

**DOCUMENTI
IAI**

**THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN:
AN UPDATE**

by Roberto Aliboni

Paper presented at the Seminar on “The European Union and the Future of the Mediterranean region”,
organised by the Institute of European Democrats-IED,
Brussels, July 8, 2008

THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN: AN UPDATE

by Roberto Aliboni

The Union for the Mediterranean-UMED is expected to be established on July 13-14 at a Summit of Heads of State and Governments meeting in Paris in the framework of the French Presidency's semester. According to the EU Council's decision of mid-March 2008, the UMED is understood as an evolution of the Barcelona Process. With the establishment of the UMED, the Barcelona Process will become a multi-layered undertaking comprising the new UMED, the old Euro-Med Partnership (EMP), both remaining somehow linked to the broader European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). While the ENP and the EMP are part of the panoply of EU policies, the UMED will be linked to the EU – the Commission will participate in it – but it will have a strong inter-state character.

Why the UMED? The responses to this question oscillate between arguments relating to the need for new impetus for an initiative widely regarded as unsuccessful and arguments based on its value added with respect to the EMP. In fact, the UMED was initially launched as a French initiative towards the Mediterranean states only, decoupled from the Barcelona Process. It was not intended as an EU policy nor was it meant to improve the Barcelona Process. President Sarkozy's idea was to leave the unsuccessful EMP to its destiny and jump-start another process. European fears of disruption of the European communitarian process, in which the UMED came to be regarded as a threat to the inner EU political balance and cohesion, convinced France to shift from a Mediterranean to an EU process. To the extent that the UMED has become a Euro-Mediterranean initiative, it is necessary to see it as a project bound to revitalise the Barcelona Process and the EMP by injecting some value added into them.

This transformation was agreed upon, as pointed out above, by the mid-march European Council. That Council asked the Commission to suggest a new Barcelona architecture including the UMED, and to work out a new division of labour within the Process between the new UMED and the EMP. The Commission's response was included in a Communication issued in mid-May. In it, the Commission clarified that, while “the current structures of the Barcelona Process ... should be preserved and reinforced where possible ... [the UMED] will be complementary” (p. 4) to existing bilateral and collective Euro-Mediterranean structures. The UMED initiative and the Commission's suggestions were confirmed during the June 20, 2008 meeting of the European Council. Against this backdrop, the Commission has suggested a way of bringing the various new and old components of the Barcelona Process together under an integrated chain of command: the Barcelona Process will be made up of the UMED and the Commission and will, thus, comprise both the EU member states and the EU itself. The UMED will be an inter-state organisation linked to the EU through the Commission. There will be biennial summit meetings of the Heads of State and Government as well as meetings of the Foreign Ministers between summits with the aim of setting up work programmes and reviewing their implementation. Impulse and proposals for activity will stem from

the UMED members, the Commission and the UMED co-secretariat. The implementation of the UMED's agenda will be assured by the co-secretariat, made up of officials from both sides of the Mediterranean and including the Commission. Two Committees from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the Senior Officials and the Euro-Med Committees, will help the process of implementation (the former being in charge of political and security issues, the latter of developmental and social issues). There will be a North-South co-presidency.

The UMED will work on the basis of a dialogue between its institutions, the co-secretariat of the UMED and the Commission. With respect to the Euro-Mediterranean experience, the Commission will continue to have a secretarial role, but this role will be selective rather than general and, in any case, limited to matters arising from the past Euro-Med Partnership and its competencies. Other matters arising from the implementation of the UMED and its coming agenda (in particular the all-Mediterranean projects that will characterize it) will be managed by the new North-South secretary envisaged by the UMED project.

The Commission's key suggestion is the (Euro-Med) Joint Permanent Committee (JPC) "composed of permanent representatives [of UMED and EMP member countries] from the respective missions in Brussels" and the Commission itself (p. 6). In charge of final coordination, the JPC clearly reflects the EU Coreper experience and is bound to operate in a very similar way. According to the Commission's suggestions, the JPC will prepare the meeting of the Senior Officials and the Euro-Med Committee as well as the deliberations of the UMED institutions. Given this pervasive role, the Commission points out in its Communication that the setting up of a JPC "could lead to less frequent Senior Officials / Euro-Mediterranean Committee meetings" (p. 7).

This organization may be subject to changes at the first summit, to be held in Paris on 13-14 July, when the UMED is to be officially instituted. But there can be no doubt that the substance will remain what has just been summarized in the previous paragraphs as set down in the Commission's Communication. Consequently, the Barcelona Process will shift from an EU policy towards the Mediterranean to an intergovernmental endeavour linked to the EU and supported by the Commission. It will be more similar to the Black Sea and the Nordic Dimension initiatives, in which the EU provides assistance without being at the centre of the initiatives themselves, quite the opposite of what was the case in the former Barcelona Process, i.e. the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In this sense, the main lines of UMED functioning have been anticipated by Michael Emerson in a recent policy brief.

It is difficult and even premature to attempt an assessment of the UMED. The most obvious feature is the greater importance of the governmental dimension with respect to the communitarian one. In terms of general architecture, the EU as such – i.e. the communitarian dimension – will work mostly within the framework of the ENP, essentially with the task of promoting economic integration and development regionally, whereas governments will focus on sub-regional endeavours, such as the Black Sea Synergy, the Nordic Dimension and, as of today, the UMED. In this they will take advantage of the instrumental – somehow subordinated - role of the Commission. Whether this is an emerging blueprint for action, reflecting the trend towards re-

nationalization within the EU, or just a transition to new political and institutional combinations, remains to be seen.

The UMED is being launched to focus on common Mediterranean interests in the field of social and economic development, while sidelining political issues. The latter were certainly dominant in the EMP. For different reasons – more often than not, not pertaining to the EMP itself – the EMP did not live up to its ambitions. This is reflected in the a-political UMED format. Whether the UMED's more business-oriented approach will succeed in bringing about the Euro-Med cooperation the EMP failed to promote is another thing that remains to be seen. Politics will hardly fail to infiltrate the new Euro-Med venture. This time, the Southern governments will not be minor associated partners but full members. The hope is that more authentic partnership will help Southern governments to co-own the UMED and its activities. Again, the outcome remains to be seen. In any case, there is an eclipse of politics in the EU in general and the UMED is significant evidence of this.

The shift from the EMP, with its strategy of security assured by reforms in the Southern Mediterranean countries, to the UMED, and its absence of politics – including reforms – is another important feature. The decline of the idea that EU security is linked to reforms is bound to have strong repercussions on the EU's identity and modus operandi, in particular its normative action. The security/reforms nexus is a key point in the European Security Strategy. The EU may well decide to assume a more realistic standpoint. It looks like the UMED is anticipating this possible key change in the EU's strategic vision.

Finally, the UMED confirms Europe's long-standing preference for a Mediterranean format. This is taking place while the tendencies at work would suggest an enlargement of this format to the Gulf and the wider Middle East. The EU is largely absent from the broader Middle East and has only a weak presence in the Gulf. An EU entrenched in the Mediterranean does not correspond to the EU's interests and potential. In any case, the Gulf countries have invested a considerable amount of resources in the Arab Mediterranean states in the last years – in spite of the EMP – certainly more than the Europeans. This may be interpreted as evidence of the fact that the UMED and, more in general, EU Mediterranean policy should develop in openness and look constructively to the Gulf and the rest of the region.