

## **The UFM: Challenges and Prospects**

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Let me start by reminding that from Toulon (The Speech of the Candidate SARKOZY of February 2, 2009) to Tanger (the Speech this time of the President SARKOZY on October 25, 2007] to the Rome Trilateral Italian Spanish French Summit meeting of December 2007, to finally the European Council of March 13-14, 2008, the French idea of the new Mediterranean Club has been enlarged and Europeanized. Though it was developed out of a critique to the Barcelona process, and as an alternative to it and later as complimentary to this process, it ended up, thanks to the European insistence and opposition to the French original idea, integrated into Barcelona, as Barcelona 2 or Barcelona renewed or perhaps Barcelona second generation going via the transitional phase of carrying the 2 names in one before ending up finally with dropping Barcelona from the title, signaling symbolically the newness of the UFM, after choosing the nice Mediterranean city as the headquarters of the new or renewed and enlarged and better focused project to carry the name of the UFM.

Allow me to suggest **five ideas** for discussion and to make five propositions about this Project of projects:

**First:** the arithmetic's of the multilateral transmediterranean relations reflect the very great interest for cooperation emanating from the two shores of the Mediterranean sea; the former 12 plus 5 , the 5 plus 5, the Euro Arab dialogue, the Mediterranean forum, the Barcelona process, the European neighborhood policy and finally the UFM are all good examples of this keen interest with changing agendas. Nevertheless the means invested were never up to the declared goals and objectives. It is also worth noting that in many instances we witnessed different agendas than the ones officially declared for the cooperation, we witnessed the prevalence sometimes of security and mercantilist logic as opposed to a dependency logic. Perhaps a little comment that I have heard myself on the launching of the Barcelona process could be very indicative of the state of mind of many of the architects of that process. An eminent colleague of mine from Brussels, who took off his official hat, put it to me this way; we wanted to export part of the solution in order to avoid importing the whole problem.

**Second:** we must avoid, on the two shores of the Mediterranean, to put the bar very high in terms of defining unreachable objectives. This could lead to frustration and often to a feeling of fatigue and of dropping what could be achieved when we stick to what is not achievable. Equally important, now that we are at the beginning of a renewed process, is to avoid the trap of mixing up wishes with reality. Speaking of a Mediterranean identity in the socio-historical meaning is more of a utopia than reality, as described by Jacques ATTALI. However we must fix as an objective the creation or the forging of a Mediterranean identity in a functional way, in other words the construction of a community of interests based on shared common political values. Let us admit it, we are still far apart from that important goal that could act as a cementing force for the UFM on one hand and a driving power behind its goals on the other hand.

**Third:** while enlarged Europe is still torn apart between East and South, always tilting in favor of the East as being part of geocultural Europe to be recuperated entirely into the EU, and to “save” it from falling into a Russian zone of influence. It is quite indicative to observe that immediately and parallel to the launching of the new Med-Process both Sweden and Poland called for the creation of a new structure of cooperation bringing together the EU and East European countries namely the Balkan countries, an Eastern Partnership, a structure to be shaped almost after the UFM model. The European inner political dynamics, A Europe of nation states, explains that duality or competition. Thus if the European Mediterranean countries look south, the Central European countries would look east, each group to its immediate neighborhood. However a basic difference remains between the two projects; the finality of the southern one is and remains deepened partnership, the finality of the eastern one is membership. On the opposite shore of the Mediterranean the Middle East has been undergoing tremendous changes at different levels: the configuration of power, the dominant ideology, the nature of influential actors, the types of conflicts. We are witnessing the emergence of a disordered regional order. This emerging fluid Order presents a set of major challenges to Europe but it also offers a set of new opportunities for Europe to rethink its relationship with a dynamic and chaotic region.

**Fourth:** geography, history, sociology, and economics have contributed to the creation of a transmediterranean society, which in turn witnesses on one hand and contributes on the other hand to the many interdependencies that were established at the societal level between the two shores – basically

between the Maghreb and Europe. The issues of the South, namely of the Arab world, have become thanks to this transmediterranean transmission belt, domestic European issues. What I describe as the dialectics of the two suburbs is being strengthened every day. On the opposite shore the relationships of the European cities to their suburbs, not only in the geographic but also in the socio economic meaning, do carry certain repercussions on the relations of Europe with the Arab world. This transmediterranean specificity is a mixed blessing. It could be a source of friction as well as it could provide a great potential for solidarity and cooperation across the Mediterranean.

**Fifth:** many faults lines exist between the shores of the Mediterranean; a demographic fault line with a large expansion in the south now controlled but producing lot of pressure on the job market, an economic fault line whereas 80 percent of the GDP of the Mediterranean pourtour belongs to three countries of the northern shore: France, Spain and Italy. These factors coupled with political and security ones in certain instances produce a strong migration pressure. Though it was reduced as emanating from the southern shores the Maghreb, the latter has become a point of passage, a transit road for sub-Saharan African migration. The absence of a credible south-south integration Project as it is observed particularly in the Maghreb because horizontal economic integration is often hostage to political factors; the settlement of political conflicts remains a prerequisite – a necessary but not sufficient condition, for successful horizontal integration that allows to lessen the dependency on the northern markets and societies. A political fault line does exist also in the form of a demand for a more active and dynamic European political role namely in settling crises and conflicts. To the great frustration of the southern countries, Europe is often absent or marginal or assuming a nominal non influential role because Europe does not speak with one voice on certain issues or does adopt positions short of the expectations of the south on other key legitimate issues to the same south; The absence of a comprehensive and critical political dialogue between the 2 shores nourishes and maintains negative perceptions of the other; a cultural fault line does exist also with the identity revolution and awakening and the strong return of the cultural to the world of politics; a return of the identity based politics often leading to rupture and lack of dialogue and the emergence of phobias and of simplistic discourse leading often to generalizations and to the demonization of the other. A major problem currently lies in the tendency to give an identity based or derived explanation to a socio economic or politically provoked behaviour or actions

thus people became locked into their identity, and looked through the prism of identity thus deepening the fault line and increasing tensions and conflicts among different societies with different culture or religion. The phenomena of economic exclusion and social marginalization and the behaviour they could provoke are given identity interpretation and associated with one's belief and culture; Seeing the world through the lenses of culture and religion and acting accordingly is the "*maladie du siècle*"; A dialogue of deaf, of arrogance and ignorance takes over in the relations between different societies via a simplistic and dangerous logic.

***Five suggestions***, I wish to make almost a year after the Paris Summit and almost six months after the Marseilles ministerial meeting that ushered the take off phase now that the Process is stuck after Gaza and because of Gaza, and drawing particularly on the lessons of the Barcelona process:

***First***, it is important to develop a better focalisation on the projects of cooperation and partnership focusing on projects which are of regional nature or projects that encourage and facilitate or invest in regional integration, mainly south-south integration. Priority must be given to projects that act as a lever or locomotive for development projects in strategic sectors.

It is important also to focus on projects that stimulate and help forging transmediterranean solidarities

***Second***, to adopt a flexible approach that helps avoiding barriers and difficulties through the logic of cooperation at multiple speeds. An approach based on the principle of the '*geometrie variable*' must prevail to avoid the problems and the stalemate emanating down the road from the complex realities of the political context and/or to manage successfully the sensitivities of some participants at one point of the process. It is equally important to clarify and define the relationship between the different structures of cooperation in the Mediterranean basin, for instance the relationship between the UFM and the European policy of neighbourhood which is based on rebilateralisation of cooperation as well as the principle of positive conditionality with the EU. It is of utmost importance to do a good division of labour among these different structures.

***Third***, it is necessary to democratise the cooperation both at the decision-making level and the functioning one, to invite the South, and that is a challenge to the South, to present initiatives and ideas that could turn into projects for implementation as well as guiding policies being the fruit of

consultation with the Northern partners who too of course are supposed to present ideas and initiatives. What must be avoided is the policy of presenting projects, which reflect the simple balance of power between the two shores of the Mediterranean. A more balanced legitimate cooperation cannot be but the fruit of that process of dual initiative taking and consultation. Partnership does not happen only at the official or formal ceremonial level but at the level of the formulation of projects and of setting up priorities. We must do projects with the other and not projects for the other; that should be the philosophy of the UFM.

On the other hand, human dimension was always the weak dimension in the Barcelona process, it is this dimension that gives legitimacy and driving force to the cooperation. Indeed the human factor is the ultimate objective and the finality of this cooperation. Inclusiveness must be the cornerstone of active partnership and cooperation, bringing in the largest possible number of civil society actors to encourage what we call the cooperation of proximity again in the formulation of projects and priorities as well in the implementation and follow up phases. This could enhance the much needed sensibilisation of the public to the UFM goals. The creation of a Mediterranean ERASMUS is a good example of the promotion of the human dimension; a project that gives visibility but particularly credibility to the UFM.

**Fourth**, it is equally important to maintain a global approach to the “project of projects” an approach that is based on maintaining always a political drive, or a political impetus to the UFM. Indeed the *raison d’être* of the new Construction is political. We cannot give a political impetus to this Project while trying to avoid politics at the same time or deal with it *à la carte*. In this context it is important and necessary that the UFM does not become hostage to the ‘hard conflicts’ particularly to the Arab Israeli conflict; it is impossible to make abstractions of these conflicts particularly of the Arab Israeli one, which is to a great extent structuring the geopolitical context of the Middle east Mediterranean region. The political trauma and the regional explosive tense context after the war on Gaza provide the best example of the weight this conflict could have on the UFM Process rendering it almost entirely paralyzed. I like always to call the attention to the fact that without Madrid and after without Oslo we would not have been able to have Barcelona. Thus Europe is urged to engage firmly and clearly in the search for a comprehensive settlement to this Conflict; the key elements of this settlement being known by now. It’s equally important that Europe plays a

more forceful role in the management and stabilization of regional crises and conflicts. Europe can assume the role of initiator, facilitator of the negotiations to be, of accompanist, but also of a guarantor of the finality of the reached settlement. It is always worth reminding that cooperation does not create peace out of identity based conflicts or conflicts of national liberation nature. Cooperation cannot substitute for a just settlement of these conflicts as some tend to preach all the time despite the lessons of history. Indeed cooperation gives a legitimate content to peace, which in turn opens highways as well as large horizons for cooperation.

*Fifth*, it is important to create a forum for reflection to think continuously, or to revisit always the philosophy of this Grand Project, to review its main orientations and axes and to reevaluate always its functioning. I would consider the creation or the setting up of a quadripartite forum bringing together officials, intellectuals, representatives of the private sector and of the civil society. There is the need to create a tradition of an open, inclusive representative and flexible or informal dialogue. We need to conceive an open Mediterranean regionalism in a world that is becoming more interdependent and more complex every day. It is impossible in this world particularly the Mediterranean world to compartmentalize and slice major regional issues and problems, which are highly interconnected and interpenetrated in their evolution. Finally one needs to remember that if the EU is Mediterranean by its interests and its concerns, by its present and its future, the Arab world is equally Mediterranean for the same reasons. Thus we must develop and strengthen the perspective of an active, gradual and flexible participation of non Mediterranean Arab countries in the UFM with the aim of having them at one stage joining fully the UFM.