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## A QUARTER CENTURY AFTER THE BARCELONA PROCESS: UfM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN POLITICS

Enric Olivé Serret, & Didem Doganyilmaz Duman\*

### ABSTRACT

The Mediterranean Basin has been homeland for various societies throughout history since it stands at the connection point of the Old World. Within the modern political structure, the Basin can be divided into the North that represents the European Union and its members and the South consist of Arab countries and Israel with not only their different social structures, but also socio-political and socio-economic orders. Since the abolishment of the colonial rules in the southern Mediterranean, there have been various attempts to establish cooperation based on partnership and the Barcelona Process has become the most significant one, of the last quarter of the 20th century, since it paves the way for a union, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). This study analyzes the Euro-Mediterranean relations within an institutional level starting from the Barcelona Process and the current UfM. The quarter-century long initiative has been focused within the Democratic Peace Theory in order to form a base for both trade-oriented and institutionalized structure of relations alongside border securitization concerns of the European Union. It puts UfM's political effectiveness at the center and provides an analysis regarding the capability of its responsiveness to certain political issues of the Mediterranean Region.

**KEY WORDS:** Mediterranean, the Union for the Mediterranean, Euro-Mediterranean relations, democratic peace theory.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the Mediterranean has become a geopolitically important region where western and eastern values met. The interaction between the North and the South has always been kept alive due to political, cultural, sociological and economic differences. This importance of the Mediterranean has not been vanished within time; hence political and economic relations have been improved with bilateral and/or multilateral agreements.

The word 'Mediterranean' is originated from *Mediterranie*, from Latin 'Mediterraneus' that means midlands with the sense of the *sea in the middle of the earth* as in Mar Mediterranean (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). This denomination refers to its geological location since it is placed in the middle of Europe, Africa and Asia, the three continents of the Old World. In fact, this reference has not been limited with Latin-originated languages. For instance, in Arabic '*Al-Bahr al-Mutawāsīt*' (Bordonado Bermejo & Zúñiga Rodríguez, 2008, p. 2) or in Turkmen language '*Ortaýer Deňzi*' (Glosbe Dictionary, n.d.); they both mean 'the sea in the middle'.

Shores of the Mediterranean have always demonstrated adverse structures. With respect to these diverse characteristics, it would not be wrong to claim that the Basin is divided into two as the North and the South. Northern shores of the Mediterranean consist of southern countries of Europe. For this part of the Basin a supra-national structure attracts the attention; in other words the European Union (EU) with democratic, economically stabile, wealthy and industrialized states, alongside Turkey as a candidate county represent the North (Uzun, 2003, p. 3). The South, on contrary, demonstrates unstable characteristics with the lack of similar economic and political development resulted by their relatively young independence and long-lasting authoritarian regimes, recent Arab Revolution movements, regime changes and consequent political and economic aspects. Briefly, the North can be pointed out as an example of developed characteristics both in national and macro-regional level, the South has not achieved these standards.

In terms of forming sustainable relations between the North and the South of the Basin, all aforementioned characteristics have become negatively effective. As it will be discussed in detail, cooperation attempts have mostly focused on developing the South. The reason was about the neighborhood; since the EU

has intended to control and to securitize its southern borders with investing in economic, social and political stabilities of Arab countries in order to achieve a decrease in emigration. Since domestic conflicts of southern countries have become a concern around the North; development was pointed out to solve the *issue* of migration permanently. Consequently, various attempts have been carried out in order to cooperate.

In international relations discipline, cooperation is linked to liberal theory that encourages inter-national and/or supra-national relations and consequent inter-dependent actors within the international system in order to maintain the peace in the system. Regarding the Democratic Peace Theory, there are different focus points to maintain a peaceful characteristic within the international system; improved trade relations for a deepened inter-dependent structure and institutional connection for a more legitimized cooperation, alongside various other aspects. Even though the theory has been criticized strongly, it has a strong effect within liberal theory and a concrete background that is based on the philosophy of Kant (Mello, 2017). For the purpose of this study, this theory possesses significant important, in accordance with institutionalization of relations between two sides of the Mediterranean Basin. As it will be explained in upcoming paragraphs, relations were first developed on the basis of economic interests via bilateral agreements, then the frame of cooperation have been widened starting with Barcelona Process that turned out to be a 'union' after all.

This paper analyzes the historical process of developing and institutionalization of relations between the South and the North from the very beginning, how cooperation projects have been resulted and how countries have reacted them. With all these aspects, an evaluation of a quarter-century-old international actor, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) will be provided in terms of its efficiency in Mediterranean politics, as well as the international system.

## **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN**

With the end of colonial connection in 1960s, a new era started in terms of relations between the North and the South. Once colonialism terminated, mutual dialogues have become the base of relations and that paved the way through a modern understanding of relations between two sides of the Basin. With establishing a dialogue, the intention was to response social, political and

economic needs of the South (Kurtbağ, 2003, p. 74).

Foreign policy of the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC) back then, mostly focused on trade and development and used to lead the foreign affairs of the non-member states (Kahraman, 2008, p. 1731). That was applied for southern neighbors as well, and various steps were taken in order to develop relations within the frame of foreign trade and development policies. Economic, social and political gaps between the EEC and its neighbors brought about the necessity to invest in relations meanwhile it was considered as an obstacle once taking further steps was intended.

Even though relations between the South and the North was initiated and developed on the basis of economic cooperation, analysis with the limits of trade and/or economic aspects within a wider perspective would be deficient and lead the research to achieve one-sided results. It would not be wrong to claim that another reason to invest in Euro-Mediterranean relations during 1960s was the lack of control over southern borders as a result of the end of colonial ties. Improved relations would be the core element to respond interests of the EEC in terms of security. Economic reasons were used to develop Euro-Mediterranean relations where the EEC was independent in terms of foreign trade apart from the petroleum while the South was dependent for various goods with low level of development. In addition to economic dependency, low level of development and its consequent results were considered as probable risks for macro-economic and sociological problems and increasing the level of welfare of southern neighbors was agreed. With this intention, implementations to bring about development to the southern part of the Basin were planned to be initiated; however, it was not welcomed and be suspected as being a different strategy of the North to protect its own interests.

Topics with aforementioned necessities such as securitization of borders, increase of economic development, and so on were implied as a complete project for all countries of the Mediterranean Basin in 1970s and in addition to bilateral agreements of the time between 1972 and 1974 two concrete initiatives were implied with the focus on the Basin. Global Mediterranean Policy was launched with a significant definition of the 'region' from Turkey to Spain, and Euro-Arab Dialogue that involved members of the Arab League (Guasconi, 2013).

In addition to various bilateral agreements, till the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century various summits alongside conferences, working groups, and initiatives were carried out to enhance cooperation within a regional level, including the Five plus Five Dialogue (MedThink 5+5, n.d.), the Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (UN, 1999), the Mediterranean Forum, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Summits (U.S. Department of State, 1997), the Arms Control and Regional Security Working, the West European Union Mediterranean Initiative Group (Del Sarto, 2006, p. 60) alongside many more. However, the most concrete one with was the Barcelona Conference that initiated the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as a process that led to the formation of the union.

### **3. FROM BARCELONA PROCESS TO A 'UNION'**

The idea of establishing a union has not come to the agenda in a sudden, since the process possesses significant attempts itself. After completing aforementioned steps in terms of economic cooperation on a bilateral level, concreting certain focus points was decided in 1995 during Barcelona Conference. With significant policy-making steps, Barcelona Conference has been a milestone even there was not a clarified reference to a union.

On 27-28 November 1995, the EU declared a new policy focusing on the Mediterranean Region during the Barcelona Conference in order to establish a stronger partnership with Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and the Palestinian National Authority. The initiative was supported by France, Italy, and Spain during the Corfu and Essen summits of the European Council (EC) in 1994. There were three main subjects that were focused on during the Conference: political and security dialogue; economic and financial partnership; social, cultural and human partnership (Barcelona Declaration and Work Program, 1995). The initiative has become the first to be applied on the region entirely and with this characteristic it can be pointed out as the most concrete step for a future union.

Conference results were declared as the Barcelona Declaration, and the process itself was called the Barcelona Process as well as Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euro-Med), which was launched with a joint declaration of foreign ministers from the EU members and Mediterranean partners, with a significant reference to the region. As aforementioned, even though the initiative was supported by Mediterranean countries of the North, they were represented

within an institutional level as the EU was part of the Declaration which was soon to be a part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The Euro-Med and the ENP were founded with different motives since the former emphasized both the interests, which defines common ones as goals to be pursued, and shared values with an emphasis on region building process, whilst the latter largely focused on EU's interests. Still, the EC underlined the importance of commitment to shared values – like democracy, rule of law, human rights – and the EU's self-tailored role to be the normative power in the region (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). Additionally, it was critically pointed out that there was the dominance of the North over the South that paved the way for a deteriorated relationship with trust issues. Del Sarto and Schumacher (2005) address to a 'center-periphery' approach between the North and the South instead of an equal partnership, since the EU acted to be the center whilst the periphery consists of the non-EU partners.

The overall objective was to provide a framework for a strengthened dialogue and a comprehensive cooperation in the Mediterranean Basin; hence, during the annual meetings further steps were established. The partners have, *somehow*, agreed upon a strategy with the basis of forming sustainable peace, stable and welfare structure over the region, which can be pointed out totally in line with the aforementioned Democratic Peace Theory. However, obstacles based on failed approaches to the understanding of a *partnership* have jeopardized the process. Nevertheless, a decision was set up for establishing Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010 that would carry each bilateral agreement to a more region-based level.

The Barcelona Process and the decisions were intended to be consolidated with annual meetings throughout the years towards the decision of the union. There have been different channels in terms of institutional approach as it is visible in the ENP, but Action Plans with goals of domestic political and economic reforms became the common tools for these different structures. Thus, there are different institutions from both structures working on the same policy issue, carrying the risk of overlapping areas of responsibility. Hence, a balance between these different channels had to be restored in order to maintain a sustainable approach for policies with certain actors. At this very point, the idea of a union could be savior only if with a concrete structure.

#### 4. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE COOPERATION: THE UfM

A union for the region was proposed by then French President Nicholas Sarkozy, first mentioned during his presidential campaign speech in February 2007 (Süel, 2008). The process of creation of the UfM, itself, was born with a significant relation with the attempt of the French presidency of the EU, to remake a French policy of greater presence in the entire Mediterranean (Tasche, 2010). President Sarkozy tried to retrieve a proposal to gain the leadership of the region, most specifically in economic, but also in cultural and in political orders, that France had lost since at least the end of World War II.

France initially wanted to create a 'Mediterranean Union' which is composed only of the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, but with an exterior support and aid from the EU. Inherently, that proposal was rejected by the Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel and with a less reaction by the EC, not for a specific interest in a Mediterranean policy, but for the lack of the control of the will be paid European funds. As Germany is the principal contributor, the lack of the control was to become a very significant problem.

The German opposition and the negative reaction of the EC forced Sarkozy to modify the initial proposal of the 'Mediterranean Union' to transform into the 'Union for the Mediterranean'. But, in both cases, the union was born with the idea of partnership and ownership shared by all Mediterranean countries, Europe, the Maghreb and Mashreq. The partnership intended to give same level of responsibility to both European and non-European countries, aforementioned regions, and multinational institutions such as the Arab League, Anna Lindh Foundation and the World Bank, alongside the institutions with questionable efficiency such as the Alliance of Civilizations and the Islamic Conference.

In terms of sustainable peace process that was intended to be established by the EU to securitize its southern borders was not in motion at the time due to long-lasting authoritarian leaders of the southern countries. The popular uprisings that led to the Arab Revolutions in countries with such leaders like Hosni Mubarak, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Basar Al Assad or Moammar Gaddafi, put the political structure of the Paris Summit of 2008 – which was based on the idea of *equality* of all EU members and candidates with democratic systems, the 12 Mediterranean countries with mostly authoritarian regimes, the Balkan countries – in a very delicate situation, as well as the World Bank, the Alliance



of Civilizations, the African Union, Anna Lindh Foundation, the Islamic Conference. Nevertheless, it should be distinguished that it has been the Arab Revolutions that challenged the entire institutional framework of the UfM, which was then co-chaired by the former president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak.

The questionable structure of the *union* proposal has been distinguished by the (future) members as well. There have been various reasons for a negative reaction and different actors focused on different issues. Turkey, for instance, highlighted the union's being an alternative for its long-lasting relations with the EU – expected to be ended with membership (Emerson & Tocci, 2007). It struggled significantly with the very first intention of Sarkozy and this start caused an uneasiness regarding Turkey's approach to the initiative. Among the South, on the other hand, there were various reactions. Israel, Morocco and Tunis significantly supported the initiative, whilst Muammar Gaddafi, then president of Libya, put a reservation with highlighting a probable existence of a hegemonic establishment of the North over the South under the name of a 'union'. Among the EU members, there were also different approaches since the region itself demonstrates diversity in terms of its proximity to the Mediterranean. Spain, Italy and Greece had been totally supportive since the very beginning, but the EC and Germany have taken the process slower with assured actions. The declaration of the EC was as follows; 'These initiatives that are developing regional cooperation are good, but it should have developed within the existing structures.' These words can be interpreted as a question for necessity of a new union. Similarly, German Foreign Minister also stated that Barcelona Process was sufficient to maintain sustainable development alongside deepened relations and cooperation. A similar opinion was declared by representative of Slovakia as well, which was at the presidency of the Council of the EU at the time (GNAT, n.d.).

Despite the critics, the UfM was established on 14 June, 2008 with the entire EU members and 15 southern and eastern Mediterranean countries to contribute to regional stability, human development and integration (UfM, n.d.). The UfM prioritized six projects as a reformulation of the three main objectives of the Barcelona Process. The projects concentrated on topics as follows; de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, maritime and land highways, civil protection initiatives to combat natural and man-made disasters, the Mediterranean solar plan, higher education and research, Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia and Fez, Mediterranean business development initiative (Martínez, Aragall, & Padilla,

2010). Within this arrangement, the EC was accepted to become a full associate to function as a link between the two unions (EU and the UfM) (Tasche, 2010).

The UfM was intended to be established as a new institution started with the Barcelona Process and continued by the EC in line with the ENP, but in the meantime, it would not be wrong to claim that it was ceased by these three key elements:

- Unlike the Barcelona Conference, the UfM, intended to base on a framework of equal terms to all member countries.
- Obviously, differed from the ENP which gave significant privileges to the ex-Soviet Union countries and Caucasian republics, the UfM focused on the Mediterranean-Balkan region.
- The UfM intended to pause the most controversial issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, but instead, it focused on economic and infrastructural topics, alongside higher education system.

It should be noted that the drafters of the Barcelona Declaration, unlikely the UfM, thought that the only way to progress with the partnership was to put aside cultural and educational aspects in order not to enter political and cultural arguments those could cease the relations. Accordingly, the Barcelona Declaration made limited references to the educational and cultural aspects. However, after a while it was realized that those were some of the most significant aspects that may consolidate and allow a shared and a genuine understanding of a region. These aspects were detected immediately, in order to achieve to a significant success with the 'EuroMed Civil Forum' which was held in Barcelona, in 1995.

The 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, which was celebrated in 2005, was the perfect timing to amend the Declaration of 1995 with intention to make special emphasis to intercultural dialogue, in a particular time when the world was still criticizing the September 11. There would not be a more appropriate time to build bridges not only for economical/infrastructural aspects but also and more importantly to create an intercultural dialogue. But during the Paris Declaration, that leads the establishment of UfM, the co-operators of the Barcelona Declaration made the same mistake. They were thinking that the intercultural dialogue was more a liability than an encouraging initiative. With a last-minute change, an addition regarding the importance of the higher

education between the North and the South was actualized, as it was seen as a key element for a more successful cooperation between two sides of the Basin.

Recently, the UfM has focused on development-based security with regional solutions for regional problems (UfM, n.d.) and even though it has been criticized since the very beginning of the idea, it provides a significant platform for regionalization of the Euro-Mediterranean Area. Even though its effectiveness has been discussed within a scholarly based approach and different theories (Behr, 2010; Calleya, 2009; Gillespie, 2011; Duman, 2019), it focuses on various topics within political framework, via regional dialogue platforms with projects and initiatives (UfM, n.d.). It has been a quarter century that the first concrete step has been taken, and currently the UfM has conducts more than 50 projects by gathering thousands of stakeholders with a focus on different aspects.

## 5. DISCUSSION: WHAT WENT WRONG?

When the EC seemed to begin to understand the tensions in the Mediterranean region, whose main reason was the lack of intercultural dialogue between different sociopolitical and economic structures, the UfM put these topics on its fields of activities. In contrast the Barcelona Process, the newborn *union* was challenged to stop the cultural issues which was assumed to be the origin of the conflict and focus on the economic and infrastructural factors with all its effort in order to balance the scales of development from one side to another of the Mediterranean. The UfM was not born as a cultural or educational development project, instead a project of economic development, basically. The reason was not only for a credence of political implementations but also for a utilitarian approach because it was believed that it would be easier to courage investors for the infrastructure and/or for the solar energy. This idea, as a result of the foundation act of the UfM, foreseen almost no public funding sources but insisted on the idea of looking at the private sector investment in need for the projects.

Unsurprisingly, the aforementioned approach with the basis of neoliberal idea was difficult to put on life in the South, where the main structural lacks were the adaptation to new challenges of globalism with all aspects including social integration, gender equality and level of education. In fact, with these decisions and implementations, UfM sent a political message that embodied a greater role for the business world in structures and nothing for the basis of promoting better

ground for an intercultural dialogue that might pave the way for peace or improving and/or establishing educational aspects alongside cooperation. After a while, the UfM considered that the cultural debate has been an obstacle for implementations of structural development projects with no chance to ignore, different actors were put into action, like Anna Lindh Foundation, which has focused on cultural issues to be covered and to start dialogue to prevent conflicts since 2003 (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.). However, the main issue in the Mediterranean Basin, which were the lack of dialogue, politics and the socio-economic imbalance and at the backstage the economic development, was highlighted clearly during the popular Arab Revolutions.

The 2011 Arab Revolutions of all countries have a common denominator; the right to dignity. These were not the demonstrations about the prices, or infrastructural deficiencies, or similar concrete reasons, instead they were about abstract and idea-based necessities to be referred. The revolutions were for dignity, for the same rights those are owned by their northern neighbors who have democratically elected governments. And these are the revolutions for the right to work and to be educated. It would not be wrong to claim that these are the issues that have been neglected by the UfM and its founding. Besides, there was the reality that the UfM has missed the point that the union has overvalued its authoritarian partners.

The reaction of the UfM against revolutions in its southern members was to remain silent, since it canalized just the entrepreneurial function with the energy sector, infrastructure with hesitation to involvement any political and/or cultural discussions. Obviously, this attitude put the UfM in a tough situation for an alleged *union*, which has been overtaken by the reality of youth, families, men and women of all ages who rebelled against authoritarian regimes. It is to say that the imbalance between the two sides of the Mediterranean Basin has been highlighted by people of the South, instead of the *union* in an institutional level.

Accordingly, it would not be wrong to claim that the results were not in line with initial expectations from a union. The Arab Uprisings can be seen as a proof that two-decades-long projects could not suffice to achieve concrete development in the South. Besides, Arab Spring did not result with success in majority of countries that were affected, and as it can be seen in the example of Syria, it brought about even deepened instability that have affected not only the South

with certain countries but also the entire Basin. Recently, the most-debated topic on the agenda of the North has been refugees' placements and integration of

already-settled ones into the host culture. This issue has not only been a crisis between the North and South but also in the North itself; since, it has become a debated topic in relations between Turkey and the EU within a humanitarian approach as well as a political one.

From the very beginning of projects that were suggested and applied to develop concrete relations between the South and the North, there was a trust-issue that southern countries possessed. This mistrust has been put on the table various times and has been consolidated by various reasons as aforementioned; center-periphery approach, unresponsiveness to the Arab Uprisings, debated topics between members and again no certain initiative taken by the union etc.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The UfM has to deal with many issues to gain the respect and the accountability. Especially as a continuation of a former project, Barcelona Process, it has many difficulties to get over to reach the success. More effort has to be invested in the Union than has been invested before. It is a mutual opportunity for all partners in many different activities like the security issues and the economical topics.

The union members have to overcome three important obstacles to actualize the opportunity. These are the shortcomings of its institutional design, the division of labor among the EMP, Union and the first pillar EU institutions, and the political conflicts starting with the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first two setbacks might be remedied by institutional measures; however, it would not be wrong to claim that political conflicts are beyond the capacity of the union. The issue remains the most difficult obstacle to sustainable dialogue among the partners, since its resolution depends on complicated external dynamics and actors outside the Union. Besides, it becomes a reason to consolidate mistrust amongst the members with the incapability of solving or even focusing on a political issue. As a union, the UfM should attract the attention as a problem-solver at least for its members.

With its neo-liberal policies, the UfM has prioritized its focuses and in line with them it has no interest in political and/or dialogue-based processes. According

to the Democratic Peace Theory, it is certain that trade agreements alongside institutional formations possess significant power to establish peace between different actors; however, to maintain the restored peaceful environment, they

would not suffice since there is a lack of democracy alongside social and/or liberal based humanitarian approach. Even many of the states of the South has recently been forming stable political and economic orders after the Arab Revolutions, whilst some of them still suffer. Hence, as visible with the revolutions and recent refugee crisis, problem-solving capability of the UfM is strongly questionable even after a quarter-century of the first initiative. It would not be wrong to claim that there are certain deficiencies for UfM's being an efficient actor in the region; however, it would be far better to accept the declared projects of the union as they are and focus on it within the framework of environmental and infrastructural levels.

#### **DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT**

The author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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