

## Building a new idea

By Jean-Francois Coustilliere

**On the 13th of July 2008**, in Paris, a summit of the heads of state and of the European and Mediterranean governments, organized by the President of the French Republic, endorsed the launching of an initiative labelled “The Barcelona Process: a Union for the Mediterranean”.

While the form this initiative is going to take and the manner of its eventual implementation are gradually taking shape, it would be useful, before analyzing the content of the Declaration of the 13th July and then envisaging what we may expect from this new step that has been taken, to recall its genesis.

### “The Barcelona Process: a Union for the Mediterranean”

The signature of a document constituting the foundation act of the UfM concluded the summit of the 13th of July 2008, in Paris. This act was the culmination of a long period of negotiations aiming at introducing this new initiative, designed for the benefit of the Mediterranean region.

The debate had started 18 months earlier, in February 2007, following a speech delivered by the then presidential candidate Sarkozy, who proposed, on the face of the clash of civilizations, the globalization and the failure of the Barcelona Process (BP), that France should take the initiative, along with Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, to form a Mediterranean Union, encompassing the countries around the Mediterranean. “The aim of this Union would be to work closely with the European Union” and it would be called upon to work on the prospect of further developing the relations between the EU and Turkey, of achieving peace in the Middle East, of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, of better handling the immigration problem, of the ecology, of the de-pollution of the Mediterranean, of fostering co-development and so-on.

The speeches delivered by President Sarkozy to the foreign ambassadors in August 2007, in Tangiers in October 2007, and the Rome Call in the company of the Spanish and Italian heads of government in December 2007 have resulted in significant developments.

### The Rome Call

The Rome Call Obliges UfM to approach any given matter on the basis of concrete plans; determines that the object of this initiative is not to replace earlier ones; confirms that the BP and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) will remain central in the partnership between the EU as a whole and its partners in the Mediterranean; foretells that this project will be discussed between those bordering the Mediterranean and the members of the EU; underlines that it will not interfere either in the process of stabilization and association of the countries concerned or in the process of the current negotiations between the EU and Croatia on the one hand, and between the EU and Turkey on the other.

This last declaration, in which appeared [a semantics slip in the calling of a “Union for the Mediterranean” instead of “Mediterranean Union”](#), caused a strong tension between France and Germany which did not end until the European Council on March 14th 2008 in Brussels.

The conclusions of this Council approved the fact that the UfM included not only the member-states of the EU but also the countries bordering on the Mediterranean. The Annexe no. 1 of these conclusions charges the Commission to present to the Council the necessary proposals for defining the modalities of the UfM, in view of the summit to be held in Paris on the 13th July.

## The Declaration of the 13th July 2008 on the UfM

On the 13th July, the summit in which the UfM was founded and which President Sarkozy had convened in Paris, was a great success on the diplomatic level: 43 countries participated in the session.

The absence however of the Libyan leader and of the King of Morocco should be noted, while, on the other hand, the presence of the President of the Syrian Arab Republic Bachar Al-Assad, of the Prime Minister of the State of Israel Ehoud Olmert and of the President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas was remarkable in itself.

The final declaration comprises all the Member-States of EU (27), the European Commission, together with the other States (partners or observers) of the BP (12). The initiative welcomes also Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco and Montenegro.

The UfM is defined as a reinforced partnership of the BP, the privileged orientations of which aim at enhancing multilateral cooperation and the sharing of BP's responsibilities, building on the acquis of Barcelona and reinforcing its achievements. The interest in co-operations adapted to circumstances is underlined.

The declaration provides that: firstly, the bi-annual summit meetings should take place alternately in the EU and in Mediterranean partner countries. Secondly, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly will be the legitimate parliamentary expression of the UfM. Thirdly, the institutional governance rests on a co-presidency between one EU country and one partner country, and lastly a joint Secretariat for the UfM will be established, the mandate of which will be of a technical nature, while the political mandate will remain the responsibility of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BP.

The institutions of the BP will remain unchanged even if a Joint Permanent Committee is created in Brussels to assist and prepare the meetings of the Senior Officials.

The modalities of the institutional set-up of the initiative should be fully operational before the end of 2008. The Annex to the Declaration defines the guidelines given, as a first stage, for a number of key initiatives:

- De-pollution of the Mediterranean
- Maritime and Land Highways,
- Civil Protection,
- Alternative Energies: Solar Plan
- Higher Education and Research,
- Business Development

While the success of this summit is indisputable, it would be useful however to probe deeply into its content. It is certain that the uncertainties which marked the development of the initiative from its beginning did not favour a calm and constructive international debate.

There remains a certain ambiguity, because, if in the eyes of the Commission the UfM project constitutes now a new tool for the BP, destined<sup>1</sup> to enhance multilateral relations, develop a real partnership and give it greater visibility, it is not certain that the way France perceives the matter would be altogether identical.

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<sup>1</sup> 1. "The bet of a new initiative consists in consolidating the multilateral relations, in developing the sharing of responsibilities in the whole process and in rendering the latter clearer to the citizens. The moment to imbue the Barcelona Process with a new impetus has come." – in a "non-paper", Commission.

## Into the Future

Therefore, the next determining meeting is the one of the Foreign Ministers, scheduled for November 2008, which is charged with forming the proposals for the institutional modalities of the project's implementation.

Today, while waiting for this meeting to take place, we may anyway declare that **the project of a Mediterranean Union has brought again the Mediterranean to the forefront of the international scene**; that the EU, profiting from the BP, is showing a real dynamic in reactivating a great number of files that had somehow been left dormant (water, pollution, sustainable energy etc.); that the Europeans have adopted the UfM project, even largely replacing France; that all the partners are discovering the usefulness and the efficiency of specific actions for the advancement of the BP.

There is no doubt that the UfM will function as a tool of the BP which, through specific actions by the volunteer countries, will become a school in real partnership and a producer of confidence. The objectives of the BP remain pertinent, only the method of their implementation had been in question. The UfM offers a way to correct this.

The examples of security 5+5 show that this way is, without doubt, quite profitable.

## Conclusion

In this perspective, it seems that the project had an extremely favourable impact on the further development of the BP. In 2005, this impetus was expected to materialize, but it did not mainly because of the attitude of the European countries, which were hesitating to invest for the benefit of the Mediterranean. The UfM somehow forced their hand. It is an excellent thing and now it is worth it to foster the movement..

Between the Treaty of Rome and the present, 51 years were needed in order to form the European Union, as we know it today. Though this project is not much less ambitious, it would be quite presumptuous to make forecasts on what the UfM will have become in ten years time. The UfM is a new beginning.

Yet, already clouds are gathering over the UfM: the reticence of the Arab-Moslem countries towards the presence of Israel; the concurrence with the new initiative for the East, launched last May by Poland and Sweden; the absence of a spirit of genuine partnership in the preparation of this effort which makes the South express the same criticisms that were addressed to the BP.

**Jean-Francois Coustilliere** is Vice-Admiral (2S), Independent Consultant and President of the Association "Horizons Mediterranee", France.