

A View from the South on the Mediterranean Region

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The marvellous Mediterranean Region, like other places of passage, has a daily dynamic with influences from around the world. It is a region where a number of civilizations have come together and melded and a slew of historic events have transpired, the ensemble of which makes for a very particular place. Each thing and image of the different facets of the Mediterranean Region requires attentive scrutiny in order to be comprehended and analysed and for its secrets to be revealed. The Mediterranean both separates and unites at once.

It is clear from its genetic make-up that Europe and Africa are the factors most influencing its evolution, for this region has witnessed many transactions of a political, social and economic nature between European countries and their counterparts on the African continent. It has evolved over long periods of crisis in which slave trade was widespread and the pillaging of African riches a right imposed by the colonists.

Immediately after the African continent's independence, the Mediterranean Sea changed roles. It became the ferryman of nuisance from South to North, which rapidly gave rise to major social crises such as the rise in racism against third-country nationals from the South and the abusive exploitation of foreign labour, particularly in the mining sector.

Today, with the crisis we are experiencing on a global level, the Mediterranean Basin represents a melting pot and anchorage point for a new generation of problems, in particular pollution, issues associated with the elderly and aging, social unrest

and political instability. Insofar as migration, it has become a large-scale societal problem particularly affecting the Maghreb. Before, this region was used as an area of transit towards the North, but for some years now it has become a destination in its own right. The situation in these countries now mirrors that of Europe in the 60s and 70s, with all the side effects this produces.

A new economic migration profile is gradually becoming consolidated and this time in the North to South direction. It involves job-seekers and retired elderly people. The latter immigration has been growing for the past few years. Clearly, a European retirement pension allows an elderly couple to live a decent life under better conditions than in their country of origin. Many cities in the South are experiencing this type of immigration. There are even, at times, neighbourhoods of retirees who carry out new socio-economic or cultural activities transferred from abroad which are taking up increasing space in the public sphere.

This new trend will most likely lead to a significant change in relations between countries, which will no doubt establish a new relational framework between them. This change in social, political and economic behaviour will provide new partnership conditions that will take into account the interests of both parties.

To this end, public debate on a new development model has been undertaken on different levels with the aim of identifying the right actions and being able to effect the necessary adjustments and by the same token, deal with the multi-dimensional crisis that is dangerously weakening the political regimes in the region. The forums and symposia held on this topic have reopened debate on alternative support and solidarity that could be provided by a social and solidarity economy (SSE).

MEDESS: BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM FAVOURABLE TO THE SSE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

MedESS is an initiative by a number of actors of the Mediterranean social and solidarity economy, in particular, MACIF and the Groupement Crédit coopératif. Founded on 29 January 2013 in Rabat, the first edition of this congress was held in Tunis on 2 and 3 May 2013. Over 600

participants attended, with 41 initiatives from six countries of the Mediterranean Basin and some hundred representatives; 75 Mediterranean organisations and enterprises; 60 speakers on the different topics and 91 accredited journalists over the three days of the conference.

Such considerations have been the object of regional gatherings of social and solidarity economy stakeholders. The ESMED (Euro-Mediterranean Social Economy Network), a Mediterranean network established in 2000, has continually reflected on the best paths and means for getting out of the crisis. The 2011 Barcelona ESMED Conference gave rise to a panoply of recommendations on the subject. Other recent organisations such as MedESS and Maghreb-ESS (see boxes) have each attempted to identify paths for progression capable of inspiring policies in the region and fostering economic democracy with sustainable development. In seeking to attenuate the detrimental effects of capitalism, which has reached its limits, models of development more adapted to human needs are recommended, whereby the human being is the focal point of concern insofar as development. Naturally, the immediate interest is that of easing the tension of public demands brought about by an unemployment rate that goes beyond 30% in some countries, especially among youth (this is the case of Spain).

The social and solidarity economy will certainly find its place in the Mediterranean and will consequently provide the solutions of balance and regulation necessary for this long-awaited social justice.

It should be noted that the countries in the region today have a business substrate in this sphere considered significant, consisting of social enterprise and non-profit organisations falling within the social economy. This sector alone employs 6.3 million individuals in 411,000 enterprises, the majority of them co-operatives and associations. But the major question remains of how one can foster such development alternatives in a region where a certain number of problems endure, such as the issue of the circulation of peoples and the South-North economic imbalance.

In any case, in addition to this imbalance, the South has a significant deficit insofar as decentralisation

and regionalisation, which are absolutely essential elements for attaining an economy that integrates the territory and becomes the generator par excellence of wealth and employment.

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In a comparison of southern countries concerned in the sphere of the social and solidarity economy, one can observe that Morocco has made commendable efforts in this domain since 2000. It differs from other countries along the South shore by remarkable progress in certain projects related to the development of enterprise in the social and solidarity economy. The Initiative nationale du développement humain (National Initiative for Human Development or INDH), launched in 2005 to combat poverty, and the second pillar of the Green Morocco Plan designed for small-scale farmers both bear witness to the deep involvement of associations and co-operatives.

The situations in Algeria and Tunisia are different and the social economy in these two countries is characterised primarily by mutualist action focusing on social and medical coverage. Insofar as associations, they remain on a modest scale and highly localised. The laws and regulations governing the social economy reveal statutory definitions different from those in the majority of countries. This heterogeneity renders an inter-Maghreb partnership in this area difficult. All the more so since

MAGHREB-ESS: CO-ORDINATING THE SSE THROUGHOUT THE MAGHREB

Maghreb-ESS is a Maghrebi network of social and solidarity economy founded on 2 March 2013 in Algiers. It was created on the initiative of the Tunisian National Union of Mutual Societies (Union nationale des mutuelles – UNAM), the Moroccan Network for the Social and Solidarity Economy (Réseau marocain de l'économie sociale et solidaire – REMESS) and the Algerian Committee for a Social and Solidarity Econ-

omy (Comité algérien de l'économie sociale et solidaire). The Maghreb-ESS has members from these three countries, for the time being. Its founders are working on attracting Libyan and Mauritanian organisations as well. Mohamed Laddada, former medical doctor and president of the Algerian National Health Insurance Fund (Caisse nationale d'assurance santé – CNAS) is the chair of this network.

each government does not lend a specific reading to the function and utility of this alternative. Some would like to use it as a charitable stopgap instrument while others see it as a tool of choice for ensuring sustainable development capable of harnessing the potential of each territory in order to bring about change and the conditions necessary for inclusive local development.

With regard to the North shore, it ranks higher than the South insofar as the social and solidarity economy, which statistics indicate as healthy. In France, 45% of the adult population belongs to associations according to the Law of 1901. In Europe, there are 248 million members of co-operatives, mutual aid societies or associations that

contribute 8% to the GDP. This sector accounts for 6% of employment in Europe. Such data amply demonstrate the importance of social enterprise and its role in the dynamics of the European economy.

This reveals the need to get the two shores to work together and take advantage of one another's experience to enhance trade in services and products from such co-operatives. To this end, fair trade has a preponderant role to play in creating a new trade dimension between Europe and its former colonies. This co-operation could lend many northern countries the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and foster a more emancipated, fairer citizenship based on solidarity.