



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

The Mediterranean Dialogue

The complexities that abide in the Mediterranean are historically attributed to the strategic and navigational importance of the region. They are also the result of the succession of powers that have established themselves in the Mediterranean, of others that have occupied the region and the consequent settlements brought about by the movement of persons. The empire builders were followed by the crusades, colonisation and super power rivalry. The cultural diversity, civilisation and values resulting from these endeavours have left their mark on the character and way of life in the different sub regions of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean is endowed with a unique regional heritage that should be preserved and apportioned in a way as to enhance cooperation and promote trust among the littoral states. Therefore, the need to harmonise the wider cultural influences that exist in the region must be an ongoing process.

We are living in a time of change brought about by the accelerated advancement in the field of communications and the information technology that have increasingly promoted globalisation. Change is inevitable, and change must come from within in a planned manner, failing which, it will come about through external forces and influences that bear upon the daily lives of the citizens. At the regional level the choice is to take up the challenge of change in a progressive manner, thus supporting the efforts for closer collaboration.

In the Beginning...

CSCE

The Mediterranean dialogue is relatively of recent date. The inclusion of the Mediterranean on the international agenda is the result of Malta's determination to include a Mediterranean Chapter in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. The Maltese approach introduced in the early stages of the CSCE was based on the concept that there can be no security in Europe without security in the Mediterranean and vice versa.

The thawing down of the bipolar world in the late eighties shed new light on the Mediterranean perspective. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, heralded the return of Eastern European states to democracy and self governance. These states have eventually sought European Union and NATO membership. To the south of the Mediterranean these changes brought to an end the political alliances that Mediterranean countries held with the two political blocs.

Other than the new political scenario, the looming globalisation bore on several Mediterranean countries. Improved communications, technological advance and the introduction of the IT provided citizens with the liberal access to on-going events and information on the global scale.

On the other hand, liberalisation at the national level brought with it a number of soft security concerns: trafficking of drugs, arms, money laundering ...and the list is endless! Irregular migration from East to South and Central Europe as well as from the African continent to the Southern Mediterranean on to Europe became more evident. This phenomenon gradually diversified its destinations while the number of persons seeking refuge increased and still growing.

Manifestly the region has also to bear with the stiff increase in the cost of energy products and grains.

The terrorist attack on the USA in 2001 highlighted the hardening of positions and commitment. The attribution of terrorist acts to a particular race and its belief has widened further the gap between civilisations.

The Mediterranean backdrop is not complete without the disputes that exist between states in different parts of the region. The Maghreb, the Aegean and the Middle East represent the main divisions that tend to become endemic. They do not carry with them the same intensity for the existing processes. The Maghreb issue hangs on to the difficulty of determining the form and manner of holding a referendum, giving the Sahraoui the chance to express liberally the political status of their choosing. While the differences in the Aegean remain, they do not surface in a prominent manner.

On the other hand, the Middle East stands apart. The search for the modalities to give effect to the two- states solution is a complex one. Any fora or organisation that has some relation with the Mediterranean has to face up to this issue that tends to snowball onto the other forms of regional cooperation. It is a difficult issue that turns up in every regional partnership, forum or dialogue. Inevitably the parties to the dispute take up time to exchange claims of culpability while seeking the apportionment of blame on one another. In any regional summit, Ministerial meeting or other forms of discussion the reference to the situation in the region is the last item to be agreed and included in the concluding document. On several occasions agreement could not be reached and no consensual document finalised. All the regional fora should be encouraged to take up this dispute in a more challenging manner in a way as to contribute to the promotion of

peace and stability in the Middle East and hence the Mediterranean region. The tendency to apportion blame should be avoided while specific formats should be set up, involving the parties to the dispute, to carry out an effective exchange in a way as to contribute towards the realisation of the peace initiatives that are on the table.

In response to these changes several attempts were made since the last quarter of the twentieth century to introduce forms of cooperation that would facilitate the political, economic and social transition that all the region had to face. The idea was to bring together the technical, financial support to existing resources and capabilities in the Mediterranean region.

In Numbers...

The Western Mediterranean Dialogue (5+5)

In 1983 the French President Francois Mitterand called for the setting up of a Forum in the form of a security initiative bringing together the five members of the Arab Maghreb Union: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia and their immediate neighbours to the North: France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain. The Western Mediterranean Dialogue was set up in December 1990. It was meant to secure closer cooperation between countries west of the Mediterranean, through improved economic cooperation, limiting the disparity in population growth and encouraging more efficient management of resources to enhance regional interdependence. A number of select working groups were set up to deal with thematic issues such as the environment, multilateral financing institutions, infrastructure and technological development. Unfortunately by 1992 the process was brought to a halt. This pause is attributed to the fact that at the time Libya was subjected to international sanctions on its alleged support of terrorism. Also the Arab Maghreb Union ceased to function due to the situation in the Western Sahara.

In 2001 Portugal relaunched the process and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ten member states met in Lisbon. The meeting in Portugal was followed by annual meetings that were held in Libya, France, Algeria, Malta, Morocco and Algeria. Libya also took the initiative to call meetings of the Speakers of the Houses of Representatives of the member states of the dialogue.

Over the years it became expedient to transform the structure of the dialogue to meet present day contingencies. In addition to the regular Ministerial meetings of Foreign Affairs, the original working groups were to be replaced by sectoral Ministerial meetings that covered themes determined from time to time. In this respect the present dialogue covers tourism, internal affairs and defence cooperation.

The Forum

Mediterranean Forum

In 1994 Egypt and France came up with a second initiative that was intended to include all the Mediterranean states. A hard core group of eleven states was set up to launch the Mediterranean Forum in their meeting in Alexandria. The original intention was to enlarge the Forum to include all the Mediterranean States. However in view of differences that exist among some members of the core group it was not possible to take up in an effective manner the enlargement of the Forum. To this day the Mediterranean Forum is still made up of: Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.

In 2001, during the Portuguese Presidency, the three standing committees were suppressed. As a result the Forum retained the annual meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Political group that precedes the Ministerial meetings.

A year later the Euro Med process came into being and as a result the experience of the Mediterranean Forum was short-lived. In the years that followed the Mediterranean Forum transformed itself into a grouping of like-minded states that in principle sought to make up a Mediterranean lobby to advance the objectives of the Barcelona Process. It has also taken a very important initiative through the drawing up and adoption of a code of conduct to combat terrorism which was later emulated in the concluding document of the 10th Anniversary of the Euro Mediterranean process that was held in Barcelona in 2005.

From Brussels to the Ramblas

The Euro Mediterranean Partnership

In 1995 the first Euro Mediterranean Ministerial Conference was held in Barcelona setting up a comprehensive partnership between the then 15 members of the European Union and twelve Mediterranean partner countries, namely, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. The 1995 Barcelona Declaration adopted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the participating countries was made up of three chapters intended to establish a common area of peace and stability, creating an area of shared prosperity, and the development of human resources, promoting understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies. The process was supported by a substantial financial investment out of European Union funds.

This venture was welcomed by all those interested in the Mediterranean. Through the individual Association Agreements concluded with ten of the Mediterranean partner countries (Malta and Cyprus as candidates for membership in the European Union had their own protocols) progress was registered. However at the regional level the pace was slow and often stalled as a result of

the situation in the Middle East. To some of the southern states, in the course of time, the process had gradually changed its bearing. Whereas the Barcelona Declaration was the key instrument of the process, in the course of time other documents came into being such as the Mediterranean strategy document, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and action plans. Again some of the Mediterranean partners considered that some of these new instruments vie with the Barcelona Declaration. The ENP in particular was conceived for the European peripheral states and later extended to the Mediterranean partnership. Not all the Mediterranean partner countries are ready to finalise agreements on the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The enlargement of the European Union by ten new member states in 2004 increased the number of European states to twenty five while the number of Mediterranean partner countries - with the accession of Malta and Cyprus to European Union membership - was reduced to ten. Several attempts were made to restore balance between the two groupings. A study committee was also set up in 2006 to review the working methods of the process, in order to improve co ownership. After the latest enlargement in 2007, with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU currently consists of 27 Member States.

Rebranding the Barcelona Process

Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean

During his presidential campaign and his early days at the Élysée, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy called for the setting up of a Mediterranean Union. French Ambassador Alan Leroy, who is responsible for the project, had also addressed the PAM Assembly in Malta in November 2007, where he illustrated Sarkozy's vision for the Mediterranean. The project includes sector-based initiatives. However after a period of political gestation, the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean was launched on 13 July 2008 at the Paris Summit of Heads of State or Government. The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean is made up of all the member states of the European Union, the non EU Mediterranean partners together with Albania, Mauritania, Monaco, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

The emphasis of this new set up is based on co ownership between the partners. The Summit agreed to introduce a system of Co Presidency, a Joint Permanent Committee that will be composed of Brussels-based officials and a Secretariat. The innovative addition is primarily based on regional projects, the realisation of which appears to depend on a sort of public/private venture basis.

Attempts are underway to give effect to the Declaration that was subscribed to by the Heads of Government in Paris. The result of this exercise will feature in a document that will be concluded by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, in their meeting scheduled to be held in Marseilles in November 2008.

Legitimizing Years of Collaboration

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean

.In 2006 the Parliamentary representatives of the littoral states of the Mediterranean met in Amman, Jordan to set up the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). The Assembly brings together all the Mediterranean representatives on an equal footing to discuss issues that are of direct concern to them or the region. It will be recalled that Parliamentary Diplomacy among Mediterranean States took the form of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) that was established in Malaga in 1992 under the auspices of the Inter Parliamentary Union. In 1995 the CSCM met in Valletta during which the Maltese parliament proposed the setting up of an Association of Mediterranean States to be made up of a “Council, an Assembly and a Secretariat”. This was followed by another meeting that was held in the year 2000 in Marseilles where agreement was reached to “set up, in the long run, the Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean States”. The coordinating Committee met in Nice in order to draw up the Statute of PAM that was adopted in the Fourth and Final CSCM held in Napflion, Greece in 2005. The project was inaugurated in Amman in 2006 in the course of which the Assembly adopted the main instruments of the new assembly and agreed to locate the headquarters of PAM in Malta. The PAM has since moved into action and within a short period of one year it has already achieved substantial recognition and adopted several resolutions.

PAM represents the Parliamentary arm of the regional dialogue, the importance of which is construed on the latitude that parliamentarians enjoy in their dealing with the government and their constituency.

The PAM demonstrated that its unique personality is based on the equal participation and common status shared by all the individual member states that make up the Mediterranean littoral. The concept should be supported in the sense that any step forward registered by the PAM could be reflected in other regional and sub regional fora.

Mediterranean Dialogue and Diplomacy

Independence and Complimentarity

There is a close relationship between the four pillars that, while acting independently, complement one another.

It is important to take into consideration the intrinsic value that each of these fora can extend towards the new Mediterranean ambitions. These bodies are distinct from one another, yet they cover common areas that deal with the Mediterranean, albeit from different perspectives.

Together, they take the form of concentric circles, the common grounds of which, should serve to harmonise the collective approach towards predetermined goals.

It is easy to dispense with the different groupings on the basis of duplication. This is not correct since the composition and objectives of each are different. This experience is not exclusive to the Mediterranean. For example, Europe itself is made up of numerous bodies that take the shape of Unions, Councils, Assemblies and sub regional organs. Nonetheless taken together they contribute towards the enhancement of the European continent from different latitudes.

The challenge is to make this diversified dialogue more coherent. In other words, there is a need to discover, the manner in which to direct the collective inputs of these organisations into a holistic approach. This unique endeavour leads towards strengthening mutual support thus avoiding fragmentation. Some form of dialogue between the organs that deal with Mediterranean issues would undoubtedly help to chart the course of Mediterranean solidarity and cooperation forward.

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