

Introduction

2008, European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, ended with the announcement of Barcelona as the headquarters of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The city, which with its name and energy has since 1995 symbolised Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, will boast an international body making it the de facto capital of the Mediterranean. It is the recognition of a long history and continued efforts since the so-called Barcelona Process began in 1995. Its Euro-Mediterranean involvement since then has been indisputable, leading to crucial qualitative advances for relations and cooperation between European and Mediterranean people. The initiative of Barcelona and Spain first played a key role in 1995, then during the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in 2002 and, again, in the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Summit in 2005. In this frame of mind, we are confident that, with the support of all Euro-Mediterranean partners, in 2010, when Spain will hold the Presidency of the European Union, we will overcome the current economic slump and achieve a more effective dialogue framed within the new multipolar paradigm.

The very existence of the UfM is positive, as is the newly-created structure, with biennial summits and a secretariat, but we are far from resolving with a stroke of the pen all the issues facing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. And this is where Barcelona can make the difference. The Secretariat of the UfM has, in principle, a technical mission of preparation, monitoring and encouragement of the projects approved by the summits or ministerial conferences. However, with headquarters in a city and country which firmly believe in the Mediterranean project, with the support of all its government levels and a committed civil society, this new Union will have a broader development and will far more actively invigorate the projects of Euro-Mediterranean scope. Based in Barcelona, dialogue and cooperation will be strengthened. Barcelona's involvement and energy will realise the UfM dream, a dream described in this publication by Andreu Bassols through an original exercise in politics-fiction which marks a series of shared challenges. These challenges consist of achieving peace, democratisation, social and demographic transition, employment, sustainable development or collective security. This means that the profound involvement of the European Commission and of all partner countries in the Barcelona Process is not simply a question of courtesy or solidarity with Southern Europeans: the stability and economic progress of the Mediterranean interests the whole of the EU as well as Mediterranean Europeans. This is even more apparent for the more sensitive aspects on the Mediterranean agenda: the migratory flows, the problems of cultural dialogue, the issue of terrorism... directly affect the whole of Europe and their echoes reach the entire world.

The Barcelona Process is not the instrument for achieving peace in the Middle East, but it can and does improve the basic economic, social, political and educational conditions, which are a requisite for advancing towards a future understanding. The Barcelona Process is also, and not by chance, the only field in which Israelis and Arabs regularly meet and participate together with Europeans. In no other field, outside of the Euro-Mediterranean, is this progressive contact between official or civil organisations from Israel and the Arab world taking place.

If Europe truly seeks to put the Mediterranean at the top of its priorities, it must offer a substantial advance in expanding the Partnership. Assertions that the Barcelona Process has failed because it is too ambitious ignore the fact that it is called a process precisely because it is a social modernisation project. And in all social modernisation processes, unfortunately, the effects are not measured in years but in generations.

For social modernisation a far more intense, profound and long-term effort is required. External aid needs money, but also requires technical assistance, personalised people to people help in the field, involvement of governments and, above all, of civil society, as professor Bichara Khader notes in his article. Thus, the priorities of the UfM must be, firstly, the management of human mobility in the Mediterranean and, secondly, the resolution of conflicts in order to achieve regional integration, a real Euro-Mediterranean space.

In this context, the young, to whom we dedicate the dossier of this issue of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, play a fundamental role, as they can act as a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean, with a clear projection towards an egalitarian future, where the cultures of the region know and respect each other in mutual enrichment. In this respect, the Union for the Mediterranean specifically shows that the Euro-Mediterranean strategy in relation to culture has one of its main axes in the recognition of the importance of dialogue between cultures. And in this framework, the young, their dreams, realities, potentialities and actions can open new paths of resolution and prevention of new conflicts, which are very difficult to develop from other fields. In the same spirit comes the call from the Alliance of Civilizations to all those who believe in constructing more than destroying, those who consider diversity a means of progress more than a threat and those who believe in the dignity of people and of the human condition beyond differences of religion, race and culture. The European Union, for its part, works in the field of youth through its programme Euromed Youth which, through initiatives and activities aimed at young people, fosters mobility and active citizenship, education and training, mutual understanding between youths, and between organisations which support young people.

Only through this path of effort and participation is it possible to channel a new political creativity, capable of constructing more and better alliances, communities, strategies and shared instruments in order to make the Mediterranean a shared space of exchange, meeting, progress and creation.

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