



“Euro-Mediterranean Relations: A Year After Spring”

*Proceedings of a seminar organised by
The Réseau Euromed France (REF)/ French Euro-Med Network
in Paris on the 23rd of March 2012*

The French Euro-med Network, a national platform bringing together 26 French organisations working to strengthen Euro-Mediterranean civil society, organised a seminar on the 23rd of March 2012, at the premises of the League of Education in Paris. The seminar discussions focused on Euro-Mediterranean issues in light of the profound changes underway since the beginning of the democratic revolutions in the Arab world claiming dignity, freedom and fundamental rights. The aim of the seminar was to take an informed position on the role of Euro-Mediterranean civil society in this new political situation.

The objectives of the seminar were, notably, to give an overview of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the context of the democratic revolutions taking place in the Arab world; to analyse the European Union's response to the upheavals, the needs and the new resulting constraints; to assess the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and to put the role of civil societies in the construction of future Euro-Mediterranean relations into perspective.

Together with the experts invited, Catherine Wihtol de Wenden¹, Iván Martín², Jean-François Daguzan³ et Sébastien Abis⁴, fourteen representatives of the REF member organisations and other European partner organisations have contributed to this discussion⁵. The following brief note provides a summary of the main ideas brought up.

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1. Aspects of Context.

The European crisis in all its facets (economic, financial, social and political) on the one hand and the Arab democratic uprisings on the other hand, have contributed to further marginalise the “Mediterranean question”– already ailing since the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean - and especially to question the regional dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

Undoubtedly, the Mediterranean is not a priority of current policies neither in Europe nor in Euro-Med countries. At present, there is no vision or Mediterranean project. This does not depend on the (often mentioned)lack of resources but on the order of priorities as evidenced by the tremendous financial resources mobilised to rescue the Greek or the Spanish economy, unlike the resources allocated to Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. The three European countries traditionally on the leading edge of the Mediterranean question (France, Spain and Italy) are inactive and lack leadership and the Northern European countries no longer trust the European Mediterranean countries dealing with the Mediterranean question.

Priorities are elsewhere; Euro-Mediterranean regional cooperation has found itself in a deadlock situation and even the will to do something together seems to be questioned.

On the Southern Shore, besides highlighting the disparities between the countries, the Arab revolutions have caused the emergence of national entrenchment almost everywhere as national emergencies have become vital due to the current upheavals. Southern Mediterranean countries have no common position on Europe (each country tries to stand out). Yet, the lack of unity on both sides (south-south, north-north) is one of the major constraints to the development of real cooperation.

On the Northern shore, the paradoxical consequence of the Arab revolutions is that we now perceive even more the difference between European and Southern Mediterranean countries. Europe is not pleased with the election results and yet, it has to define its position on political Islam that is becoming increasingly present in the political life of northern and southern Mediterranean. This situation stops, slows, and questions the model of cooperation that we had designed. This model now needs to be redesigned with a new system that takes these massive changes into account.

Besides the rise of national entrenchment on both Mediterranean shores, there is a lack of visibility on perspectives since the situations are far from being stabilised. Yet, this vagueness increases the difficulty in taking a position and above all, it does not promote openness towards “others” who seem increasingly “different”.

In fact, since ancient times, the Mediterranean is an area of strong exchange between the two shores but also an area of rupture and distrust. Due to their geography, both shores are condemned to live together and face common challenges that, in some cases, have worsened during recent decades.

More importantly, the crisis and the revolutions have vividly demonstrated the extent to which the Mediterranean is a system of interdependencies and paradoxically made the “Euro-Mediterranean” project even more topical.

2. New Challenges, New Emergencies

Today, even if Europe is taking a closer look and observing the events happening in Arab countries with concern, no one speaks of the Mediterranean. Yet, the challenges faced currently by the countries in the area are not only numerous but also common to both shores.

The first challenge is that of employment: considering that in order to meet the working requirement of Mediterranean youth, 1.5 million jobs must be created each year for the next 10 years in the Mediterranean Arab countries. Today, 40% of the 60 million young people aged between 15 and 30 in Arab Mediterranean countries are neither in employment nor in education or training, 25% have informal jobs, 33% are in secondary or university education and only 2% have formal and decent employment. With the current economic model, it is impossible to solve the employment problem in the South. It is civil society's role to seek alternatives because governments reiterate the same modalities as in the past.

Food insecurity is another major problem in the Mediterranean (and one of the main causes of war and migration) that is likely to increase (this is already the case in Egypt or Syria). It is therefore necessary to increase resources among poor and/or rural environments.

The territorial divide between coastal and inland rural areas in Southern countries is a relatively unknown phenomenon whereas for a long time, we have focused on the North/South divide.

On a more global level, the presence of new players from outside the Mediterranean coming from world emerging powers (BRIC) and even from the Gulf oil countries is another major challenge for Euro-Mediterranean societies and economies and especially, for Europe's influence in the area.

Finally, the revolutions and above all, the electoral processes have put the question of common values, individual and collective freedoms and fundamental rights, especially the issue of equality between men and women and the issue of migrants' rights at the heart of the debate.

However, the most important common challenge is undoubtedly the one related to the migration issue and its management. When talking of the Mediterranean as an area of complementarities, we could highlight the existing complementarity between the need to work in the South and the need of workers in the North.

In Europe, the change of posture that Northern European countries currently have vis-à-vis the countries that have chosen a new path in the name of dignity and are still paying the price, is a determinative challenge. These countries, these populations and especially these young people are now demanding Europe to change its paternalistic and superior glance. This is an essential condition in order to face the common challenges together.

3. A Fundamental Issue: Migrations

Today, the issue of migration is often sidestepped in the debates whereas it is an essential aspect of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the dominant discourse in the North is impregnated with "protectionism". The countries are questioning the Schengen area and the proclamation of the primacy of national sovereignty with regards to Europe. In general, the Northern countries do not trust Southern European ones in matters of border control. Moreover, today,

despite the fact that Southern Mediterranean countries have played Europe's border guards in the past years, Northern countries trust them even less.

European migration policies primarily have a security-centred approach whereas migration is a complex phenomenon. Mechanisms such as Frontex (European agency for the surveillance of external borders), readmission agreements and the Integrated System of External Vigilance (Gibraltar), in many cases, lead to the non-observance of the rights of migrants. They also encourage smuggling, the rise of clandestineness, illegal and intractable situations and ultimately, the criminalization of migration.

In the context of the Arab revolutions, loosening the grip and facilitating mobility would reduce the adverse effects of the security-focused system and decrease the number of deaths at sea. Establishing real cooperation between countries on the issue of mobility would help ease the relations between North and South of the Mediterranean. This would create the conditions for a smoother flow and thus discourage illegal and precarious settlement while encouraging comings and goings.

In 30 years time, migration issues will be very different from the ones of today due to sociological and demographic changes. Presumably, there will be much less potential migrants.

We should already start perceiving the Mediterranean as a system of interdependencies and complementarities (between the rich and the poor, the young and old) and consider the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean free movement area.

4. EU Mediterranean-Related Policies.

The Euro-Mediterranean model (resulting from the Barcelona Process) based on a system of multilateral cooperation aiming to maintain stability in the area has exploded. Moreover, the emergence of political Islam as a major player in the political life of the Southern countries (and, to a lesser extent, the Northern ones) is a significant factor that has contributed to breaking the status quo.

Finally, the presence of new actors in the Mediterranean region weighs in on the difficulty faced by Europe to assess emerging issues, to take a longer-term view, in short, to rethink its project for the Mediterranean.

The existing political and institutional frameworks are ineffective or need to be rebuilt. The UFM – Union for the Mediterranean – increasingly seems to be more of an empty shell that prevents the emergence of new initiatives and hinders the possibility to fundamentally restructure and rebuild Euro-Mediterranean relations on new foundations. As for the ENP - European Neighbourhood Policy - it has relegated the Mediterranean region to the rank of a region like all others, thus killing the specificity of the Barcelona Process, which made Europe's southern flank not only a major strategic area but the very cradle of Europe itself. However, given the limitations of the ENP, today, a strategic Mediterranean vision and policy should be adopted. It is also of utmost importance to get out of a simple approach of (development) assistance and border management in order to move on towards a logic of interdependence.

As from spring 2011, the EU carried out a rapid redefinition of its policy on the area by defining a new approach to the Neighbourhood Policy. Nevertheless, Europe's response to the Arab revolutions has only added new themes while keeping the old instruments. Above all, Europe did not change its view or its model of cooperation with countries that have just paid the blood money in order to overthrow regimes that have been previously supported

and strengthened by European strategy that did not encourage any process of socioeconomic development.

Of course, the themes of democracy, fundamental rights, civil society, mobility and employment occupy a new place in the revised ENP but a thorough and thoughtful reflection still needs to be made.

The analysis of the new approach already reveals two problematic issues: the question of “political conditionality” and the one of the financial resources mobilised.

The “More for more” strategy that governs the new ENP refers to the “three M’s” (more means, more markets and more mobility) and the strong conditionality that is at the heart of the ENP’s revision whose contents are not specified (more of what to get more of what?). Moreover, no concrete commitments related to progress in partner countries have been defined by Europe. Besides, the EU imposes a unilateral assessment and decision process. The question is whether such conditionality imposed on very fragile countries, is really realistic.

It is more important than ever for civil societies to define the impassable red lines of the “conditionality of rights” that would be based on universal values and rights enshrined in international and European treaties, such as equality between women and men, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, minority rights, ... Nonetheless, the imposition of European criteria could only lead to mistrust and even rejection of European requirements on the Southern Shore.

Working jointly on the “3 C’s”, specific to a model of relations based on co-development: real convergence (of income, wages ...), cohesion (territorial, ...) and co-responsibility (shared ownership of problems and solutions, and thus the mobilisation of common resources) could be a more constructive way of proposing a real alternative to this imposed conditionality (of the past).

The fact that the funds mobilised to deal with the new situation are very modest is another cause for concern: Europe does not seem to have really measured the strategic importance that the Mediterranean represents for Europe and its future.

Today, it is urgent to radically change the paradigm of cooperation: the funds that are currently allocated are funds dedicated to development cooperation. These funds are too targeted and do not aim for comprehensive development. Should we not experiment other ways? Should we not consider an extension of the European regional policy’s concept, methodology and structural funds?

4 axes are proposed:

- Democracy, citizenship, equality and non-discrimination, including equality between women and men in all areas;
- Employment, which has become a priority in Euro-Mediterranean debates (civil society has an important role to play in the search for alternatives to the current economic model that is unable to satisfy this need);
- Local development: aid deployment must change as it is too centralised;
- Reconstruction of regional cooperation in the Mediterranean given the current trend of “nationalisation” of interests.

A different economic model and a different model of regional cooperation, again, based on our interdependence are necessary. Limited models (such as the 5+5, a purely inter-governmental initiative perhaps adapted to military and security cooperation but not necessarily to other areas) are not an alternative to the Euro-Mediterranean project.

5. Civil Societies Have a Role to Play.

The European Union seems to have understood the importance of civil society in the ongoing democratization process: new means and facilities have been dedicated (see EC and EEAS Joint Communication “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood” (COM (2011) 303 of 25.5.2011).

These new instruments and facilities are one of the main novelties of the European Neighbourhood Policy’s (ENP) new approach. They plan to establish a Civil Society Facility and ultimately, a European Endowment for Democracy.

The main civil networks are currently questioning themselves on the role of civil society in the current Euro-Mediterranean context.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Important collective reflection and consultation must be carried out within European civil society, both at national and European level, on the Mediterranean, on its importance and its potential for Europe’s future. Its challenges should be presented and its realities capitalised. The large civil society networks such as Coordination Sud themselves do not work on these issues. Ad hoc working or reflection groups to deal with these issues could also lead advocacy actions. The mobilisation of civil society must be permanent and not occasional, in case of crisis.
- Strengthen and revitalize the networks of Euro-Mediterranean civil society organisations, in synergy with experts and academics, as platforms of expertise in Euro-Mediterranean policies. These platforms would monitor the policies implemented and the formulation of concrete proposals for action by public authorities in Europe and in each Euro-Med country. In this context, the place of the Mediterranean diaspora in Europe and the role it could play in leading the links between the two shores must be recognised (but of course, this cannot replace a genuine policy of cooperation in the Euro-Med area).
- Civil society organisations of both shores should continue to play a role at a “micro” level to build relationships of trust between Euro-Mediterranean countries without waiting for the “macro” situation to be stabilised. They should be able to combine cooperation and solidarity especially in the current struggle taking place in the South.
- Finally, thanks to solidarity and its experience in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), Euro-Mediterranean civil society can support the establishment of new associations emerging in the South.

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The Réseau Euromed France (REF)/ French Euro-Med Network is the French network of Euro-Med Non Governmental Platform. Bringing together French civil society organisations engaged in the Euro-Mediterranean region, it aims to:

- *Federate these organisations in France in order to facilitate exchange of practices and the circulation of information, to ensure the flow of information, to support the sharing of ideas on Euro-Mediterranean issues and actions.*
- *Mobilise and promote the network’s actions, develop joint initiatives and partnerships.*
- *Advocate for Euro-Mediterranean issues vis-à-vis French public authorities and European institutions.*
- *Enrich the Euro-Med Platform’s work through the specific contribution of the REF’s members.*