

The Union for the Mediterranean: a new impetus for the EMP?

JMC Berlin

29.05.2008

During the French presidential campaign in February 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy launched in Toulon the idea of creating a “Mediterranean Union”. This resulted from the assumption that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (also Barcelona Process) had failed in achieving its ambitious goals stated 1995 and that EU external relations had focused rather on the Eastern European neighbourhood.

Once elected, President Sarkozy further developed his proposal, particularly launching the idea of a union just for Mediterranean coastal states. This caused tough reactions from several EU member states and Turkey, leading to hard negotiations, particularly between President Sarkozy and German Chancellor Merkel. Finally, on March 13th and 14th European leaders agreed on the creation of a “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” (UMed), to be officially launched in Paris the 13th of July 2008. As expected, the European Commission (EC) was entailed to developing a proposal.



Last week, on May 20th, the European Commission presented its proposal on the UMed to be further developed until the Paris summit. Although the EC’s initiative has incorporated the UMed into the existing EMP framework rather than establishing any new structures, it contains major changes regarding both, the French proposal and the existing framework of the Barcelona process itself.

First, instead of being a parallel initiative to the EMP, grouping only EU member states with an immediate Mediterranean coastline, the UMed is supposed to represent an upgraded step of the Barcelona process, in which not only all EU States are foreseen to be members, but also other Mediterranean coastal states (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Monaco), some former EMP observer states (Albania, Libya and Mauritania). Although this membership enlargement enriches the Euro-

Mediterranean dialogue, it also entails major challenges in terms of political decision making processes. Consisting of 44 member states plus the European Commission, the UMed will face the challenge of harmonizing heterogeneous preferences among more actors. For that reason, a sophisticated and well balanced institutional design will have to be agreed on and implemented.

Second, in order to face this challenge and as a mean for improving co-ownership, the institutional governance of the EMP has been further developed. Three institutional innovations have been proposed: a Co-Presidency, a Joint Permanent Committee and a Secretariat. In this context, the Co-Presidency principle seems to strengthen EU’s coherence as it comprises the Council’s and the Commission’s presidencies, as well as EU’s High Representative for CFSP. On the other side, Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) should devote serious attempts towards achieving a coherent bargaining position. Similar to the EU’s governance system, the power of the chair in theory gives MPCs greater room for setting the agenda of EuroMed cooperation and by coalition building on certain issues. Whether this is a genuine chance for MPCs to enhance their coordination will depend on the actors’ willingness to allow the framework to function as it should.

The creation of a Joint Permanent Committee (JPC) and a Secretariat are expected to reinforce the effectiveness of the EMP framework by allowing for greater flexibility and transparency. Involvement on projects’ implementation on a voluntary basis might allow for implementing the reinforced cooperation principle of EU’s Lisbon Treaty. Although decision making in the JPC might become more complex, the very nature of project based cooperation might lead to a long term stronger cooperation by delivering more visible successes. An effective coordination among the secretariat - as EMP project’s clearing-house - and the JPC seems to be a prerequisite for UMed’s success.

Nevertheless, the UMed represents a unique opportunity to streamline existing initiatives and to bring them under a single umbrella. This may present a real chance to resolve some of the confusion surrounding the way in which bilateral efforts under the ENP have been communicated to Mediterranean neighbours.

While the planned initiative no longer resembles the Sarkozy’s original idea for a Union comprised only of countries bordering the Mediterranean, the French President has nonetheless succeeded in returning Mediterranean issues to the top of the EU foreign policy agenda.