the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis in the UfM region, with a special focus on UfM MENA member states, as information and research on the Covid-19 crisis is less comprehensive for these countries.

- The analysis of impacts will give special attention to the issue of reorientation of industrial production, particularly the proximization of supply chains in the aftermath of the pandemic, given the potential that such a relocation would present for the UfM Region and the Euro-Mediterranean regional integration.
- A stand-alone Report on Reshoring of manufacturing and other value-chain activities and opportunities for the MENA region will discuss relevant evidence and policy initiatives, namely during the next UfM Regional Forum.
- This is not a new idea.
- As you so well put it, it was one of the scenarios envisaged by the Barcelona Process itself: Investment, Integration, Trade, as a catalyst to promote economic growth, well-being and regional wealth and stability.
- But this is nowadays far more important - and pressing - than it was 25 years ago.

For Europe, geo-strategically speaking, this might be the only way to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive international arena.

A coherent and robust European FDI (foreign direct investment) strategy in its southern neighborhood is not only important for those neighboring countries - it is vital for Europe's role as an economic power.

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- If there's something that this period has come to show us is that the negative effects of climate change are reversible if we have the ambition and determination to act fast and collectively.
- Europe has already pointed to the right path forward, with the presentation of its Green Deal and now the large-scale recovery plan that was proposed by the Commission and that clearly sets the pace for the development of a low-carbon economy, focused on green, blue and circular economic models.
- This same logic has to be present at the regional level.

Last year we presented our Ministers of Foreign Affairs the early conclusions and guidelines for policy makers of the first scientific report on climate and environmental change in the Mediterranean area, that was prepared by MedEcc, a network of more than 80 scientists from across the region.

The final report is to be presented in the next UfM Ministerial on Environment and Climate Change, later on this year.

- Never before it has been as urgent for science to guide policy. And the scientific lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic urges additional engagement in Green Deal policies to create more resilient societies.

Policies affecting positively at the same time the most relevant dimensions of wellbeing: economic activity, employment, health, environmental sustainability, work-life balance, as focused in the recent EU Green Deal proposal.

But with one more fundamental lesson to be drawn: health and environment know no boundaries; fragilities we don't cope with in our closer or further neighborhoods revert back to us, so that no one can be left behind in a green and health protective upgrade of our nations.



And one first neighborhood dimension that cannot be overlooked is the Mediterranean as whole, where over-intense relations and contacts overlap a tragic asymmetry in means and development so that, clearly, leaving behind the weakest implies we will all lag behind.

- For the Mediterranean a region-wide approach is essential and is being integrated in the strategies of its main regional organization, the Union for the Mediterranean, based on science pointing out that there is a fast, powerful, promising cycle of co-benefits that we can trigger by engaging in a region wide conversion towards green economy.

There is a clear circular link between climate, energy security, economy and health.

The same causes of climate change are fostering:

- Asymmetry and poverty in weaker economies (climate change is caused by concentration of resources, not development) and their further deterioration caused by COVID crisis will further aggravate climate change,
- Health insecurity, through food and water/sanitation insecurity, enlargement of infectious diseases areals, destabilization of health infrastructure, air pollution, disruption and cross-contamination of ecosystems.
- Many actions to tackle climate change have been highlighted in the MeDECC Report:
  - rebalance development and create fair sustainable employment (new economy),
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- absorb CO2 while consolidating food security in a way that surrounding ecosystems become health protective (technologically updated Mediterranean diets and food systems),
- perform “nexus” security functions by fairly distributed energy access and efficiency.
- Therefore, climate action can be deployed in conjunction with COVID 19 aftermath in two co-benefits dimensions
  - economic recovery and employment
  - health protective ecosystems and production chains, both resulting in societal and infrastructural strengthening, that increase resilience to climate and health threats.
- The entire Euro-Mediterranean region has to have the ambition to address together this development challenge.

Climate Change mitigation and adaptation, energy transition, blue and green economies, these can be extremely important opportunities for growth.

- Today, as we commemorate the 25th anniversary of this Partnership, the Euro-Mediterranean region has to accelerate and deepen its cooperation.

If we really want to guarantee the area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity that is evoked in the Paris Declaration of 2008, this is a challenge that we must face together.

- Thank you very much for your attention.