

Passion and Commitment to the Mediterranean

Miguel Ángel Moratinos. Former Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

In 2014, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) celebrates 25 years of its work fostering actions and projects that contribute to awareness and exchange between Mediterranean societies. Its founder, the late writer Baltasar Porcel, undertook this major task with the general aspiration for democracy and well-being based on dialogue and political commitment. This has strengthened the international image of Barcelona as a Mediterranean and plural city which, with time, has become the headquarters of the Union for the Mediterranean. Today, the IEMed, along with other Spanish institutions, continues to work with the passion for and commitment to the Mediterranean that characterise the career and literary work of Baltasar Porcel.

Perhaps anniversaries and key dates help us to look at the realities and personalities that are the object of recognition, memory or revision. The 25th anniversary of the Catalan Institute for Mediterranean Studies – since 2002 the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) – and the 5th anniversary of the death of its inspiration and promoter, Baltasar Porcel, are invigorating Mediterranean affairs as a concept of nature “constituted by plurality” and not as “an attic of gloomy problems”¹ and, above all, as a vector of civilisation, an emerging space and a political, social, economic and cultural field of creativity, with “an extraordinary future potential.”²

It is difficult to separate the vision, passion and commitment in relation to the Mediterranean from the founding of the Catalan Institute for Mediterranean Studies, aspects that impregnate the thought, work and life of Porcel, a “clear-headed colleague and a friend”³ in the ups and downs of Mediterranean navigation. As a friend I shared his approach of seeing the Mediterranean “as an ancient creative force forming an indisputable unit of which Europe and the West are a consequence.”⁴ We believed that the acceleration of time and the risks in the area unfailingly led to the “general aspiration for democracy and well-being,” incorporating it into an asymmetric globalisation, which is

1. PORCEL, B., *Mediterráneo. Tumultos del oleaje*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1996, pp. 10 and 11.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

3. Baltasar Porcel's handwritten note.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 416.

more noticeable on the shores of the Mare Nostrum. We understood that cooperation was necessary and essential “for self-preservation and self-realisation” and that “this would necessarily take place according to the classic Mediterranean pattern: dialogue, democracy.”⁵ As Director General for Africa and the Mediterranean in the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and in later missions and multilateral forums, I have encouraged these concepts and involved myself in the search for social and political agreements. Only through dialogue and political commitment is it possible to stabilise one of the most strategic and unstable areas in the world, where the flows of human activity are increasingly intensive and segmented. This is reflected by the irregular immigration to Europe and the whole of the Maghreb, as well as by the organised crime networks in their most diverse forms and religious fanaticism, which have focused much of the agenda of the 2000s.

I have shared with Porcel the vision of further strengthening the international presence of Barcelona, far from the sterile nationalist dialectics, as a “collective platform” of the Mediterranean

Since the founding of the Institute, I have shared with Porcel the vision of further strengthening the international presence of Barcelona, far from the sterile nationalist dialectics, as a “collective platform”⁶ of the Mediterranean. For this reason, it was satisfying to see the success of the Euromed Civil Forum in 1995, the largest meeting of specialists from Mediterranean civil society in history, which acted as a nexus and inspiration for many of the initiatives of the Euro-Mediterranean Summit,

called by the Spanish Presidency of the EU. It was attended by 12 extra-Community Mediterranean countries and laid the foundations of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Ten years later, I was responsible for re-launching the Barcelona Process and contributing to and managing the 10th anniversary of the Summit to revise and update objectives; although, unfortunately, many of them are still pending. I also advocated taking to Barcelona the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, in which 44 countries are represented, including the State of Israel.

Through his activity and work, Porcel helped forge the Mediterranean mentality, while contributing to the construction of the Mediterraneanness of Barcelona and Catalonia, and also of Spain and Europe. Before many of our neighbours with bigger economies, our country was aware of creating a model of public diplomacy within the state, represented by all its political and administrative levels. Consequently, and in my modest view, Porcel was a pioneer in forms of soft power and in the creation of Spanish public diplomacy.

Thus, after long work sessions and successful organisation, the public consortium of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) was created, open to civil society and the economic-business world, so it can participate and channel its knowledge and interests through multiple contacts, activities and studies. At the IEMed and, later, at Casa Árabe, Casa Sefarad-Israel and Casa Mediterráneo, the Mediterranean space has been enhanced and its diversity made more visible. Mutual awareness has also been strengthened and, most interestingly, it has worked for the “fluidity” of our interdependence.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 416.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 412.



Euromed Civil Forum Opening, 1995 (IEMed Collection).

Europe is returning to the Mediterranean, after almost 30 European councils with no mention of it, because its geo-political interests are being transformed and it is obliged to further commit to a region in full effervescence and which has not yet completed the process known as the Arab Spring, which involves citizen empowerment in a system of democracies. In recent years, Europe has been engrossed in the financial, economic and institutional crisis, while the Maghreb continues

to be a segmented and confrontational area with no guarantees of human security, with the exception of certain states. Fortunately, institutions such as the aforementioned and the IEMed have continued with their work and have maintained bonds of cooperation and dialogue in the region, which contributes to being more optimistic with a perspective of stability and sustainable progress. The Middle East continues to be a hornet's nest against the background of the war in Syria and with

the limited advances in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

The solution to these conflicts cannot distract us from other priorities, such as progress in human rights and cooperation in political, social, cultural economic and environmental issues. These are fields strengthened in the latest Euro-Mediterranean Summit held in Barcelona and explored in depth by our system of public diplomacy and the multilateral agencies in the region. Indeed, “if we let the

Mediterranean degenerate into a sewer, what sense will there be in politically and economically saving humanity and the Mediterranean societies?”⁷ With the passion and commitment to the Mediterranean shared by many of us with the IEMed and Baltasar Porcel on their anniversaries, we can help ensure that the *Mare Nostrum* is a clean and living sea: a space of peace and progress; “the friendliest ecosystem, a harmonious and suggestive historical landscape.”⁸

7. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 416.