

Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies



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The Mediterranean Dilemma:
A Bridge or a Great Divide?

I always found most striking the description given to the Mediterranean by the French historian Fernand Braudel:

“A thousand things together. It is not one landscape but numerous landscapes, it is not one sea but a complex of seas, it is not one civilization but a number of civilizations piled one above the other”.

And yet the Mediterranean Sea as such, stands no comparison in size to the Atlantic, to the Pacific or to the Indian Ocean. The distances between lands, as separated by this sea, is minimal. What I like in Braudel’s definition, is his concept of a number of civilizations piled one above the other. For this sea is the birthplace of civilizations.

In my country, Malta, we have the Neolithic Temples, which pre-date the pyramids by a thousand years. Indeed Malta has been defined because of these temples, the cradle of architecture. But the whole Mediterranean Sea is one which has seen so many civilisations succeeding each other or to return to Braudel, piling one above the other.

This sea has shifted from being at the centre of history during the days of Greece and Rome to a backdrop with the discovery of the New World at the end of the 15th Century; only to recover a central role with the construction of the Suez Canal rendering the passage way to India for Britain’s empire a shortcut through the Mediterranean Sea and today the most efficient corridor for oil tankers to ply.

The Mediterranean Sea saw not only the birthplace of civilizations, but also the start of the three great Monotheistic Religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam – all having their roots in Patriarch Abraham. The Biblical message, created in the mind of the Israelis, a sense of belongingness to the Promised Land, in the darkest days of the Diaspora Jews all over the world, even in concentration camps, on their great feast days used to pray for a next year in Jerusalem.

The Christians have seen Jerusalem as the place where Christ preached was crucified and resurrected from the dead. It has seen pilgrimages of devotion and soldiers in armour to establish the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. And the Arabs fought and resisted this alien rule on what they considered to be their land and the Temple of the Rock in Jerusalem has been the third most important centre of Islamism after Mecca and Medina.

The Arab invasion of North Africa moved in Spain and arrived in Sicily and advancing through the Balkans, reached at the very walls of Vienna. Three important battles stopped

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this triumphant move of the Ottoman forces in Europe; the Siege of Malta in 1565, the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, and the Battle of Vienna in 1683. Up to the First World War, Ottoman influence was very strong in the Balkans and throughout the Middle East.

The colonial empires of France and Britain and later of Italy, made strong dents in these Arab lands, creating in the process of events, a French, British, and Italian presence in North Africa and the Middle East and beyond, creating a cross current of conflicts of cultures, as well as a cross fertilization of civilizations.

The Second World War brought about European nation fighting European nation and involving in the process, their own colonies. For some time, the British through their Royal Navy, tried to reincarnate through a *Pax Britanica*, the *Pax Romana* of centuries before. This *Pax Britanica* was resented by Fascist Italy which considered British presence through its military and naval bases, in Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus and their control of the Suez Canal, Egypt and Palestine, a way how to cheat Italy from what it considered its pre-eminent role in *Mare Nostrum*.

The end of the Second World War underlined existing pressures and brought about a decolonizing effect resulting in the independence and renewed sovereignty of Arab countries from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, reasserting the concept of the Arab nation, the *Al Wattan Al Arabi*, still feeling the past humiliation of colonialism, rendered even more painful for the Arab world, by the creation of an Israeli State on what for long centuries, had been Arab land and through a succession of failed wars, made the Palestinian people, stateless persons, refugees in their own country.

This brief historical background has been given for one to understand the theme of this paper, '*The Mediterranean Dilemma: a Bridge or a great Divide?*'

Few kilometers of sea divide countries and cultures, religions and civilizations, standards of living, realities and perceptions. Many in the Arab world, not only in the political elite, but even more so in a *souq*, in a *kasbah*, in university campuses, feel that the West has betrayed the Arab nation, first through colonization and humiliation, later through economic exploitation, and then through the creation of the State of Israel on what they strongly consider to be Arab land. And this perception of ill treatment from the West, carries on even today by upholding Israel's predominating military superiority and occupation beyond the territory given to it by a United Nations resolution. Fuelling this negative situation, is a poverty curtain which, in spite of the riches of oil and gases present in some of the Arab countries, there pervades a poverty curtain even more impenetrable than the familiar iron curtain used to be. For many in the Arab world consider themselves to be the orphans of globalization.

If one were to stop here, one can understand the thinking of a *Clash of Civilisations*; one would draw the conclusion that the Mediterranean is a sea of conflict perpetuating itself down an alley of distrust, recoiling at best in indifference, at worst in fundamentalism and terrorism. For those who indulge in fundamentalism, their philosophy is making of Islam, a force of reaction to be able to resist the mounting pressures of *Westernisation*, economic exploitation and today perceived as neo-colonialism. Others see in terrorism, the poor man's war, how to create havoc in democracies and particularly in the West, through self-immolisation, causing fear and chaos through a systematic and persisting interference in the democratic and social texture of Western States.

I cannot understand those who advocate terrorism. I cannot understand what goes on in the mind of a teenager turned into terrorist who explodes himself, bringing an end to his early life and killing in the process fellow human beings, guilty only of belonging — and not necessarily so — to another people, race or creed. Terrorism is not the poor man's war; it is the weapon of those who relinquish reason in a fury of destruction. I always turn to Gandhi as the apostle of peaceful resistance and through his resistance, humiliated those who try to dominate other people.

I think that this conflictual attitude must have prompted Huntington's hypothesis of a Clash of Civilizations. Indeed, may I add that when Huntington speaks of a Clash of Civilisations, I do not think that he was referring to a Confucian or Hindu concept of civilization clashing with Christianity. I think that what he had in mind and others have in mind, is a clash between Christianity and Islam, inducing many to believe that in the West we have a return to the days of Crusaders and in the Arab world, to a *Jihad*.

I am against this interpretation of history. I cannot accept this to be the future of the Mediterranean. The negative, elements which I underlined do exist but equally persistent and insistent, are other factors which have to be considered and given their full value. The West may have failed through its colonialism, as well as through many of its policies, but the West has also brought many of its achievements as part of a cross fertilization factor, in world civilization. The concepts of illuminism and the clarion call of the French revolution of '*Libertè, Egalitè, Fraternitè*' have become part of the heritage of the Arab nation as well as of the West. The marked presence of the English and the French languages, have created a means of communication accepted and endorsed and easily spoken and felt by countries on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The West has to remember the marked contribution of the Arab thinking in the Middle Ages to a revival of Greek philosophy as well as to the sciences and mathematics. I think that Averroes does represent this fusion of Euro-Arab intellectual power. Just as we have the Charlemagne Prize for those who distinguish themselves in European Unity, so should we establish an Averroes Prize for those who promote unity and dialogue in the Mediterranean.

The benefits of globalization may not have penetrated to the extent that one would desire in the Arab world, but the ambition and the economic will to move forward, is slowly creating an upgrade in standards of living and ways of life. The question one puts at this stage is, 'do these positive elements outbalance the negative factors which were underlined before in this dissertation? Have we succeeded in making of the Mediterranean, a bridge of understanding rather than a wall of confrontation?'

My feeling is that not enough has been done. In November 1995, following the Oslo Agreement, we in Europe tried to bring about an experiment through the so called Barcelona Process. I was at that time, Foreign Minister of Malta and together with Manuel Marin of Spain, then Commissioner for Mediterranean Affairs, and others including Javier Solana, Gianni de Michelis, Habib Benyahja, Amre Moussa, Roland Dumas and Alan Juppe, we brought about the Barcelona Meeting between the European Union and twelve other countries from the Mediterranean basin, including for the first time, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This was a novel approach to politics. We did not call it a treaty, we wanted it to be a process because we envisaged that it had to be an ongoing experiment based on three pillars – the political and security pillar, the second being the economic and financial pillar, and the third being the social, cultural and human affairs pillar. We believed in a people to people

approach reaching out not only to the political leaders, but also to influence the economic life of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea and creating a social and cultural awareness, bringing about understanding and social advancement.

Eleven years after, we look at the Barcelona Process and discover that it has not lived up to its expectations. We did not give full weight to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin weeks before the opening of the Barcelona Process. We failed to realize that this assassination meant that the peace process started in Oslo was being halted by extremists in Israel. As also witnessed by the ensuing elections there. Arafat's return to Palestine and his setting up of the Palestinian National Authority, did not halt the illegal settlements by Israel in the West Bank and the further consolidation of Israel's grip on Jerusalem. The suicide attacks by Palestinian activists further derailed the peace process. This Israeli-Palestinian conflict led to the virtual hijacking of the Barcelona Process.

The war in Iraq has added to this negative political situation. The confinement of Arafat under virtual house arrest in Ramallah, impeding him elementary freedom of movement from Ramallah to Bethlehem, a very short distance away, gave to the Palestinians, for this and other reasons, an image of failure of Arafat and his Fatah Movement, provoking thereby the rise of Hamas, which in itself is an element of ongoing friction.

With an eleven year hindsight, the Barcelona Process is weak politically, limited economically and poor socially. The Mediterranean non-EU Member States believe that the EU is implementing a short sighted policy to protect its own short term interests such as energy pricing and the protection of its own markets.

An important factor which has revolutionized international perceptions and relations are the events of 9/11/2001. We are here to see its impact on the Mediterranean. It further fuelled misperceptions and misconceptions; it created a feeling of mistrust and suspicion; provoking an "us" and a "them" mentality. This, however, appears offset by new political initiatives from the Arab world. Yasser Arafat in 2001, at the UN General Assembly, condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks carried out on the United States and addressed the importance of the Jordanian-Egyptian initiative, the Tenet Plan and the Mitchell Report. In 2002, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, launched the so-called Arab Peace Initiative, offering the ending of the Arab-Israeli conflict, a peace treaty with Israel, and the recognition of the State of Israel in exchange for the withdrawal of Israel from almost entirely all the occupied territories.

One can ask, what has hampered these peace initiatives? Those who opt for the easy answer will put the blame on the United States and on Israel with the pursuit of attacking Iraq. But I think that it be best to consider first of all, what is the American perspective for the Mediterranean. The Italian military strategist General Carlo Jean, writes:

'From Washington's perspective, the Mediterranean represents a vital transit of communication and a staging area to project American power through the greater Middle East and in the Sea of the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. For the countries of Europe and in particular the southern ones, the Mediterranean is a unitary geopolitical and geo-economic region.'

These two perspectives throw a total difference of emphasis on the Mediterranean, but for the Mediterranean region to come into its own, it is essential that four perspectives converge:

the American perspective, the European perspective, the Arab perspective and the Israeli perspective.

The American perspective and the Israeli perspective complement one another. The Israeli perspective relies on America's approach to the Mediterranean as a vital transit of communication, with Israel providing a measure of military protection, both to this vital transit and also as an indirect projection of American power through the greater Middle East.

For the EU, in particular for those Member States bordering the Mediterranean, the efforts are directed also through the Barcelona Process and viewing the Mediterranean as a unitary geo-political and geo-economic region; with this difference, that although the political vision is there, the political will is weak and fragmented.

The Arab perspective is united on the general issue of the Middle East, fragmented in providing a unitary approach in their relations with the EU, notionally upholding the principles and objectives of the Barcelona Process but equally ready to meet the United States if the United States were to adopt a policy which in their view provides a more balanced understanding of the Arab world and have a more measured approach between Israel and the Arab world as part of its foreign policy.

Examining further these four perspectives, if the political will were present in the EU, it will find in the Arab world a very willing partner for development. Relations with individual countries, such as France, Italy, Spain, and Britain are in most cases positive and if these relations are nurtured, both at a bilateral and multilateral level, in particular through the Barcelona Process, the Mediterranean can serve as an important peace-oriented bridge of understanding and development.

Unless and until, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is solved, no solution will work. If this conflict is solved, we may discover this bridging effect in different areas of cooperation. For Europe needs the support of the Arab world, its developing market, its energy resources and its human resources. The Arab world needs European cooperation, political, economic and the social influence of Europe, both in their own Nation States as well as through Arab communities present throughout Europe. The difficulties that arise in setting these two perspectives together are the fundamentalists who view with mistrust European initiatives and identify Europe with what is negative in the Western world and Europe considered as an annex to American policies. Fundamentalists in the Arab world and extremists in Europe, identify a situation where the two civilizations, at best do not meet, at worst are bound to clash.

I believe that it is our responsibility, as Europeans, to manage the political situation such as to bring about a closer partnership relationship between Europe and the Arab world. This is not only in the interests of Europe for the reasons already given, but for a Mediterranean approach to European policies, creating a Euro-Med attitude which has a positive outcome for all parties concerned.

A new dimension has been added to the Mediterranean; the boat people of the Mediterranean who in their thousands cross the sea in search of a future which in their countries they feel is denied to them. Many are refugees from political oppression: most are hunger refugees, possibly the worst of all oppressions.

We were right when, in setting up the Barcelona Process, we had the courage to state, as our general objective, that of turning the Mediterranean basin into

‘an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation, guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity, requiring a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights, sustainable and balanced economic and social development, measures to combat poverty and promotion of greater understanding between cultures which are all essential aspects of partnership.’

In the Euro-Med area, we have to build confidence and security measures, having as their objective that of creating an area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean, including the long-term possibility of establishing a Euro- Mediterranean Pact. Can the Barcelona process be revived? Can it be rekindled through political vision coupled with political will? It depends on whether the EU is prepared, in the first place, to adopt an effective policy vis-à-vis the Middle East.

Europe cannot be equidistant between Israel and Palestine; it has to be equi-close to them. It has to gain the trust of both parties as an honest broker and be in a position to provide that sense of cooperative direction to solving issues. Italy and France, through their peacekeeping presence in Lebanon, to uphold peace, have shown a possible cooperative sense of direction.

Persuading Palestinians and Israelis to act in conformity with UN resolutions, in particular 242 and 338, will give European foreign policy a direct bearing on events there. Having gained the confidence of the parties in dispute, Europe will be able to focus the Mediterranean in a partnership approach. One may ask, is it not time for the EU to appoint a Commissioner to deal with Euro-Med exclusively? Is it not time for Euro-Med to have its own Secretariat, thereby creating a stronger Mediterranean awareness for all parties concerned. Is it not now the time to invest new political will behind an EU political representative to the Palestinian Authority? I do believe that all this has to lead to a Madrid Conference II, taking up where we stopped and linking up with the future.

The Arab world has also to play its part for the Mediterranean not to be a graveyard of policies but a bridge of understanding. The Arab world has to believe and invest in the Euro-Med partnership. It has statesmen who can remove the prejudice which exists.

Phillip Hitti in his ‘History of the Arabs’ has this to say in his concluding chapter, ‘Changing Scene: Impact of the West’;

‘Originators of the third monolithic religion, beneficiaries of the other two, co-sharers with the West of the Greco-Roman culture tradition, holders aloft of the torch of enlightenment throughout medieval times, generous contributors to European renaissance, the Arab speaking peoples have taken their place among the awakened forward marching in independent countries of the modern world, with their rich heritage and unmatched natural resources of oil, they should be able to make a significant contribution to the material and spiritual progress of mankind.’

There needs to be a new stability architecture for the Mediterranean. Andre Azoulay, Counselor to His Majesty the King of Morocco, in his statement to the Real Academia Ciencias

Economicas y Financieras of Barcelona, in 2002, said,

‘It is when the Mediterranean is closed and when violence is placed at the services of politics, that political decline and economic and cultural breakdown become the rule.’

Sometimes when speaking about the Mediterranean, I see a richness of proposals and a void in realizations. I have already referred to the Middle East as being a graveyard of initiatives. What is hindering the Mediterranean from realizing itself? What is keeping Europe from advancing its geo-unitary vision of the Mediterranean? What is preventing the Arab nation from investing in this geo-unitary and geo-economic approach? Some say an awakening of nationalism on both sides of the bordering sea. Others try to build negative vibes through prophesizing a clash of civilizations. Others contribute through the occupation of land which is not theirs or through terrorist activities.

All this illustrates a lack of leadership, a lack of a sense of political direction and will. It is here that we in Europe and in the Mediterranean have to show a great sense of belongingness to the future. We cannot continue fighting tomorrow the battles of yesterday. We have to realize what Ernest Renan said in his famous Sorbonne lecture:

‘A nation is born from the fact that peoples who live together, have a lot to forget and a lot to forgive.’

For this new Mediterranean to play its role, in a new political landscape, it has to have peace as its determining coagulant. And peace, it has to be said, is not viable in itself. It has to be qualified with justice. It has to be peace with justice. Justice is to be accompanied with forgiveness for as Pope John Paul II articulated so clearly:

‘There cannot be peace without justice. There can be no justice without forgiveness.’

In an indirect way, Pope John Paul II was re-echoing the words of Ernest Renan.

The Mediterranean dilemma is in itself a vision of hope or a vision of conflict — but in reality, this is not a choice. There is no choice between peace and conflict and this lack of choice, unless correctly addressed, can make of us all irresponsible politicians, failed diplomats, visionless leaders. How can we face coming generations if not withstanding the writing on the wall we decline from taking the necessary measures to ensure that peace and not chaos prevails in the Mediterranean?

As far back as 1975, Malta in Helsinki I proposed a theorem which prevails throughout that there can be no security in Europe unless there is security in the Mediterranean and that there can be no security in the Mediterranean unless there is security in Europe. This crying need for security and stability in the Mediterranean dictates the reasoning behind this paper and demands a new stability architecture for our region linking the future of Europe with that of the Mediterranean, ensuring as a result, a *Pax Mediterranea*.

About the author

Professor Guido de Marco
President Emeritus of Malta



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Prof. Guido de Marco was President of Malta from April 1999 – April 2004.

He was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 1990 and remained in office until April 1999 (except in a period November 1996 – September 1998). One of his first acts as Foreign Minister was submitting Malta's application for membership of the European Communities in Brussels on July 16th, 1990. Stressing Malta's European vocation, Prof. de Marco also underlined the validity of the Mediterranean dimension. He continued to promote and pursue the principle that the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue was a basic element in creating structures to consolidate regional security and co-operation, and as such was the signatory of the Barcelona Declaration, on behalf of Government of Malta.

On 18th September 1990, Prof. Guido de Marco was elected President of the United Nations General Assembly (45th Session). During this time he initiated a dialogue, that later led to a presidential motion unanimously approved, to revitalize the General Assembly and other aspects of reform necessary during a time of transition in international relations. Representing the General Assembly, as its President, Prof. de Marco undertook a number of diplomatic initiatives leading to his visit to the refugee camps in the Occupied Territories and Jordan, to Ethiopia and Albania.

Other initiatives include his meetings with US Secretary of State, James Baker during the Gulf War and with H.H. Pope John Paul II. He was also invited to Moscow for talks by the USSR Council of Ministers and to the People's Republic of China. As President of the UN General Assembly he also visited the Democratic Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea in May 1991 leading to the admission of these two countries to the United Nations. During his Presidency, Prof. de Marco also proposed a new role for the Trusteeship Council, an initiative which was since pursued by Malta within the United Nations.



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MEDAC was established in 1990 pursuant to an agreement between the governments of Malta and Switzerland. The Geneva Graduate Institute of International Studies (HEI) was among its first foreign partners.

With Malta's membership in the European Union and with the financial support of the Arab League MEDAC, more than ever, is emphasizing the Euro-Mediterranean dimension by building bridges between Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. MEDAC is a member of the European Diplomatic Training Initiative (EDTI), a group of EU diplomatic academies training EU personnel. The Academy is also part of the MEAM/MEMA Network which organises a programme of studies leading to a Master degree in Euro-Mediterranean Affairs. MEDAC is also a member of the Advisory Board of the journal Europe's World. E-Learning is handled by the DiploFoundation. MEDAC is also a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission_(EuroMeSCo) and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN).

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