

Mediterranean Network Meeting Nicosia, Cyprus, 28-30 November 2008

The political responsibilities of Europe towards the Mediterranean countries

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before speaking about the theme I have been proposed to develop, I first would like to ask you to show a lot of indulgence towards my knowledge of English and above all towards my accent which is, as you can hear, quite an original mix of Greek, French and Flemish. I hope you will be able to bear it at least during a few minutes. I would also like to thank the organisers of this meeting for giving me the opportunity to come back once again in this beautiful country dear to my heart. I want to thank them for allowing me to take part in this debate which is essential for Europe and refers to a big part of our common history since, from the antiquity and in a permanent way up to today, people from both shores of the Mediterranean have always kept meeting, invading, conquering, mixing, influencing each other, in short sharing together not only history but also a largely common destiny.

Fate willed that if today I am on the Eastern border of European Union on an island that has played from time immemorial a particular role in this region of the Mediterranean, last week I was on the Western border, in Lisbon. Since I have always been interested in history, I was trying to know who discovered Lisbon. Does anyone here know the answer? Actually, as it often happens, there are two different schools of thought. The first one says that Lisbon had been discovered by Ulysses, a Greek man from the Northern shore of the Mediterranean, who besides gave it his name, Olysabonne. This version seems more to be part of the legend. Historians rather think that it had been founded by Phoenicians, those people coming from the Southern Mediterranean. This is only one between hundreds of examples which give evidence that, for centuries, people from both parts of "Mare Nostrum" have had relations dominated sometimes by some of them, sometimes by others.

Please do not worry; it is not my purpose today to teach you the history of those relations but, in order to be able to pertinently answer the question of political responsibility of Europe towards Mediterranean countries, it is crucial to have present which cultural, political and human links have existed between all of us since Ulysses up to Nicolas Sarkozy. I do not know if the name of President Sarkozy will go down to posterity in the same way as Ulysses' but he is in any case the one who took the latest political initiative in the field of Euro-Mediterranean relations. I will come back to this later, after reminding that these relations have been mainly initiated by the Barcelona Declaration.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, launched in 1995, constitutes in fact the framework of political, economic and social relations between the EU Member States and the Southern Mediterranean countries. The Barcelona Declaration refers to the three main objectives of this

partnership: *the definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue; the construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free trade-area; and the rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies.*

This Partnership comprises two complementary dimensions: *a bilateral dimension* mainly based on Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements signed with each Mediterranean partner (except for Libya, only recently admitted as observer to the process, and Syria for which the ratification is still frozen) and *a multilateral dimension* aimed at covering at the same time the political, economic and cultural fields. This bilateral dimension was further strengthened in 2004 by the establishment of *the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)*, which offers a country-specific approach providing flexibility and differentiation. In this sense, bilaterally negotiated ENP Action Plans are better suited to promote internal reforms according to each Mediterranean partner's political situation, its level of ambition with regard to the EU, its reform agenda and achievements, and its level of socio-economic development. The success of this policy will clearly depend on the implementation of existing commitments, both by partner countries and by the EU.

There is a general agreement that Barcelona has not produced the results that we hoped for. Our main criticisms were its inter-governmental character and its incapacity to reverse the historical, political, economic and social tendencies in the Mediterranean countries. In this regard, it has to be kept in mind that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in the context of the Oslo Agreements and, therefore, with the hope to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the contrary, this conflict and all the others (Western Sahara; Syria-Lebanon; Lebanon-Israel) have blocked the political cooperation process as foreseen by the Barcelona Declaration and have put an end to the project of a charter for peace and stability in the region. The creation of a *Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly* in 2004 can be surely considered as a step forward in the parliamentary involvement to this process but has still to be reinforced so as to play a real role in the implementation and the elaboration of any Euro-Mediterranean policy. At the same time, a *civil society platform* has been created but also needs to be further revived. Finally, it is important to point out that the attacks of 9/11 as well as the war in Iraq in 2003 weigh heavily on Euro-Mediterranean relations, thus creating a confidence crisis between the North and the South of the Mediterranean and undermining the rapprochement between peoples. Security concerns are more than never predominant in all European policies, including in the management of migration issue and thus, prevent any kind of progress towards any free movement of people between both shores of the Mediterranean. Further to this, the lack of decentralisation and de-concentration as regards the use of MEDA funds and the low absorption capacity of the partner countries have hindered, in the beginning, the effectiveness of these programmes as well as the poor cooperation between them both at the economic and political level which made the partnership between the two shores unbalanced.

Towards the Barcelona process: Union for the Mediterranean

President Sarkozy originally advanced in May 2007 the idea of a "Union of the Mediterranean" to which "just the coastal states of the Mediterranean would aim at a political, economic and cultural union". The idea behind this project is to push forward enhanced cooperation on concrete projects: fighting against pollution in the Mediterranean, improving

energy supply, strengthening the surveillance of maritime traffic and civil security cooperation, setting up a Mediterranean Erasmus, creating a scientific community...

This proposal encountered criticism at the highest level: Turkey rejected the idea that this might be considered as an alternative to its accession to the EU; Chancellor Merkel rejected the idea that policy for the Mediterranean should be restricted to the coastal states; and the Slovenian Presidency in office stated that "we do not need a duplication of institutions that would compete with EU institutions, and that would cover part of the EU and part of the neighbourhood". The general message coming from the South Mediterranean is that the UMed project remains to be specified before there could be clear responses, but in any case it should not undermine positive aspects of the Barcelona process and of the ENP. The idea that the UMed might be the leading strategic project for the region, undertaken by just the coastal states, wins no apparent support, while the need for a proper articulation with the Barcelona process and the ENP is an explicit concern.

The outcome of the European Council of 13-14 March 2008 was a very short communiqué which announced that the existing EU policy for the region would be re-baptised "Barcelona process-Union for the Mediterranean" and include the EU Member States as well as the non-EU Mediterranean coastal states (27 EU MS + 12 Southern states + Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania).

Since then, the founding summit of the Union for the Mediterranean took place on 13 July 2008 in Paris following an official invitation from France (President of the Council of the European Union) and Egypt. It gathered at the highest level the Heads of 43 States, which constitutes an undeniable success, because the strategic importance of the Mediterranean Basin had not been on the front page of the news since a very long time and because this summit succeeded in gathering Heads of States with litigations far from being solved.

Besides this success, the Union for the Mediterranean must still prove itself and demonstrate that it will be able to draw a lesson from the semi-failure of Barcelona process.

Therefore, the question of the responsibility of Europe must be measured through the answers which will be given in the next months and years to the following questions:

First of all, at the institutional level

Should the enlarged EU be involved in an equal way in this huge Mediterranean project and keep its global unity? I suppose that representatives of Cyprus will bring an interesting light on this question, considering their own experience and responsibility in this field.

How can a Union be created between countries that have such different goals? Turkey is negotiating its accession to the EU; Morocco is moving towards an "advanced status" and Israel towards a "special status"; Egypt still has to implement the institutional framework necessary to collaborate with the Commission; Algeria is not interested in taking part in the ENP; the ratification of the Association agreement with Syria is still depending on the setting up of the International Tribunal; exploratory discussions have been initiated on a first framework agreement with Libya. Following this question, humility should lead us, people from the European side, to ask this question to ourselves: when will we get a single European voice and strategy? Since the failure of the ratification process of the European Constitution, we are forced to note that Europe did not really gain anything in terms of credibility and power on the international scene and that it is not necessarily always capable to hold a front

place in a world where the United States, China and Russia are getting to hold a more and more important place not only at political level but also at commercial level.

How does the UMed intend to overcome the existing and persistent conflicts within the region in order to gain credibility and not repeat the experience of Barcelona?

How to ensure that the promotion of democracy and human rights will continue to be duly taken into consideration in this project at least as it is developed in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Human Rights clause of the Association Agreements) and in the ENP (Human rights and Democracy chapter in the ENP Action Plans to be implemented and setting up of sub-committees on Human Rights so as to increase the political dialogue and cooperation between the parties)?

How can we raise the awareness of this project and does it explicitly include a genuine proposal for the reinforcement of the parliamentary dimension and a greater involvement of the civil society of both shores of the Mediterranean?

Many projects are needed in the Mediterranean (decontaminating the sea, transport controls, energy cooperation, water programmes etc) which are already covered by existing structures. However, the absence of results mainly comes from the failure of all Mediterranean countries involved in common projects to construct a genuine level of cooperation between them. Is there any chance of putting efficient projects into practice within a global setup and with a single co-presidency for all Mediterranean countries?

Finally, at a more pragmatic level

It seems to me that the pertinence of a number of projects must be highlighted and supported. In particular, I would like to mention ambitious and sensed projects such as the one which aims to clean up the Mediterranean which must lead us to have the ambition to make the Mediterranean the cleanest sea in the world, the coastal highway between Alexandria and Tangier, going by the Piraeus, the creation of a centre of excellence *Euromed* in the fields of agriculture, desertification, biodiversity and climate changes.

In my view, three questions automatically arise: the question of the means, the question of the coherence and the question of the actors.

1. How will those projects be financed? By European funds exclusively or will they be co-financed by private funds? The question of the financing is crucial.
 - The difference in terms of development between the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean is the biggest one in the world between two adjacent regions;
 - The employment situation in the countries of the Southern shore is dramatic; it is well stated that those countries should create 90 million new jobs to have their workforce occupied, which does not seem, all other things being equal, very likely;
 - Only 2% of the European turnover is invested in the Mediterranean, and it is invested mainly in the Eastern part of it.
2. Then the question of the coherence is: how can Europe simultaneously claim it is encouraging knowledge-based projects while it is closing its borders in such a

hypocritically impenetrable way? When I left Brussels, the *Université Libre* of Brussels which is one of the most important universities in the country was being occupied by what are called *des sans papiers*. These persons are asylum seekers who demand for a legal permit. Among them, we find a lot of young people. None of them committed any crime except the search for a possible future. It seems to me that Europe cannot be credible towards the Inter-Mediterranean dialogue if it does not structurally modify its immigration policy.

3. At the end, I think that one of the most fundamental questions is: **for whom do we want to reach this Euro-Mediterranean cooperation?** For the political world? The economic world? For citizens? We all know that consequences will vary according to the answer. You will not be surprised to hear that, as an ecologist, I think that only a sustainable development based on citizens themselves is able to invert a dynamic of relations mainly characterised by a win-lose logic (for example, Northern people have a better life than Southern people) and to progressively build relations which, at each step, constitute a confirmation for citizens of the win-win principle, which inevitably and at least implies a reinforcement of cooperation, participation and public governance rules.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

to conclude, I would say that asking the question of the responsibility of Europe in the Mediterranean area will not be possible without asking the question of the responsibility of every present and concerned actor. Today the Union for the Mediterranean seems to be a dynamic which deserves to be promoted but on one condition: this union must be radically turned towards the citizens of all the concerned countries.

Thank you.