



# **THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN: BEYOND THE BARCELONA PROCESS?**

Isabelle Birambaux

[birambaux@yahoo.fr](mailto:birambaux@yahoo.fr)

(Political Scientist)

## **Synopsis/Executive Summary**

*"Réactiver les relations entre les deux rives de la Méditerranée, redynamiser les économies du Sud en développant en commun des projets grâce à l'implication du secteur privé et créer un grand marché commun à l'horizon de 2010", tel est le rêve que caresse le président français Nicolas Sarkozy.*

*Mais l'annonce d'un nouveau projet de coopération euroméditerranéenne à la veille des élections françaises n'a pas fait l'unanimité en Europe et au Sud de la Méditerranée. Après des mois de négociation, le projet "Processus de Barcelone: Union pour la Méditerranée" a été approuvé par le Conseil Européen du 13 et 14 mars 2008 et sera officiellement lancé pendant le Sommet de Paris du 13 et 14 juillet 2008. Le nouveau concept est le résultat d'un consensus prenant en compte les différentes opinions et conceptions formulées par ses partenaires et futurs participants au projet.*

*Les 39 pays qui participeront à l'initiative incluent les 27 états membres de l'Union Européenne et 12 états du Sud et de l'Est de la Méditerranée. Ensemble, ils développeront des projets concrets dans différents domaines. Jusqu'à maintenant, la priorité a été donnée à l'environnement, la culture, l'éducation, la sécurité humaine et le problème de l'immigration. La plus-value du projet sera l'implication du secteur privé appelé à participer au développement de projets concrets.*

*Beaucoup ont vu dans cette initiative des ambitions françaises de réaffirmer leur leadership en Europe dans le cadre de la coopération euroméditerranéenne. Suite aux critiques, des réajustements ont été entrepris à différents niveaux.*

*Mais beaucoup de questions restent encore en suspens. D'un point de vue économique, on s'interroge sur l'ampleur des aides, sur la disposition des entreprises à augmenter leur taux d'investissements dans une région considérée comme instable et manquant de sécurité juridique. Pourra-t-on en effet appliquer la même logique de coopération sous-jacente à la Communauté Européenne de Charbon et de l'Acier à une région en proie à diverses conflits politiques (israélo-palestinien, Sahara, crise libanaise, etc...) et confrontée à de graves problèmes de société. Comment accepteront les populations un projet où elles n'ont pas été consultées?*

*En d'autres mots, est-ce que l'Union pour la Méditerranée sera à la hauteur de ses ambitions? Réussira-t-il à réduire la brèche qui sépare les deux rives de la Méditerranée en développant la prospérité dans cette zone? Arrivera-t-il à tenir ses promesses d'un futur meilleur pour les jeunes populations de ces pays et ainsi enrayer les flux de migration vers l'Eldorado Européen ?*

*Est-ce que l'Union Européenne sera à même de faire entendre sa voix sur la scène internationale en proposant un modèle différent dans le cadre du Dialogue des Civilisations? Et qu'en diront ses partenaires américains si l'Union Européenne lui fait concurrence dans une zone qu'elle considère comme des zones prioritaires de son influence politique?*

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*"To revive relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean, to reinvigorate the economies of the south by developing joint projects thanks to the involvement of the private sector and to create a great common market by 2010", is the dream of French President Nicolas Sarkozy.*

*However, the announcement of the project on the eve of the French elections did not get a warm welcome from all the countries of Europe and the southern Mediterranean. After months of negotiation, the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" was approved by the European Council of 13-14 March 2008 and will be officially launched during the Paris Summit of 13-14 July 2008. The new concept is the result of a compromise which seeks to accommodate the different opinions and conceptions of its members and future participants in the project.*

*The 39 countries which will take part in the initiative include the 27 member states of the European Union and 12 states from the southern and eastern Mediterranean. They will jointly develop concrete projects in different sectors. So far, priority has been given to the environment, culture, education, civil defence and immigration. The added value of the project will be the involvement of the private sector, invited to participate in the implementation of concrete projects.*

*Many have interpreted this initiative as a French drive to reassert its leadership in Europe within the framework of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Because of the criticism a reappraisal has been carried out at many levels.*

*However, many questions remain unanswered. From an economic point of view, there is uncertainty about the level of aid, about whether companies will be willing to raise their rate of investment in a region considered unstable and lacking legal security. Will it be possible to apply the same logic of cooperation as the European Coal and Steel Community in a region plagued by various conflicts (Israel-Palestine, the Western Sahara, the Lebanese crisis, etc.) and facing grave societal problems? How will the inhabitants accept a project on which they have not been consulted?*

*In other words, will the Union for the Mediterranean measure up to its ambitions? Will it manage to reduce the gap which divides the two shores of the Mediterranean and boost prosperity in this zone? Will it keep its promises to secure a better future for the young people of these countries and halt the migratory flows towards the European Eldorado?*

*Will the European Union manage to make its voice heard on the international stage by proposing a different model within the framework of the Dialogue of Civilizations? What will its US partners think if the European Union competes with them in a zone which they consider to be one of their priority areas of political influence?*

## **Union for the Mediterranean: Beyond the Barcelona Process?**

### **Introduction**

The Brussels European Council of 13-14 March 2008 approved the Union for the Mediterranean (UFM) project, defined as a revival of the Barcelona Process which since 1995 has formed the framework of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

According to the European Council's decision, the Union for the Mediterranean will be constructed pragmatically on the basis of specific projects, just as after the Second World War the European Union was built on the foundations of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

A team of "sherpas"<sup>1</sup> is currently studying the projects to be presented during the Paris Summit of 13-14 July 2008<sup>2</sup>. According to Arnaud de Sury, first adviser at the French embassy in Spain, there are some 20 projects under consideration. He says that French diplomacy has no wish to lock the "Union of projects" into a "Cartesian logic", rather offer the possibility of developing projects "flexibly" and in different sectors of the interested states.

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<sup>1</sup> Government representatives in the Union for the Mediterranean

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Alain Leroy, French ambassador in charge of the Union for the Mediterranean project, conducted by Hicham Mourad for the weekly Al Ahram Hebdo on 27 December 2007, available at [http://www.fmes-france.net/article.php3?id\\_article=866](http://www.fmes-france.net/article.php3?id_article=866)

The way it was approved in March 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean will not replace the Barcelona Process, rather extend it. As Secretary of State for European Affairs Jean-Pierre Jouvét emphasized in the closing ceremony of the Paris Forum devoted to the Union for the Mediterranean on 30 March 2008: "The Union for the Mediterranean takes over from where the Barcelona Process leaves off: the Barcelona Process is not being replaced, rather taken to a higher level, both in its content and in its operation"<sup>3</sup>

Its goal: to bring the two shores of the Mediterranean closer together with the creation by 2010 of a free-trade zone between the European Union and the southern Mediterranean countries, based on similar models such as NAFTA for North America, the ASEAN in Asia, Mercosur in Latin America, etc.

Thirty-nine countries will take part in the project: the 27 European Union states plus 12 states from the south and east of the Mediterranean. Albania and Mauritania are the two latest countries to have agreed to participate in the UFM, which will also include Israel and the Palestinian Authority<sup>4</sup>.

### **The initial project**

The reappraisal of the initial idea launched by Nicolas Sarkozy on 7 February 2007 in Toulon during his campaign for the French presidential elections was brought about by the controversy that the French proposal triggered. Many have reproached Nicolas Sarkozy for wanting to go it alone on a project which commits the whole of Europe. Others, such as Germany, said that the way the project was initially conceived could deeply divide the European Union. Other states have seen it as a skilful way of concealing French ambitions in a region coveted by China, Russia and the USA on account of its wealth of resources

The current concept of the Union for the Mediterranean is quite far from the idea that Nicolas Sarkozy launched during his election campaign in February 2007. At first, Sarkozy's proposal was interpreted as part of his election strategy, rooted in the need to offer Turkey an alternative to integration into the European Union and to reaffirm French foreign policy priorities with regard to the Maghreb. During an interview that the French leader gave to

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ambafrance-es.org/article.php3?id\\_article=2742](http://www.ambafrance-es.org/article.php3?id_article=2742)

<sup>4</sup> See the article by Marina Mielczarek "L'Union pour la Méditerranée, la fausse bonne idée?" available at [http://213.139.108.166/actufr/articles/099/article\\_63834.asp](http://213.139.108.166/actufr/articles/099/article_63834.asp)

the magazine *Politique Internationale* on 30 May 2007, Sarkozy had this to say about Turkey: "I've always been very clear regarding Turkey: I believe it does not have the vocation to become a member of the European Union because it is not European. But not because Turkey does not form part of the Union will it move away from Europe. (...) We must go even further and propose to the countries of the Mediterranean area the establishment of a Mediterranean Union, in which Turkey would naturally be one of the pivots"<sup>5</sup>.

This idea was not to the liking of Turkey, which criticized the French leader's statements and hinged its adherence to the Union for the Mediterranean on consideration of its candidacy for membership of the European Union. Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said that Turkey had not yet expressed its opinion on its participation in the project owing to the fact that Ankara hoped to receive guarantees that the UFM would not be an obstacle to its future integration into the European Union<sup>6</sup>.

As the third trading partner of the countries of the Maghreb, Germany, particularly, did not look kindly on a proposal which excluded some of the 27 EU states, since the French project was directed only at the coastal states forming a political, economic and cultural union based on the principle of strict equality. Thus in the initial view, the new Union was conceived as an exclusive club comprising the Mediterranean states of the European Union such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus and France and their southern Mediterranean neighbours. At a meeting with her French counterpart in Hanover on 3 March 2008, German Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted on the 27 European Union countries being included in the new project. Merkel expressed the misgivings of the European Commission that the project could jeopardize the cohesion of the European Union. With a compromise reached, the German chancellor allayed the fears of some non-Mediterranean members of the European Union upon seeing themselves excluded from an initiative which, however, sought to be financed with community funds.

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<sup>5</sup> See interview with Nicolas Sarkozy on French foreign policy published in the magazine "Politique Internationale" available at [http://www.politiqueinternationale.com/revue/read2.php?id\\_revue=115&id=613&search=&content=texte](http://www.politiqueinternationale.com/revue/read2.php?id_revue=115&id=613&search=&content=texte)

<sup>6</sup> Sevil Budak, Les relations euro-méditerranéennes et la Turquie dans l'Union pour la Méditerranée, Article published on 5 May in *Nouvelle Europe*: [http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=478&Itemid=66](http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=478&Itemid=66)

In Spain's view, Sarkozy's initial conception obviously eroded the prominence it enjoyed during the Barcelona Process. Launched in 1995, the Barcelona Process was a cooperation instrument embracing the European Union countries and the 12 states on the southern and eastern rim of the Mediterranean. Spain had a key role on account of its history and proximity to this region. According to Sarkozy's original idea, the Union for the Mediterranean was not to be confused with the Barcelona Process and it was presented as an idea led chiefly by France. (It should be pointed out that the initials of the French Union Pour la Méditerranée - UPM - are strangely similar to the initials of Sarkozy's own party - UMP).

This conception of the Union for the Mediterranean jeopardized the initiatives undertaken by Spain in the Mediterranean Basin. The European Council therefore decided to define the Mediterranean Union as Barcelona Plus, that is to say, a continuation of the Barcelona Process, thus taking into consideration that Spain's relations in the Mediterranean form part of one of the priorities of Spanish foreign policy.

Among the southern Mediterranean countries, Syria and Lebanon - which appear on the list of participants - have yet to offer any response regarding their participation in the project<sup>7</sup>.

In spite of the reappraisals of the original project and the compromises reached to satisfy the countries involved, the doubt remains as to whether the Union for the Mediterranean can provide the solutions imperative to its success. Many fear the UFM is doomed to the same fate as the Barcelona Process, which stagnated for want of financial resources, institutional structures and achievements in the process of integration of the trans-Mediterranean market and on account of the political conflicts which managed to prevent this zone from becoming an area of stability and peace as planned.

The Barcelona Process's detractors claim that this has not triggered the longed-for boom of the Mediterranean countries' economies and nor has it brought about the expected changes in terms of economic and democratic reforms. Its champions say that the Barcelona Process has not been able to achieve its goals due to the fact that the European Union's efforts were concentrated on the enlargement process to the East.

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<sup>7</sup> See article by Marina Mielczarek available at [http://213.139.108.166/actufr/articles/099/article\\_63834.asp](http://213.139.108.166/actufr/articles/099/article_63834.asp)

As far the new project is concerned, it will be necessary to clarify the relationship between the Union for the Mediterranean and the Barcelona Process, as well as between the different initiatives which affect Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in order to avoid the overlapping and duplication of efforts.

### **Greater funding and scope for concrete proposals?**

It appears that the funds allocated to the new initiative will not be increased just yet. The specific projects will continue to be financed with the funds available for bilateral or community policies and with the same tools, such as, for example, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

However, there is talk of there being other sources of funding, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB), which would provide 8 billion euros for the Mediterranean. The creation of the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) is also scheduled for the coming months, as is the contribution of the French Development Agency, as well as that of its equivalents in Italy, Spain, etc. The private sector could benefit from an association with the public sector (private-public partnership) and could be entitled to apply for funds from the African Development Bank and the World Bank. The creation of a regional bank for the Mediterranean will be among the financing projects discussed at the Paris Summit. According to Arnaud de Sury, the financing of the projects will be carried out in a flexible manner according to the nature of the project and the actors involved.

As a result of the problem of financing these ambitious projects, Sarkozy has wanted to increase the involvement of the private sector in the Union for the Mediterranean since so far the funds have not been sufficiently substantial so as to be truly lasting and effective.

For the moment, it is not possible to anticipate the extent of private contribution, but the French president hopes it could amount to some 14 billion euros<sup>8</sup>. What is indeed known is that the UFM seeks to be a Union of projects based around four pillars: a common policy of "immigration choisie", an environmental strategy (with common management of

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<sup>8</sup> See the article "Le Sommet approuve l'Union pour la Méditerranée" published on 14 March 2008, available at <http://www.euractiv.com/fr/elargissement/sommet-approuve-union-mediterranee/article-170987>

water), a common co-development policy and cooperation to combat corruption, organized crime and terrorism through the creation of a common legal space<sup>9</sup>. A group of experts is responsible for presenting some projects to the Summit to be held in Paris in July 2008.

The specific projects undoubtedly constitute the added value of the French proposal, which seeks a more active contribution from the private sector, whose presence in the Barcelona Process has been limited. This sector's participation is essential to meeting the immense challenge which reviving whole sectors of the economy in these countries poses.

However, the initiatives put forward so far only involve some sectors in the areas of the environment, economic and social development, cultural development and security, which are more priorities for the northern countries than for the countries from the South. Adapting the proposals to the needs of the countries of this region requires increasing both the financial funds and the areas of sectorial cooperation (agriculture, movement of people, visas, customs reforms for the free-trade zone, etc.).

Chekib Nouira, president of the Arab Institute of Business Managers, recommended during an Institut Frances des Relations Internationales (IFRI) conference on the UFM that the project should take into account the economic structure of the countries of the region. "The economic fabric of our countries essentially comprises small and medium-sized businesses. However, in Europe, all the projects mentioned (energy, environment, transport) concern the very large private companies which are an engine of bilateral and multilateral development"<sup>10</sup>.

Nor is the mere incorporation of Western companies into the projects going to be enough to achieve its goals, given that these countries lack organized social and economic structures. The region has major potential in demographic terms<sup>11</sup> because of the presence of a large amount of young people, but it is a youth which is out of work and which lacks education and training. The valuation of this potential should be considered a priority if the

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<sup>9</sup> See web page of Institut Européen de Recherche sur la Coopération Méditerranéenne et Euro-Arabe, document "Union pour la Méditerranée" available at <http://www.medeas.be/index.html?doc=1780>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in the work document "Le projet d'Union pour la Méditerranée: ce qu'en pense le Maghreb" of 11 March 2008, available at [http://www.ifri.org/files/Moyen\\_Orient/iumed\\_Maghreb\\_RTE.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/files/Moyen_Orient/iumed_Maghreb_RTE.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> The article by Marina Mielczarek quotes a figure of 140 million inhabitants for all the countries participating in the project.

new project is to succeed. Giving young people prospects in life and a greater hope of improving their standards of living could be key to silencing radical rhetoric

Due to the risk of radicalization and its serious socio-political problems, the region has yet to attract investors, and foreign direct investment in this region remains among the lowest. In an interview with the weekly Al Ahram Hebdo, Alain Le Roy, the French ambassador in charge of the Union for the Mediterranean project, says that while 20 per cent of foreign investments of the United States are allocated to the countries of the south of its zone, those of Europe in the Mediterranean amount to just 2 per cent<sup>12</sup>.

The Mediterranean Basin countries lack the social reforms to sustain foreign investment, which requires both legal guarantees and guarantees of social peace to be able to develop its activities. Potential socio-political instability in these countries continues to act as brake on it. There is no doubt that a more profound reflection in order to overcome these challenges would be required if the goal of convincing the private sector to become more involved in this region is to be achieved.

If social reforms are clearly necessary to attract investments, one has to ask whether an imposition from outside by a supranational institution does not carry the risk of further radicalizing a society in search of solutions to a situation with no easy remedy.

### **A project on an equal footing?**

The impression that the European Union is dictating to the Mediterranean countries what they have to do, especially as regards democratization and religion, foments precisely this fear and has sparked much criticism. In recent years, the Mediterranean countries have demanded a more significant role in the project's decision-making process. The absence of numerous leaders of Arab states during the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barcelona Process showed that the Barcelona Process did not manage to redress the imbalances which divide the two shores of the Mediterranean. The Euro-Mediterranean Summit held in November

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Alain Leroy conducted by Hicham Mourad for the weekly Al Ahram Hebdo on 27 December 2007, available at [http://www.fmes-france.net/article.php3?id\\_article=866](http://www.fmes-france.net/article.php3?id_article=866)

2005 was perceived as a failure and came to demonstrate the European Union's inability to develop its common policy project.

The European Union's insistence on wanting to help the countries of the South with their reforms both at an economic level and in terms of democratic principles is often interpreted by the governments of said countries as neo-colonialist rhetoric.

As a result of this claim, the new UFM intends to eradicate the inequalities inherent in the Barcelona Process with the creation of new institutions and of a joint presidency which will be shared between a representative of a country from the South and one from the North of the Mediterranean, assisted by a secretariat. "Our association has to be the result of real dialogue between the North and the South and not a concept imposed on the South by the North", said the French president during his recent visit to Tunisia in April 2008<sup>13</sup>. A summit bringing together the 43 countries of the Union will thus be held every two years in order to promote this dialogue.

This initiative was welcomed both by the countries of the South, which thus realized their ambitions to be considered on an equal footing with those of the North, and the European Commission, which will be able to continue managing the community funds allocated to 10 countries between 2007 and 2013.

While this proposition has the merit of taking into account the aspirations of both sides, it does not, however, address the underlying problems and above all the imbalance between the models of society of the countries of the South and North of the Mediterranean.

In other words, how must the challenge presented by the democratic reforms in many countries of the Maghreb and the Middle East be overcome? How must the debate over society which sets the desire for modernity of the North against political Islam be handled? How can the antithesis of a bureaucratic North on the one hand and a South dogged by corruption on the other be addressed? Not to mention the problems of human rights, which was the official obstacle barring Turkey's integration into the European Union.

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<sup>13</sup> Entretien de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République, dans le quotidien tunisien "Ach-Chourouk" du 27 avril 2008, sur les relations franco-tunisiennes, l'Union pour la Méditerranée, le conflit israélo-palestinien et sur la politique africaine et arabe de la France. (2008-04-27), available at <http://discours.vie-publique.fr/texte/087001293.html>

As Hassan Abouyoub, roving ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, said during a conference on the Mediterranean Union project at the Institut Francais des Relations Internationales<sup>14</sup>, the project also lacks a democratic foundation since the proposal was never put to popular debate. The Union for the Mediterranean is often compared to the European Coal and Steel Community which emerged after the Second World War in Europe. According to Abouyoub, the creation of such a Community was possible because it was democracies which took the decision to entrust to a sovereign body a part of their sovereignty in a time of peace. In comparison, the Mediterranean Union project lacks popular backing, a key condition – especially if the aim is for the regimes of the Maghreb to reform and democratize.

The creation of a regional executive with no popular legitimacy may be perceived by the population as something that is imposed, as a project that smacks of neo-colonialist reminiscences and thus become an object of rejection. In a climate of radicalization, popular opinion should be taken into account with much more sensitivity and tact. How will people react if their governments impose measures aimed at satisfying the demands of the West to negotiate with a society which incorporates Western concepts of modernity? Might this type of decision not trigger even greater rejection on the part of the inhabitants of these countries and rather foster repudiation of Western values? These matters certainly require debate as democratic principles are fostered through dialogue and are not imposed by force.

### **The political challenges facing the UFM**

A radicalization of the populations of the countries of the Maghreb - in the event that the benefits of the project did not reach those that most need them - could have alarming consequences in a region already plagued by major political instability.

As the Moroccan ambassador and many others pointed out, it will be difficult to apply the same model of the European Coal and Steel Community to a region dogged by eternal conflicts. To ignore them and even not wish to commit oneself to finding solutions would be to condemn the project to failure. It is very difficult to conceive of achieving a

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<sup>14</sup> See the IFRI work document "Le projet d'Union pour la Méditerranée: ce qu'en pense le Maghreb" of 11 March 2008.

prosperous and stable zone without trying to solve these conflicts. The experience of European construction has shown that peace is precisely the essential condition for achieving the goals of integration, cooperation and economic growth. Jean Monnet's idea was based on the idea that by developing common projects, Europe could consolidate peace in its space, but that could only be carried out after signing the peace agreements which put an end to years of war.

Avoiding tackling these problems would be yet further demonstration of the European Union's inability to develop a common foreign and security policy.

The divisions between member states of the future Union, such as that between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara, between Lebanon and Syria, not to mention Israel and the Palestinian Authority, could jeopardize the development of the process. Some heads of Arab states such as Libya, Syria and Algeria have already expressed their reluctance to participate in the July Summit in Paris owing to the presence of Ehud Olmert and his policy towards the Palestinians<sup>15</sup>. If relations among the members states of this new regional forum do not have solid foundations, one must ask how economic cooperation at a regional level is going to be developed among them.

The Union for the Mediterranean appears to wish to dodge these political issues to focus exclusively on economic projects. Without settling these key issues, the Union for the Mediterranean could also come to a standstill, as was the case of the Barcelona Process.

In the same vein, some Arab leaders have a very hostile view of the French president's new priorities as regards foreign policy, especially due to his rapprochement with Israel and the United States. This new stance could further hinder the European Union's work to pressure Israel to agree to speaking about the peace process.

France's traditional bilateral relations with some Arab states, such as, for example, Algeria, could also have a counterproductive effect on the Union process since both the multilateral dimension of the UFM and its nature as a European initiative could lose credibility.

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<sup>15</sup> See the article "Union pour la Méditerranée: Paris peine à convaincre tous les chefs d'Etat arabes" by Nathalie Nougayrède and Philippe Ricard published in *Le Monde* on 3 May 2008, available at [http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2008/05/02/union-pour-la-meditteranee-paris-peine-a-convaincre-tous-les-chefs-d-etat-arabes\\_1040500\\_3218.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2008/05/02/union-pour-la-meditteranee-paris-peine-a-convaincre-tous-les-chefs-d-etat-arabes_1040500_3218.html)

This temptation on the part of France is already feared by some of its European neighbours, such as Germany or Spain. Many question the true framework of the initiatives that the French president embarked upon after his election, when he visited several Arab countries to negotiate lucrative energy and infrastructure contracts at a time when the European Union is developing a common policy on this matter. These negotiations have sparked incredulity in some of its neighbours as these agreements were made without taking into consideration the security concerns of Spain, alarmed by the nuclear development of regimes which until recently were considered pariah states, such as the regime in Tripoli.

At a geopolitical level, it is true that the Union for the Mediterranean project allows France to reassert its leadership in Europe after the European Union's enlargement to the East had shifted political power in Europe towards Germany, thanks to the proximity of the Eastern European countries to its zone of influence.

And lastly, it will be important for the European Union to have a clear position. The decision taken by the European Commission on 10 April 2008 to develop a strategy to help the Mediterranean to clean up the coast of this region<sup>16</sup> before the official launch of the Union for the Mediterranean, scheduled for 13-14 July, does not appear logical if the Union for the Mediterranean aims to address those selfsame environmental challenges.

Presenting the European Union as a united body before its neighbours to the South will be very important for its credibility as a power and will be key at a geopolitical level.

As Bertrand Badie, professor at the Sciences Po school in Paris, explains in an interview with the French daily *Le Monde*, "the Mediterranean project could redress the risk of the reliance on NATO" of a European Union incapable of organizing a European diplomacy and defence of its own<sup>17</sup>. According to Badie, the strategic importance of the

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<sup>16</sup> See the Reuters article "L'UE brûle la politesse à Paris pour dépolluer la Méditerranée" on 10 April 2008, available at <http://www.lexpress.fr/info/infojour/reuters.asp?id=68771>

<sup>17</sup> See the interview in *Le Monde* published on 2 April 2008 "Le projet d'Union de la Méditerranée pourrait rééquilibrer le risque d'atlantisation de l'Union européenne", available at <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/chat/0,46-0@2-3214,55-1029964,0.html>

Mediterranean Basin could have a driving effect, capable of reviving the common foreign policy project.

But the attainment of such a project could also have negative consequences on the relationship between the European Union and the United States. Washington will not accept anyone disputing its hegemonic role in the region at a diplomatic and military level. If the project remains purely rhetorical, Washington will not take it seriously and will remain indifferent to the European initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

"The future of Europe is in the South", said Sarkozy. The launch of the idea of a Union for the Mediterranean at least has the merit of reviving interest in the Mediterranean Basin on the agenda of the European Union and its leaders. Generally speaking, its purpose has been well received, since there is consensus on the need to tackle the underlying problems of the societies to the south of Europe and above all the consequences that these difficulties have on the countries on the northern rim. Closing the gap that separates the north from the south of the Mediterranean in terms of development and economic wealth is one of the initiative's major aims. It largely stems from the acknowledgement that the creation of wealth, of jobs and of better standards of living in this zone will in the long term have a positive impact on migratory flows towards the European Eldorado. In other words, Europe wants to stem the tide of illegal immigration by helping the countries of the South to develop their own economies.

If the project amounts to something more than mere rhetoric, it will also be a golden opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its ability to advance towards a common foreign policy and declare itself as a model capable of generating well-being beyond its borders.

Just as the Barcelona Process had the merit of having created a forum in which peoples in conflict can meet alongside the Europeans, the Union for the Mediterranean will continue in the same vein. Thus it will contribute to the Dialogue of Civilizations, launched by Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero at the 59<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly (September 2004) to counterbalance the Clash of Civilizations – a US-inspired concept. By constructively expanding on this dialogue, the UFM could also contribute to the long-term

transformation of these societies and help in the creation of this space of peace and stability that Europe so longs for and which so many people who live there desire.

On the basis of real dialogue and economic development, the dream of a common Mediterranean which Sarkozy spoke of in his speech to the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées et Technologie of Tunisia on 30 April 2008 may yet come true. By becoming a sea of cultural and commercial exchange for the diverse peoples which surround it, the gap that currently divides the two shores can be reduced. The cradle of major civilizations, the Mare Nostrum can thus recover the leadership and importance in terms of exchange which it has enjoyed throughout history.