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**WILL THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN  
LEARN FROM THE BARCELONA PROCESS?**

**Dr Mahjoob Zweiri**

**(Assistant professor at Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan)**

**Nicola Pantaleo**

**(Research assistant at Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan)**

**RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN STUDIES**

**(RIEAS)**

**# 1, Kalavryton Street, Ano-Kalamaki, Athens, 17456, Greece**

**RIEAS [URL:http://www.rieas.gr](http://www.rieas.gr)**

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## RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN STUDIES

(RIEAS)

### Postal Address:

# 1, Kalavryton Street

Ano-Kalamaki, Athens, 17456. Greece

Tel/Fax: + 30 210 9911214

E-mail: [rieas@otenet.gr](mailto:rieas@otenet.gr)

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### Abstract

The candidate to the French presidency Nicolas Sarkozy, in the middle of his electoral campaign on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2007, launched the proposal for a Union for the Mediterranean in Tangiers (a meaningful place next to the Gibraltar Straits). The project received bitter criticism from many European partners and some Arab countries. Once elected, and despite this firm opposition, President Sarkozy and his staff work hard to realize this Union. This study will analyze which steps have lead 43 Heads of State and Government to the 13<sup>th</sup> of July in Paris for the launch of “The Barcelona Process: the Union for the Mediterranean” (UMed). Subsequently, the paper will examine the structure of the UMed and the new pragmatic goals of the renewed Euro-

Mediterranean cooperation, trying to understand if the Union for the Mediterranean has made steps forward in comparison with the Barcelona Process.

## **Introduction**

The 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2008 started the six months French presidency of the European Union with many challenges to deal with. This period of presidency is an important challenge for President Nicolas Sarkozy. He planned a strong effort in order to facilitate the several delicate questions related to the Euro-Mediterranean area. In fact, he budgeted 190 million Euros for the entire semester.

Sarkozy's EU presidency will focus on three fundamental points. Firstly, he will try to solve the impasse provoked by the Irish referendum to not ratify the Lisbon treaty. The French President hopes to reach the approvals of the other 26 EU members. A positive signal has already arrived from the approval of the eurosceptic Great Britain<sup>1</sup>.

Secondly, President Sarkozy will try to revitalize the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) that will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The presidency has to clarify two main points: the relationship with NATO and how it will start the project of the European army. The first problem does not appear so difficult to tackle because Sarkozy will bring France back into NATO military command since De Gaulle left in 1966. However it is likely that the French President will have more problems in establishing the first embryo of European army. He will try to involve in this project, which has never been implemented, Italy, England, Spain, Germany and Poland. They will create a 10,000 European soldier battalion and increase their military expenditure to 2% of their GDP<sup>2</sup>.

Thirdly, the French President will re-launch the Euro-Mediterranean policy. This idea was born in Tangiers in October 2007, during his electoral campaign. He spoke about a Union for the Mediterranean and when it was formulated it was a generic framework which included only the Mediterranean coastal countries and didn't receive a warm acceptance<sup>3</sup>.

The most negative reactions arrived from Germany, Slovenia and Turkey. Chancellor Merkel and the Slovenian presidency argued, in December 2007 and January 2008 respectively, that there was no need to duplicate Euro-Mediterranean institutions, while Turkey rejected this idea that might be considered an alternative to its access to EU<sup>4</sup>. But even in France, an expert politician such as former Foreign minister Védrine said: "If you want this to work, you need to avoid including everyone and all their problems immediately. You have to start with a small group"<sup>5</sup>.

After his election, President Sarkozy continued to work on this idea, working with his diplomatic office in order to make his proposal more acceptable and to re-examine a new presentation for the UMed different from the one that he made in Tangiers, which only provoked bitter reactions.

On 3 March 2008, President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel reached an agreement on the UMed issue, which was discussed at the European Council meeting of 13-14 March 2008. In fact, the European Council meeting approved the “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean”, which will, according to Chancellor Merkel, carry the Barcelona Process to a higher level. The Council also agreed to officially launch the project on the 13th of July in Paris.

The new title of the process, first of all, shows a mediation among the European partners and some Arabic countries, along with the Spanish desire to frame UMed in the ten years old Barcelona Process.

The French President’s proposal does not agree with the Euro-Mediterranean neighborhood policy that applies the Copenhagen criteria of democratization to both the Mediterranean and the Eastern countries which share a different history, geography, traditions and religions. Moreover, he proposes more cultural exchange programs between students and researchers of the two sides of Mediterranean.

However, this new proposal for the Union for the Mediterranean did not receive wide support, above all from European countries. As for example, the Eastern countries belonging to the Black Sea Union demand more attention and funds for their development<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, Germany is firmly convinced that now the European Union has to focus its attention on the issues related to the recent Eastern enlargement and wants to know where President Sarkozy will find funds to finance his UMed, since Chancellor Merkel does not want to increase economic aids to the Mediterranean.

German critics do not seem to be completely disinterested. In fact, someone should argue that Germany has been the leading country in the creation of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The CBSS has the same structure that the UMed should have, namely every coastal country belongs to it. In fact, the CBSS` members are Finland, Russia, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Sweden, the European Commission (which are Baltic coastal countries) while France, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and US have the sole status of observers<sup>7</sup>.

On the other hand, European Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Walden said: "We are deeply committed to the Mediterranean region. Today`s proposal underlines our commitment and our desire for a more coherent partnership based on co-ownership of the program"<sup>8</sup>.

In the Arab world positive reactions come from the Syrian President el-Assad, he said that the Union for the Mediterranean is a great opportunity to improve the political relationships among the Mediterranean States. He adds that the UMed has to be fit in the Barcelona Process and that it needs strong efforts by all members to make concrete Sarkozy's project<sup>9</sup>.

Israel seemed to desire to use this Conference to deepen its peace talks with the Palestinian Authority President Abbas, in fact working meeting with the Palestinian delegation is planned. Afterwards President Sarkozy will hold talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders<sup>10</sup>.

In the days before the Conference, most of the attention has been paid to who might or might not show up at the Paris meeting. Bashar el-Assad will come as well as Prime Minister Olmert; both President Qaddafi and His Majesty King Abdallah of Jordan will not attend the meeting. Moreover, on July 7 President Bouteflika, after a meeting with the French President during the G8 summit, confirmed his presence in Paris<sup>11</sup>.

### **The launch of “The Barcelona Process: the Union for the Mediterranean”**

On Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2008, before starting the Conference, President Sarkozy held private talks with Bashar el-Assad and then put at the same table the Syrian ruler and the Lebanese President Suleiman. At the joint press Conference, the two Arab politicians said that the two countries will start the process for mutual recognition and to establish diplomatic relationships between them.

Both in Lebanon and in France commentators did not give a warm welcome to this meeting because there was not a time table to arrive at this stage. Moreover, a Lebanese politician said: “Even the US had an embassy in Iraq in 2003, nonetheless they attacked Iraq”. From the French side, the Secretary of the French Socialist Party said that there was no need for a so warm welcome to a dictatorship<sup>12</sup>.

Despite these criticisms, “The Barcelona Process: the Union for the Mediterranean” took place in the pompous frame of Paris at the presence of 43 Heads of State and Government and 12 International Organizations<sup>13</sup>.

At the same table, were seated some enemies like Greece and Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia, Israel and Syria, trying to make the Mediterranean “an area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity”. The preface of the Joint Declaration follows faithfully the Barcelona Declaration, above all in themes like the building of peace, democracy, the non proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the promotion of human rights and the establishment of a Free Trade Area in the Mediterranean.

The Union for the Mediterranean, as stated in the Declaration, gives a new impulse to the Barcelona Process in three important ways:



- By upgrading the political level of the EU's relationship with its Mediterranean partners;
- By providing for further co-ownership to the Euro-Mediterranean relations; and
- By making these institutions more concrete and visible through additional regional and sub-regional projects, relevant for the citizens of the region<sup>14</sup>.

In fact, some aspects of the Final Declaration mark important changes in the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

Firstly, the Declaration stresses and describes in a detailed way the new institutional framework. A co-presidency has been established in order to improve the balance and the joint ownership of their cooperation. One of the co-presidents will be from the Mediterranean partner country and the other will be from the EU.

The Members agree on the creation of a Permanent Secretariat that will be composed of officials selected from participants in the process. The permanent Secretariat will give a new impulse to this process in terms of identification, follow-up, promotion of the projects and the search for partners. This Secretariat will be autonomous and independent from the political Partners.

This new institutional structure seems to be originated by the failure experience of the Barcelona Process and the Euro-Mediterranean neighborhood policy that had an over-elaborate institutional system and Sarkozy's proposal seems to simplify and make more functional. But, during the Conference no Secretary was elected because the participants chose the consensus electoral formula, but there was no agreement on the headquarters of the Secretariat and who will be the General Secretary. The Heads of State and Government also agree to hold biennial summits and Annual Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meetings. The first Foreign Affairs Ministerial meeting will be on November and they will deal with the election of the Secretary and to decide which will be the city that will host His office.

The Secretariat will be flanked by the Joint Permanent Committee based in Brussels. It will assist and prepare the meetings of the Senior Officials and to ensure the appropriate follow up: it should also act as mechanism to rapidly act in case of exceptional situation<sup>15</sup>.

Secondly, despite the pompous and magnificent meeting, the French-Egyptian co-presidency decided to give a functionalist approach to the UMed. In fact, even if the Final Declaration resembles the Barcelona one, the UMed is concentrated on joint projects rather than political goals.

The first one is the de-pollution of the Mediterranean and the implementation of the alternative energies: the Mediterranean solar plan. Going on there are the other four projects that better reflect the new spirit of the Mediterranean cooperation.

There is the project to improve cultural exchanges between Mediterranean Universities and Research Centers. This project will almost follow the European Erasmus that has been one the most successful European Union projects and made possible the mutual meeting of the European youth in any European country.

The Civil Protection project demonstrates the effort to try to re-launch cooperation in the security field, even if this one only looks at cooperation among Mediterranean civil protection.

The other two projects are more focused on the economy. One is the creation of the Maritime and Land Highways, to make faster and safer the transport of goods and people in the Mediterranean. The other project involves more the Euro-Mediterranean economy because it provides for technical assistance and financial instruments in support of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. In fact, Euro-Mediterranean economy is characterized by this type of factories<sup>16</sup>.

### **The 33 chapters Final Declaration leaves unsolved many questions.**

The most important problem, as President Bouteflika stressed, is how the Union for the Mediterranean will finance itself. European funds for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation are blocked until 2013 and Chancellor Merkel does not want to increase it. Dealing with this economic aspect, the Sarkozy's solution is to improve private capitals investments in the region, but, probably, they will not be enough<sup>17</sup>.

A problem emerged during the Conference is the division of the Arab world. From one side there is the Maghreb that stresses the importance for a quick project on the labor market, to promote orderly managed legal migration in the interests of all countries and to foster links between migration and development issues of common interest which should be addressed through a comprehensive, balanced and integrated approach<sup>18</sup>. On the other side the Mashreq that asks to pay more attention on the political issues of the Middle East<sup>19</sup>.

And there is also the Turkish question. Prime Minister Erdogan accepted to take part at the Conference, and, once in Paris, he also worked hard to mediate between Israel and Syria. In fact, during the press conference while Israeli Prime Minister was talking, President el-Assad left the room and only the Turkish mediation solved the situation. The Turkish Premier held separate talks, in sequence, with Israeli delegation and with the Syrian one in the frame of the informal peace talks<sup>20</sup>. Taking into account that Turkey was skeptic on the UMed project, but attended it, the question is what game was Turkey playing in Paris?

It seems that the French President, the Palestinian one and Prime Minister Olmert made impressive efforts in their talks only to demonstrate themselves strong on an international stage because they are weak in their internal affairs. In fact, Olmert is charged with corruption, Sarkozy, according to French polls, is not well supported by the French and Abbas has to deal

with the Gaza Strip and Hamas problems. According to Haaretz, the strong French engagement is only a *ballon d'essai* because France cannot substitute the US as broker. In fact, in the Declaration, there is a reference to the new peace process started at the Annapolis Conference (20 November 2007)<sup>21</sup>.

## Conclusion

After the Conference, it is important to understand what has been built. Certainly, the pragmatism, and it is clear in the six joint projects, is the main point of this renovated Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The 43 Euro-Mediterranean Partners, omitting the global goals of the preamble, committed themselves in more feasible engagements. The meeting has been a political one, but the long final Joint Declaration underlines that the Members engage themselves in “a short list of concrete regional projects”<sup>22</sup>. Someone should argue that the short term goals are limitative for such a new-born Organization. This should be restrictive, but it is true that the actual European Union started as program of cooperation to exploit the common basins of coal and steel.

Probably the projects with an immediate success will be the exchanges among Euro-Mediterranean Universities and the technical assistance and financial instruments in support of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises because the EU has deeply developed during its history of cooperation among European States these two projects. For instance, student exchanges among European universities are successfully working as an instrument of integration of the European youth. Moreover, the technical assistance and financial support to European enterprises should be a winning mix of private sector initiative and governmental intervention.

However, as stressed by the Algerian President, the problem of funds is critical. Since the new Euro-Mediterranean engagement, as declared in the six points, is pragmatic and based on commerce the Members must clarify how the combination of public and private investments projects will function. This is an essential point since it is one of the novelties launched in Paris.

In addition, the members of the Union for the Mediterranean seem to have learnt that the Barcelona Process failed due to the incoherence of co-ownership and of the baroque structure. The institution of an independent and permanent Secretariat shows the new fulfillment based on a less European direction and a more Mediterranean ownership of the Union. The Foreign Ministers Meeting in November has to clarify the decisive point of the Secretariat: if the Secretary will be a strong one or only a diplomatic coordinator. In the second case, the UMed risks to become another Barcelona: something more than a Declaration. But, if governments will be hardly are committed to this initiative and if a strong-willed Secretary will be appointed a new chapter of the Euro-Mediterranean integration could be written.

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## Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> A. Villafranca, L'Europa di Sarkozy: le speranze della presidenza francese, ISPI Policy Brief, n. 90, June 2008, pag. 1.
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- <sup>15</sup> Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, [http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=view&lang=fr&cat\\_id=7&press\\_id=1597](http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=view&lang=fr&cat_id=7&press_id=1597), pag. 14-15.
- <sup>16</sup> Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, [http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=view&lang=fr&cat\\_id=7&press\\_id=1597](http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=view&lang=fr&cat_id=7&press_id=1597), pag. 19-20.

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<sup>18</sup> Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, [http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=view&lang=fr&cat\\_id=7&press\\_id=1597](http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=view&lang=fr&cat_id=7&press_id=1597), pag. 12.

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### **About the Authors:**

**Dr Mahjoob Zweiri** is assistant professor at Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan as well as member of RIEAS International Advisory Board. and **Nicola Pantaleo** is research assistant at Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan.

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