

MEMORANDUM OPEX Nº 239*/2019

SUBJECT: THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN (UfM) TEN YEARS AFTER ITS FOUNDATION - HOW TO OVERCOME THE FRUSTRATED AMBITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

It is a busy diplomatic period among the Heads of State and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union and the Mediterranean countries.

On the 24 and 25 February 2019, the EU and the League of Arab States (LAS) are set to hold their very first Euro-Arab Summit at the level of heads of state. The two regional blocks are meant to focus on “stability” and “migration”, going back to prioritising the security and stability agenda over the promotion of democracy and human rights. The aim is also to forge a new European-African Alliance, where Arab countries must play a necessary bridging role. This goal already questions whether the centre of gravity of EU-Arab cooperation is moving away from the Mediterranean to Africa.

A few months back, the Conference of Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs – that includes all EU countries and 10 Arab countries – marking the tenth anniversary of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), was held on the 8th of October 2018. However, it passed almost unnoticed on mainstream media. The event could be considered as an achievement in itself given that it gathered the 43 UfM countries, with their divergent and sometimes antagonistic geopolitical agendas – including Israel, Turkey, alongside the European and Arab countries – and allowed to reaffirm a rhetorical commitment to this regional partnership that focuses more on the socio-economic issues. The Conference did not manage to produce a formal conclusive document, but just a mere declaration signed by the co-presidents¹.

The UfM Conference was followed more recently by the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of the 5+5 dialogue (Western Mediterranean Forum²) on 18 and 19 January 2019, where parties adopted a declaration focused on reinforcing western Mediterranean ties focusing on “sustainable development, youth, migration and mobility”³. The more “Mediterranean” format of this dialogue only composed of riparian states in the western part of the Mediterranean is attractive to its member countries as more manageable than the UfM, composed of 43 countries, including countries that are remote from the Mediterranean itself.

¹ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Conclusions-of-the-Co-Presidency.pdf>

² Malta, Italy, France, Spain and Portugal, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania,

³ <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2019-01-18/local-news/5-5-Western-Mediterranean-Dialogue-Foreign-Ministers-meeting-held-in-Malta-6736202278>

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In that regard, France is pushing for its initiative of the “Summit of the two shores”, announced by President Macron, that will take place on the 24th of June 2019 in Marseille. It aims to revive the 5+5 Dialogue format, with 10 of the 43 countries of the UfM, while making it more inclusive and less government-driven, including civil society and all actors of the “voices of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue”. It proposes a new “Mediterranean policy”, hinting on the existing failures of the UfM formula⁴.

In this paper, the authors zoom in the UfM, today considered, within the Mediterranean countries political and diplomatic circles, as a positive forum for formal political dialogue among its 43 member-states. However, throughout the past ten years, none have passed without analysts or politicians asking for revitalisation and necessary changes in the partnership, which lacks depth and vision. If you address the 43 capitals of the UfM, you are likely to find at least 20 different interpretations of the value and meaning of this somehow forgotten partnership.

The EU, on a discursive level, presents the UfM as a model for regional integration complementing its Neighbourhood policy. Southern Mediterranean countries, on their end, continue to maintain low profiles, showing their moderate interest in an organisation which has failed to become a partnership based on equal footing – one country, one vote- that would increase regional economic integration with the EU. Critical security and geopolitical issues are put on the discussion table outside the UfM’s realm, through the League of Arab States or 5+5 Dialogue. The partnership’s lack of coherence and articulation with the other forums and partnerships (Neighbourhood Policy, 5+5, EU-Arab League) contributes to its weakening.

At a time when multilateralism is vilified all around the world, when the EU is internally divided and marked by the rise of nationalist populist forces and security-driven agendas; at a time when the Arab world, all the more divided, stands far from the short-lived optimism brought by the Arab Springs, is the Mediterranean agenda going to be central to its member states’ international cooperation? Will the UfM hold a central place in the Mediterranean agenda and more broadly EU-Arab relations, or just be one of many actors?

Despite all its shortfalls, the authors believe in the added value of the UfM forum to advance people-centred socioeconomic models. We argue for reinforcing its

⁴ Foreign Policy Speech at the « conférence des Ambassadeurs » <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs/>

existing institutions in order for all Mediterranean countries to advance a progressive socio-economic agenda, whether in the North or the South.

A TROUBLED START FOR A RENEWED MOMENTUM TO THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP

In 2005, ten years had passed since the birth of the Barcelona Process (BP), also called the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It was created under the realm of the European Union in 1995 as the first formal regional partnership between the European Union and Mediterranean countries. Back then, analysts and diplomats from all sides recognised that the Partnership had failed the very high ambitions of the Barcelona Declaration⁵. Namely, it had neither provided the expected political changes in the south, such as democratisation and human rights, nor had it managed to be as influential as foreseen from the political and security scope. It also failed to advance economic integration between the two shores, or at the sub-regional level among North African countries. The latter should have been facilitated through the Arab Maghreb Union and the 5+5 Dialogue. The Western Mediterranean Forum was still paralysed, however, by the Western Sahara conflict between Algeria and Morocco.

Since then, the EU had also turned to a more unilateral recipe when it established the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004, based on the negotiation of bilateral cooperation agreements with Southern countries.

When Nicolas Sarkozy, the then-candidate to the French Presidency, proposed the idea of a Mediterranean Union in his Toulon 2007 campaign speech⁶, he laid a vision whose footprint is still largely felt when assessing the shortcomings of the revised Euro-Mediterranean partnership in terms of its identity and framing.

Sarkozy outlined an orientalist vision, expressing the need for a civilizational "Renaissance" in the Mediterranean and insisting on divisions and violence caused by religion and "hatred" among "our children". He called for the respect of past colonial enterprises of the "West" in the name of a "civilizational ideal"⁷. Behind this rather

⁵ http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf

⁶ <http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/073000533.html>

⁷ *ibid.* « L'Occident longtemps pécha par arrogance et par ignorance. Beaucoup de crimes et d'injustices furent commis. Mais la plupart de ceux qui partirent vers le Sud n'étaient ni des monstres ni des exploiters. Beaucoup mirent leur énergie à construire des routes, des ponts, des écoles, des hôpitaux.

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neo-colonial reading stood more pragmatic security interests of France. The President notably outlined what was behind the project of a Mediterranean Union: containing and controlling immigration flows; curbing Turkey's ambition to become a member of the EU by offering a second-best alternative (hence the very cold Turkish reception of the proposed entity); and third, the national ambition to position France as a major diplomatic actor, particularly in the so-called MENA region⁸.

Once elected, the French President placed the Mediterranean at the centre of France's foreign policy agenda and ambitions and proposed to its European and Mediterranean counterparts⁹ the establishment of a Union composed only of the Mediterranean Sea riparian States. That new French vision seemed to break away from both principles of a common EU Foreign Policy and the legacy of the BP. In the new formula, the European Commission would have a seat at the table, but the Union was to be state-led. The proposed setup also ignored the "Western Mediterranean Forum", commonly referred to as 5+5 Dialogue, the oldest Mediterranean intergovernmental forum for dialogue - created in 1990 - that also gathered at the Ministerial level to discuss socioeconomic issues. North African countries favoured the latter convening, as it acknowledged some of their specificities compared to the Mashreq region, and still attracts them today, as shown by the French initiative supported by Algeria for the "summit of the two shores".

Spain welcomed the common geostrategic interest shown by France for the Mediterranean region and the need to give a new impulse to the regional partnership. It received very sceptically, however, the attempt to bury and replace the Barcelona Process, given the driving role Madrid had in the creation of the Partnership back in 1995. Spain's position was understandable given its longstanding support to a regional Mediterranean foreign policy and its attachment to the "Mediterranean acquis" - the topics and mechanisms negotiated under the BP. France's historical diplomatic stance in the region was centred around the "Arab world". Germany (which was a significant financial contributor to the Euro-Mediterranean programmes of the BP), on the other hand, and followed by others like Finland and Netherlands, expressed their discontent at the creation of a Mediterranean partnership from which they would be excluded, fearing it would mean carving up the common EU Foreign Policy.

Beaucoup s'épuisèrent à cultiver un bout de terre ingrat que nul avant n'eux n'avait cultivé. Beaucoup ne partirent que pour soigner, pour enseigner. On peut désapprouver la colonisation avec les valeurs qui sont les nôtres aujourd'hui. Mais on doit respecter les hommes et les femmes de bonne volonté qui ont pensé de bonne foi œuvrer utilement pour un idéal de civilisation auquel ils croyaient. »

⁸ https://elpais.com/diario/2007/07/15/opinion/1184450411_850215.html

⁹ Notably discussed at the Euro-Mediterranean Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Lisbon, November 2007

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A compromise was fashioned at a meeting in Rome in December 2007, in which Sarkozy managed to get Italy and Spain on board¹⁰. The centrality of the BP was recognised by linking the UfM to the BP, while also including all EU Member States in the partnership to preserve the unity of EU foreign policy. This closer tie to the BP also secured access to EU funds dedicated to the region, increasing the alignment with EU policies. At the request of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UfM was finally named "Barcelona Process: the Union for the Mediterranean". The arrangement agreed upon in Rome kept most of the existing platforms and mechanisms of the BP and the European Neighbourhood Policy alive and funded. It did not replace, either, the existing Western Mediterranean Forum (5+5 Dialogue).

The compromise contributed to the institutional confusion and slight duplication of the various partnerships, rather than building a coherent multilateral platform for the region. Ministers still call today for increased efficiency of the EU instruments with its neighbours, as well as for the multiplication of synergies between the UfM and the 5+5 Dialogue¹¹, a political message demonstrating the remaining duplication and the difficulty in articulating these different platforms.

What the above-mentioned diplomatic bargain also showed was that this renewed partnership still hinged on a Eurocentric foreign policy debate taking place within European walls, thus remaining no more than a projection of European aspirations towards the Southern Mediterranean, rather than a partnership steered on the basis of equality by the Southern Mediterranean countries.

Nicolas Sarkozy managed to bring most Mediterranean Heads of State around the table to sign the Paris Declaration launching the Union for the Mediterranean at the Paris Summit of 13 July 2008. The former President did not spare efforts and expenses¹² to convince all leaders, including heads of authoritarian regimes like Bashar Al Assad, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, of his project. North African countries like Morocco and Tunisia accepted and followed this new approach, as it was based on socioeconomic development rather than migration and terrorism - issues in which they appeared as the problem rather than a partner. Nonetheless, they would have favoured a riparian approach that recognised the specificity of their

¹⁰ <https://www.dw.com/en/sarkozy-gets-italy-spain-on-board-for-mediterranean-union/a-3016610>

¹¹ See Algiers Declaration: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/55-D%C3%A9claration-dAlger.pdf>

¹² A high price for the taxpayers that was later singled out in a report by the highest public audit court of the country https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/10/28/la-tres-couteuse-presidence-francaise-de-l-union-europeenne_1259732_823448.html

situations *vis-à-vis* southern European countries embodied in the 5+5 Dialogue¹³. Egypt, who was offered the Co-Presidency and a prominent role, saw in the new Union an opportunity to further legitimise its regime, expand its foreign policy in one of its regions of influence and broaden its regional trade opportunities.¹⁴

A RENEWED PARTNERSHIP BORN DEFECTIVE: POLITICIZED INSTITUTIONS, APOLITICAL MANDATE

A “Union of Projects” in a political platform

In its institutional setup, the UfM managed to impulse a renewed momentum for the Euro-Mediterranean partnership through stronger institutions reflecting co-ownership and political weight, compared to the BP. It notably created a Co-Presidency, with one co-president from the EU and one from the South, as well as a dedicated Secretariat based in the North but with a Secretary General from the South. The Secretariat, with supervision from a Meeting of Senior Officials acting as a Board of Directors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs level meeting regularly, represented the real novelty and strength of the partnership. It aimed at following-up policy decisions and projects and bringing more visibility to the partnership.

In addition, the UfM became the only multilateral partnership, outside of the United Nations General Assembly, where all Arab countries of the Mediterranean and Turkey would sit around the table with Israel. However, the UfM was also a negative political signal sent from the EU to Turkey, as a weak alternative to EU membership. It is worth noting the UfM remains today the only platform (outside Arab and Islamic partnerships) where Palestine is a full member state with the same rights as the other 42 members. The Palestinians use it as a diplomatic forum to voice their concerns and defend their interests.

The UfM was also the opportunity for Balkan countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania, which are not members of the EU and not active in other Euro-Mediterranean multilateral settings, to establish a more dynamic dialogue with their neighbours in the Mediterranean.

¹³ Aomar Baghzouz: <https://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/669#tocto3n6>

¹⁴ http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/dt13-2010

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The mandate of the partnership was negotiated in 2007, outlined in the Paris Declaration and later detailed in the Marseille Declaration of Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The text expressly aimed for pragmatism rather than an ambition to be a vehicle for change, reforms and binding multilateral agreements. The pragmatism of the partnership's mandate contrasted with the political dimension of its decision-making mechanisms. The importance given to the Heads of State Summit (that never convened after the foundational Paris Summit in July 2008) and the country-driven decision-making, was, in essence, more political than the BP, which used EU's institutions decision-making Community approach¹⁵.

The UfM was designed to be a "union of projects"¹⁶ promoting large-scale regional socioeconomic projects, as opposed to solving geopolitical disputes, thus avoiding any mandate on issues that could lead to confrontations and paralysis within the partnership.

While the Barcelona Declaration explicitly mentioned human rights and advancing democratisation as part of its objectives, the UfM relegated these goals to founding principles instead of making them part of the Union's mandate. In that regard, Europe and the Southern Mediterranean governments also had divergent perceptions of the partnership's ambition. For the South of the Mediterranean, free trade, economic integration and free movement of people were an essential goal of the partnership. For the EU, economic integration and free trade were promoted appropriately through the regional projects listed in the UfM declarations of 2008, as a long-term goal that should not be rushed.

An inherent paradox, therefore, prevented the UfM from developing a new paradigm as a proper "union". On the one hand, the UfM was created with an ambitious political setup including a state-driven and consensus-based decision-making process at the level of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, among countries that have tense or no diplomatic relations (Israel and Arab countries, Morocco and Algeria, Cyprus-Turkey). On the other hand, the UfM was given an apolitical pragmatic mandate through the promotion of large-scale regional projects, without being endowed with the necessary financing and technical ambitions such projects would have required to advance integration effectively.

¹⁵ Senén Florensa, *La Unión por el Mediterráneo, retos y ambiciones*, Med2010, IEMed

¹⁶ As per the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean of 13 July 2008, the Secretariat is mandated to detail a number of key initiatives in the following areas: De-pollution of the Mediterranean, Maritime and Land Highways, Civil Protection, Alternative Energies: Mediterranean Solar Plan, Higher Education and Research, Euro-Mediterranean University; the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative

Once operational, a UfM captive of its paradox

The UfM finally started operating in 2010 with the establishment of the Secretariat based in Barcelona, after two years of stalemate. Many analysts and media saw that stalemate as a signal of a born-dead partnership; it could be mainly attributed to the geopolitical context (the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian question remaining the reason advanced for not holding summits), as well as to the financial crisis that had hit Europe.

The establishment of the Secretariat slowly activated the various executive platforms of the partnership, notably the Senior Officials Meeting, where ambassadors of the 43 countries started to meet regularly to discuss the various projects and issues of common interest. The UfM Secretariat institutional setup and functioning reflected the hybrid and paradoxical nature of the partnership: the staff was a mix of diplomats working on political affairs, seconded from their respective capitals, together with experts from various European development agencies. Together, they were asked to facilitate the implementation of very ambitious multi-country and cross-border technical projects. This setup meant an inherent divergence of visions regarding the Secretariat's institutional development and working culture.

The Mediterranean Solar Plan or the Trans-Maghreb Motorway were two of the so-called "flagship" projects the Secretariat was mandated to lead to fruition. They also embodied the UfM inherent paradox. While the involved governments¹⁷ in the Trans-Maghreb Motorway project advanced the completion of the respective national highway sections, the UfM showed itself unable to solve the issue of the closed Algerian-Moroccan border. Moreover, the Libyan war and situation on the ground rendered the Libyan side of the project impossible, overall defeating the purpose of a project designed for regional integration.

The Mediterranean Solar Plan represented a goal-oriented approach for energy market integration and electricity interconnections. It nonetheless turned out to be overambitious, as a result of geopolitical divergence and competition between producing countries, transit countries and client countries. After more than three years of substantial investment by the Secretariat to draft a Master Plan, a consensus could not be found, and the whole programme was killed in the bud, without much fanfare¹⁸. An industrial consortium (Desertec Industrial Initiative - Dii), created in

¹⁷ Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya

¹⁸ The Commission regrets that consensus could not be reached on the Master Plan.

2009 with large corporations and institutions was meant to be the private arm of the Master Plan implementation. Dii had shrunk from 17 to 3 partners in 2014. From 2017 onwards, the “Mediterranean Solar Plan” was no longer in the UfM Secretariat pipeline and vision¹⁹. The original objective was replaced by a more modest one, consisting of “Reinforcing and animating a structured regional dialogue on energy and climate action among Member States” through dedicated Energy Policy Platforms²⁰.

The functional approach to the partnership, which aimed to stay away from any political dimension, proved limiting. A full economic regional integration is not possible without a shared geopolitical vision and peace. Just like the European Union when it was created, it could only succeed with democracy and peace as strong prerequisites.

The “Arab Springs”: A reality-check

The unpredicted “Arab Springs” which spread across various countries in 2011 constituted a major wake-up call for the UfM Secretariat operations. Social and political movements rejecting a neoliberal economic model emerged soon afterwards in Europe; that was the case of the ‘*Indignados*’. Youth and civil movements from across the two shores started talking and echoing each other, without any intergovernmental mechanism in the picture²¹.

UfM officials did not anticipate those dramatic shifts. Due to its top-down intergovernmental governance structure, the platform could not react without fear of interfering in its Member States’ domestic affairs. The UfM appeared to *de facto* support authoritarian regimes and status quo by remaining loudly silent. The “Arab Springs” remained taboo in the UfM until, after the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak and the obvious major changes that were happening in the various societies, the UfM Secretariat was compelled to react and start acknowledging them. The Secretariat did it through the translation of external voices²², and not as UfM declarations *per se*.

¹⁹ see activity report 2017 <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/UfM-Annual-Report-2017.pdf>

²⁰ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-energy-platforms/>

²¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676261.2015.1020937>

²² First mention in a press release and news found on 26 April 2011 <https://ufmsecretariat.org/the-mediterranean-seeks-a-political-project-states-duran-lleida-in-el-pais/>

The “Arab Springs” demonstrated a disconnection between the European institutions’ self-perceptions of their achievements in the MENA region - through the Neighbourhood Policy and the UfM - and the perception shared by the civil society and youth of the EU’s limited influence and understanding on the ground²³. Recent surveys²⁴ have shed light on the scepticism with which the EU and European countries’ political role is received in the region.

This political and social storm forced the UfM Secretariat and its Senior Officials into an introspection exercise and a strategic repositioning within the framework of the existing mandate. The strategic approach slowly shifted from state-led large infrastructure projects to projects intended to be more people-centred, including thematic focuses like youth employment, women empowerment or access to water, all root causes of both the Arab uprisings and the social protests across Europe. The UfM also lowered its initial ambition of scale and slowly replaced the large-scale infrastructure projects with projects focused on technical assistance. Projects slowly embraced the concept of “variable geometry”, where only those countries that wanted to cooperate and participate could do so, facilitating consensus and circumventing political divergence. The initiative Med4jobs within the ‘Business Development’ priority was notably adopted and “labelled” (in February 2012), oriented at ameliorating the employability of Mediterranean young people, targeting projects at the micro rather than macroeconomic level.

Limited means resulted in limited impact

The UfM tried to reconcile its hybrid nature in an innovative way, through granting its “UfM label” on selected projects, a symbolic political recognition of the project obtained through a vote by consensus at the Senior Official Meetings. The “label” is aimed at opening the door for further visibility, support on networking, partnership building and fundraising, playing a semi-political and semi-technical role for the project promoters. However, without significant financial means²⁵ or funding available to directly support the “labelled” projects, the UfM has not managed to position itself as a pivotal platform for significant socioeconomic projects. Consequently, the “label” did not become a fundamental added value for the project

²³ <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2011/05/27/tiptoeing-around-issue-europe-s-response-to-egyptian-uprising-pub-44230>

²⁴ Review of Surveys on Euro-Mediterranean Relations, and an Introduction to the Elite Survey in MEDRESET, 2017: <http://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/review-surveys-euro-mediterranean-relations-and-introduction-elite-survey-medreset>

²⁵, The annual core budget of the Secretariat never exceeded 9 Million Euros.

promoters. In addition, the UfM was confronted with the challenge of adding a fundraising burden to the existing political and diplomatic efforts many projects called for.

Therefore, in terms of their financial investment magnitudes and number of beneficiaries, initiatives like Med4jobs are still not reaching a level one could expect from such a high-profile intergovernmental institution. 100,000 declared beneficiaries²⁶ represent a limited outreach for a regional framework initiative, especially when UfM's role is not to be the direct project and funding manager but an upstream mediator and policy facilitator.

The 8th of October UfM Ministerial Regional forum reviewed the progress made a year after the adoption of the "Roadmap for action"²⁷. The Roadmap was an action-oriented document initiated and pushed by the UfM Secretariat as a commendable effort to give further momentum to some of its actions. However, most of the highlighted projects are either efforts driven and steered by Euro-Mediterranean institutions with minimal involvement of the UfM, or small-scale projects, including some with not more than 1,000 beneficiaries.²⁸

On a more positive note, the UfM Secretariat has made successful efforts - particularly since the appointment of Fathallah Sijilmassi from Morocco as Secretary General in 2012 - across the organization: streamlining and professionalising its internal procedures; improving institutional functioning²⁹, creating standard operating procedures for official meetings, a professional and more transparent project promotion and development process, tools and mechanisms for project and partnership development, etc.

A weak position on the multilateral stage

Despite the efforts to respond with an agenda closer to the real priorities of Mediterranean societies, the UfM has not managed to become a multilateral forum where international agreements, transformative programmes and financing mechanisms are adopted.

²⁶ Outcomes of the Med4Jobs first stakeholder Dialogue, 8 October

2018 <https://ufmsecretariat.org/outcomes-first-med4jobs-stakeholders-dialogue/>

²⁷ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/UfM-Roadmap-for-action-2017.pdf>

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/what-we-do/how-to-submit-a-project/>

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The UfM has remained first and foremost a Eurocentric entity. Beyond its attempts to increase its relevance after the Arab Spring, the UfM is still functioning as an entity mostly driven by Europeans and therefore lacking the traction needed from its Southern neighbours. The main reason for this Euro-centrism is the fact that half of its funding comes from the European Commission's Neighbourhood Policy instruments. Add to that the fact that the Senior Officials are often the ambassadors of their countries to the European Union in Brussels.

The other major problem is that Euro-Mediterranean institutions and networks (both governmental and non-governmental) remained a somewhat closed and inner-looking circle of people, disconnected from some key geopolitical decision-making at the country level or from the wider multilateral conversations and negotiations. Over the years, many of these institutions - think tanks, universities, NGOs, networks³⁰ - meet and participate exclusively in each other's conferences and publications. Instead of being a network of mutually-reinforcing institutions for regional integration, they lacked the influence needed for decision-making at the domestic and international level, notably through the UN and other priority multilateral instruments.

One concrete example can be found in the environment and climate change sector. The UfM Ministerial meetings and platforms on Environment and Climate Change found limited synergy and imperfect coordination with the UN Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan³¹ or the regional negotiation groups of the UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which are both the existing binding agreements for countries with clear mechanisms for implementation.

The United States (through MEPI)³² or more recently China, notably through the Belt and Road Initiative, are actively engaging bilaterally in the Mediterranean countries away from the Euro-centric prism and looking at their regional interests³³. These countries never took advantage, or effectively acknowledged the existence of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and its potential, while the UfM did not manage to position itself clearly towards those key countries. A country like Morocco, which could have become a bridge between the UfM and the African Union, never associated the two agendas, leading to a situation in which this 'African Alliance' would rather

³⁰E.g. Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, Annah Lindh Foundation, IEMed, EuroMeSCo, IPEMED, FEMISE, GWP-Med, EuroMed University, Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, Anima Investment Network etc.

³¹ <http://web.unep.org/unepmap/>

³² <https://mepi.state.gov/>

³³ <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/china-mediterranean-emerging-presence>

be discussed through the League of Arab States. In the same way, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have also developed their way of shaping their alliances and collaborations in the Near East and North Africa, and show no real predisposition to take into consideration a third party like the UfM.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE UfM? A BALANCE TO BE FOUND BETWEEN THE POLITICAL DIMENSION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC INNOVATION

A difficult political context that increases the UfM's legitimacy

The UfM is today anchored in a particularly delicate regional, political and security context.

The migration crisis is a human and political tragedy³⁴ that affects both shores and in which countries are still trying to agree on how to manage. While Turkey or Jordan are battling at home to absorb a large population of Syrian refugees, most of the European countries are only willing to close their borders further.

Seven years after the youth-led political movements in the Arab world and to a lesser extent Europe, responses from countries, the European Union and the UfM fall short of the stated needs for democratisation, reforms and a new vision of socioeconomic development in response to the adverse effects of globalisation and neoliberal policies.

As Intissar Fakir and Sarah Yerkes at Carnegie recently put it, *"the need to forge a new state-citizen relationship was one of the implicit drivers of the 2011 Arab protests and the ensuing unrest. One of the core components of a viable social contract—effective governance—is still in decline across most of the region."*³⁵

Public debate in Europe, on the other side, is primarily concerned with religious radicalisation, the influence of migrants and Islam in the cultural fabric, and the adverse effects of globalisation on inequalities. The current political and social debates have been widening the space of extreme and populist political parties with

³⁴ More than 15,000 people have died since 2014 <https://missingmigrants.iom.it>

³⁵ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/16/governance-and-future-of-arab-world-pub-77501>

xenophobic, nationalistic and divisive agendas. Acts of racism and bigotry are on the rise while nationalist governments reject the European Union and its overarching principles.

As for the geopolitical landscape in the region, it does not appear any brighter. The war in Syria is an ongoing proxy war for regional rivals in the Middle East and their allies; counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel concentrate some of the Mediterranean countries military and tactic efforts; the reconciliation and stabilisation process in Libya is still at a stalemate and is agitating Italy and France; all the while prospects for peace between Israel and Palestine are at an all time low.

In addition, multilateralism has never been so disregarded and despised by influential leaders globally, who adopt a patriotic and nationalistic approach and discourse. Multilateral forums striving to defend global governance all face a crisis of legitimacy and budgetary constraints. The UN budgetary crisis and decades-long unachieved reform, the G8 becoming G7 again, Brexit and most recently the so-called Visegrad group of countries dissent within an ever more fragmented EU: these are only a few examples of the crisis of global governance mechanisms. The UfM, with its weaker mandate and fragile political weight, is not immune to this broad rejection of multilateralism.

This political climate is further fuelling the ideology of the “clash of civilisations”, auto-entertaining a divide between the two shores that has been characterised as “a wishful, paranoid and self-destructive retreat”³⁶.

This challenging and complex context, however, may shed a positive light on the UfM, opening a window towards greater legitimacy and added value. The UfM can turn its birth defect and paradox – as a political institution with an apolitical functional mandate – into strength, by reinserting a political dimension to promote sustainable human development with a wide range of actors and for building alternative models.

³⁶ <http://www.synaps.network/the-mediterranean-crush>

Tackling the socioeconomic issues affecting the political and security agenda

It is now accepted that the UfM will not solve the Israeli-Palestinian or the Western Sahara conflicts. The geopolitical divergence among the 43 countries is not conducive to any consensus on political and security issues. The UfM cannot be the platform where North and South of the Mediterranean negotiate an agreement for the management of migration flows either. The EU decision to discuss migration in a summit with the Arab League as a bilateral exercise of two different blocks of countries, thus outside the UfM realm, is but the latest evidence³⁷. Ultimately, the high-level discussions between EU and LAS might not actually be able to tackle these security issues either, given the current tensions in the relations between the EU and Saudi Arabia (current chair of LAS), and the disagreement on normalising relations with Bashar-Al-Assad³⁸.

The UfM can nonetheless play a non-negligible role concerning the socioeconomic dimension of migration, whether in the countries of origin, transition or destination. It could use its programmes, tools and platforms to exert a positive influence in regional socioeconomic projects, advancing knowledge and understanding of the issue to fight stereotypes, misconceptions and misguided responses. The 2017 UfM decision to appoint an ambassador dedicated to this file, being responsible for the development of an action plan, is a step in the right direction³⁹. The European Union is adopting a new Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027) for the EU, a consolidated budget with an increased envelop for the "neighbourhood, development and international cooperation". While most stakeholders welcome the increase in funding, concerns were raised by NGOs that the specific focus on migration will only serve the short-term security interest of member states instead of sustainable development⁴⁰. The MFF will be presented for final consent by the EU Council and Parliament in May 2019⁴¹.

The often left aside cultural and social aspects of the partnership are a fundamental component of the equation between the security and socioeconomic dimensions. Thus, both should be reinforced, particularly targeting youth, for they

³⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/european-council/president/news/20180924-tusk-meeting-alsisi/>

³⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/eu-cool-on-arab-league-summit-over-syria-saudi-concerns/2019/01/18/23099c16-1b20-11e9-b8e6-567190c2fd08_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.bdf5feddd8c5

³⁹ see page 7 https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Roadmap_FollowUp_ENG_DEF_WEB.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.devex.com/news/alarm-bells-sounded-over-new-eu-aid-instrument-proposals-92936>

⁴¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/future-europe_fr

represent the foundation for further democratisation, pluralism, sense of belonging and ownership. Questions around faith, cultural heritage and civilisations cannot be utilised to marginalise civil society initiatives and should be mainstreamed across governmental agendas and platforms with multiple stakeholders. Today, the dire standstill of the EU integration, as well as the UfM, both looking for an identity, represent two sides of the same coin in which the youth is looking for good reasons to believe in the benefits of regional integration.

Possible avenues in this regard include empowering the Anna Lindh Foundation, notably by better integrating its governing bodies and instruments into the UfM structure; holding a Ministerial meeting on Culture that actively involves civil society organisations; and promoting youth groups exchanges and applied research in these fields.

A multilateral platform to generate social, economic and political changes

Perhaps because of the initial projects of the Barcelona Process for the Union of the Mediterranean, governments in North and South have equally tended to focus exclusively on the need to advance liberalisation of markets further.

However, if there is one thing the “Arab Spring”, the “Indignados” and other “Occupy” youth movements had in common, it was the rejection of a socio-economic model they perceived as only concentrating capital in the hands of a few, and the feeling of being left out of the decision-making process⁴².

Actions directed towards preserving the environment, strengthening democracy, corporate social responsibility and gender equality are still often considered as second-class concerns compared to the need for market liberalisation. Today, not only youth activist movements are calling for a change in the social and economic models, but also scientists and government-appointed specialists (notably see the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC –’s latest alarming call⁴³ or the first World Inequality Report⁴⁴ findings).

⁴² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676261.2015.1020937>

⁴³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/energy-environment/2018/10/03/climate-scientists-are-struggling-find-right-words-very-bad-news/?utm_term=.101eec5d5def

⁴⁴ <https://wir2018.wid.world/>

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These macro challenges are similar in both shores of the Mediterranean and call for further research and development, common policy visions, and innovations. The UfM has a significant advantage whereby it can gather decision-makers (ministerial officials, parliamentarians), scholars, practitioners and civil society organizations. This multi-stakeholder approach including the policy decision-makers can be more effective than individual and activists' calls to change the course of history.

The UfM should be a platform to advance policy-oriented research, public policy and governance innovation, as well as the development of public and joint mechanisms to facilitate the emergence of truly sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic models. This kind of multi-stakeholder dialogues can optimise the collective thinking that is imperative to catalyse meaningful change.

In the past ten years, and building on previous Ministerial EuroMed meetings, the UfM has devised multiple policy platforms. These new entities have enabled regular exchanges and formal dialogues between senior officials and experts in both political and technical matters regarding priority topics for the region's future. One of the recent examples is the adoption, following the failure of the somewhat unrealistic Mediterranean Solar Plan, of three policy platforms to advance a dialogue on regional energy integration. These platforms will not replace bilateral efforts and other channels of dialogue, and cannot be expected to lead to the adoption of binding international agreements. Yet, space for policy dialogue can catalyse the emergence of sub-regional hubs and interests, and help to remove hurdles to develop deals and agreements⁴⁵.

These forums must, therefore, be given further space and impetus, to transform them into more than rhetorical platforms⁴⁶. That strengthened authority is achievable within their mandate and by making efforts to engage and invite active and innovative stakeholders, beyond the "usual suspects" of the Euro-Med institutions.

With the right coordination, these policy platforms can become the umbrella to boost and connect existing Euro-Med platforms among each other, avoiding duplications with other forums, like the technical meetings of the 5+5 Dialogue.

⁴⁵ Tareq Baconi, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/pipelines_and_pipedreams_how_the_eu_can_support_a_regional_gas_hub_in_7276

⁴⁶ *ibid*

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For these policy platforms to be fully operational, the UfM must better connect with other multilateral forums and circles working on similar topics, notably under the UN, in order to avoid remaining in the inward-looking circles as mentioned above. In that regard, the UfM must increase synergies and avoid duplications with the various Mediterranean chapters created in global institutions such as the World Bank (CMI)⁴⁷ or the UN⁴⁸. In turn, if better aligned and coordinated with the 'MENA' chapters and regional groups within their global organisations, these Mediterranean sub-centres could become a bridge connecting the UfM with a broader multilateral setup. The signing this month of a 3-year MoU between the CMI and the UfM seems to capture this necessary approach⁴⁹.

The UfM should also become an official umbrella for the 5+5 dialogue, without putting into question the added value of that sub-regional dialogue. At the last conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of 5+5 Dialogue called for an "enhanced coherence" with the UfM⁵⁰, but concrete instruments and channels for ensuring alignment of outcomes remain to be identified.

Recent efforts by the UfM Secretariat to build partnerships and sign MoUs with various UN agencies, as well as to obtain observer status at the UN General Assembly, show a commendable willingness to be more integrated within the global governance frameworks and can lead to positive outcomes. The strengthening of the partnership with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)⁵¹ is also an essential step in promoting the advancement of policy reforms and common frameworks given the legitimacy of the OECD, as well as the organisation's interest to expand its countries' base⁵².

⁴⁷ <https://www.cmimarseille.org/>

⁴⁸ like the UN Environment-managed « Barcelona convention » on Marine environment or Silva Mediterranean under FAO

⁴⁹ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/synergy-impact-ufm-cmi/>

⁵⁰ See Algiers Declaration : <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/55-D%C3%A9claration-dAlger.pdf>

⁵¹ <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/ufm-and-oecd-partner-to-strengthen-cooperation-for-inclusive-and-sustainable-development-in-the-southern-mediterranean.htm>

⁵² most Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries not being part of OECD.

Boosting more realistic and impactful projects and initiatives

It is also highly unlikely that the UfM's 43 Member countries will ever give the Union and its Secretariat enough means to become a real agency for development, or to constitute a "development bank". In a revealing comparison, the "New Development Bank"⁵³ created recently by the BRICS countries⁵⁴ has an initial subscribed capital of 50 billion dollars, when the UfM is still highlighting as an achievement projects with a total value of 1.5 million dollars. This partly reflects the lack of prioritisation that is given to the UfM by its member countries.

Despite these financial and structural limitations, there are two possible avenues that the UfM could take for increasing its overall impact, within its existing institutional set-up and mandate.

First, it can promote more large-scale projects with a regional dimension, what it calls "flagship" projects. The latter have to be chosen carefully and avoid the birth-defect of the first wave of projects proposed in the UfM declarations, as mentioned above. The current success of the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez is an example of an effort that at the same time is strongly supported nationally by one country – Morocco – while involving the necessary partners to give it its needed regional dimension, promoting exchanges and further integration. In all fields, such projects should be envisaged.

The Central Desalination Project for the Gaza Strip (a massive infrastructure project with a cost of half a billion dollars) aimed at bringing potable water to half the Palestinians in Gaza is another example. The project is surprisingly still alive despite the 11-year blockade imposed by Israel and substantial political obstacles: the UfM played a significant role in taking that project forward after years of stagnation, removing bottlenecks one by one with national, regional and international partners in a very challenging political environment, helping partners to engage for the project's further development. Although not out of the ground yet, and taking into account the desperate energy situation in the Gaza Strip, the project is moving further, albeit slowly.

Second, the UfM could catalyse innovation emerging at the national level from vibrant non-profit and for-profit sectors, particularly emerging from the youths that

⁵³ <https://www.ndb.int/>

⁵⁴ common denomination for the group of emerging countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

are not waiting for their government to come up with solutions to enter the 4th industrial revolution. More success stories like the social enterprise SINGA⁵⁵ that connects refugees and their host community, or the social enterprise Yomken⁵⁶ championing crowd-solving, could be promoted and boosted through the UfM's networks. The young people leading these organizations are already connected with their Mediterranean compatriots, but they could benefit from the institutional boost from an intergovernmental body like the UfM to expand their outreach and facilitate scaling-up.

The decision of the UfM Senior Officials to "reform the UfM label in order to make the label more clear, present, and effective for project promoters and donors alike"⁵⁷ is a necessary step, but will not be sufficient to significantly increase the leverage and impact of the label. The UfM needs to be given the necessary financial means and instruments to invest in the labelled projects and initiatives that emerge from the policy platforms or are presented to the Secretariat. Already in 2011, the European Investment Bank (EIB) seconded a staff member to the UfM Secretariat, followed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 2014. However, these secondments were not tied to any dedicated funding to the UfM's initiatives. Supplementary South-South instruments and partnerships should also be further leveraged, such as a dedicated Mediterranean agreement with the Islamic Development Bank or projects in the neighbouring countries by TIKA, the Turkish development agency, that is now heavily investing in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The UfM's institutions will also need to give further space for experimenting and testing the potential of local and national innovative initiatives emerging from the actors on the ground, NGOs, SMEs, cooperatives, social businesses and universities. The UfM Secretariat can help in connecting them better with the applied research and policy dialogue taking place in the various experts and policy platforms, with innovative concrete projects identified by the Secretariat.

⁵⁵ https://www.lesechos.fr/04/09/2015/lesechos.fr/021301080541_singa--l-association-2-0-qui-connecte-les-refugies-et-les-benevoles.htm

⁵⁶ <https://www.yomken.com/>

⁵⁷ See page 6, https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Roadmap_FollowUp_ENG_DEF_WEB.pdf

CONCLUSION

Ten years after the creation of the UfM and 23 years since the dawn of the Barcelona Process, it is time for the Partnership to take another transformative turn. If no substantial advances are made, it runs the risk of disappearing to the benefit of forums with no unifying ambition – the EU-Arab League dialogue – or with a smaller group of countries – the 5+5 Dialogue or the bilateral Neighbourhood policy.

The UfM was born defective and did not manage to achieve what the BP had also failed to do. The non-politicized “Union of projects”, leaving aside all considerations of human rights and democratisation, did not manage to advance regional integration further. It has had difficulties in anticipating and adjusting to the realities on the ground of people’s anger and fatigue with their decision-makers, while at the same time being unable to address the security concerns among governments given the divergence in diplomatic positions.

In order for the UfM to become a relevant and visible forum on the global scene, it needs to use its intergovernmental setup to its advantage, discussing policy matters of interest for both shores and participating as a catalyst for the active youth. Unlike state-driven diplomatic channels between the EU and the League of Arab States, the UfM should be the umbrella of an ecosystem that promotes bottom-up initiatives while advancing related policy reforms at the regional levels on critical socioeconomic issues such as water, climate change, higher education and mobility, agriculture or transport.

The three following conditions must be met for the UfM to move effectively forward. First, the organisation must articulate and connect more efficiently with other multilateral forums, notably in the framework of the UN or with other regional platforms. It must also clarify its institutional singularity and strengthen synergies with Mediterranean chapters of International organizations, as well as with the European Neighbourhood Policy. Second, the Secretariat, its policy platforms and the UfM’s labelled projects must be given significant financial means for their promoted actions to bring about systemic change and not only short-term impact, which is what is expected of a high-level intergovernmental structure. Third, the UfM must be more agile in its decision-making in order to deliver its mandate, not being solely driven by an elite and inner-looking circle of people, but instead integrating the vibrant civil society and private sector actors in the region.

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Judging by the 8th of October Minister of Foreign Affairs Forum conclusions and outcomes⁵⁸, it is not clear whether there is the political willingness to boost these changes. Will the “Summit of the two shores” that will take place in June manage to give the necessary impulse to a Mediterranean dialogue with a new formula? The focus on inclusiveness and youth could be the right way to mobilize the stakeholders from within the UfM platforms, NGOs, networks and innovators to initiate a bottom-up lifting for the UfM. However, it could also bear the risk of marginalizing the UfM, moving back to a very euro-centric approach to the Mediterranean agenda.

It remains to be seen whether the EU will favour the strengthening of its dialogue with the League of Arab States, at the expense of its Mediterranean agenda, in order to assert its influence in both Africa and the Middle East region, or whether it will continue to invest in the UfM as a meaningful bridge. In turn, and given their diversity, Arab Countries of the UfM might find a stronger sounding board through the EU-Arab dialogue, particularly to push EU’s positioning on critical issues such as migration, terrorism and trade, and continue to favour bilateral relations.

Ultimately, any proposal for a new formula and revival of Mediterranean partnership must take into account that the UfM is today the only partnership between the two shores that is endowed with institutional bones for joint action beyond summits and ministerial gatherings.

⁵⁸ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/10-years-regional-cooperation/>

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