



AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The Barcelona Process

The Euromediterranean Conference held in Barcelona on 27/28 November 1995 adopted the so-called “Barcelona Declaration”. It was approved by the then 17 EU Member States (MS) and its 10 Mediterranean partners, including Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The Declaration was a landmark in the EU’s policy vis-à-vis its Southern neighbors, encompassing wide economic, cultural, political and human cooperation. In its Preamble, the Declaration stated its main purpose: *“Convinced that the general objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity, requires 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 1995, the EU seemed to finally have found a way to become a major player in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The New Transatlantic Agenda, adopted in Madrid on December 3, 1995, stated that the EU and the US *“reaffirmed their commitment to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We will build on the recent successes in the Peace Process, including the bold steps taken by Jordan and Israel, through concerted efforts to support agreements already concluded and to expand the circle of peace”*.

The Barcelona Process -and its complement, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)¹- was undoubtedly the right path, as it foresaw a transformative long-term approach that would facilitate the democratization and economic reforms of the EU’s Southern neighbors. The idea was to establish in the “Mare Nostrum” a comprehensive partnership to turn the Mediterranean into an area of peace, stability, and prosperity.

The Union for the Mediterranean

The Union for the Mediterranean (UFM) was launched at the Paris Summit in July 2008 as a continuation of the Barcelona Process. It includes all 26 EU MS and the 15 Mediterranean Partner Countries from Africa, the Middle East, and South East Europe². The Arab League is present in all meetings. The UFM’s main purpose is to promote stability and regional integration in the Mediterranean (both North-South and South-South). The Secretariat was created in 2010 and the seat is in Barcelona³. Since 2012 the EU, and Jordan hold the Presidency. The UFM should in principle hold summits at the level of Heads of State or Government once every two

¹ The ENP was launched in 2003 and was revised in 2011, after the “Arab Spring” and again in 2015.

² These countries are the following: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (suspended), Tunisia. Libya is an Observer.

³ The operational budget of the Secretariat is paid 50% by the EU Commission and 50% by contributions of the UFM member states.



years and Ministers of Foreign Affairs meet in annual Regional Forums. Several UFM sectorial conferences have been held over the years⁴. But the political differences among some of the partners and, above all, the blockage of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have had an impact on the functioning of the UFM.

In January 2017, the UFM Regional Forum adopted the Roadmap *“The Union for the Mediterranean, an action-driven organization with a common ambition”*. The Roadmap focused on four areas of action: Increase the political Dialogue among the members; Guarantee that the organization’s activities contribute to regional stability and human development; strengthen regional cooperation; and consolidate the UFM’s capacity of action.

The third Regional Forum was held in Barcelona in October 2018, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the UFM. By then, the organization had approved more than 50 projects of regional cooperation worth a total of 5,3 billion euros, all in line with the UN 2030 Agenda. The Fifth Regional Forum was held on November 27, 2020 on the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration⁵.

Barcelona, 25 years later

Twenty-five years after the Barcelona process was launched, the situation in the Mediterranean region is neither peaceful, nor prosperous, nor stable⁶. The economic situation has not improved and the idea of a “Euromediterranean free trade area”, which should have been achieved by 2010, does not seem feasible in the foreseeable future⁷. Real democracy and respect of human rights are absent or need much improvement (with some valid exceptions, such as Tunisia) and regional integration simply does not exist.

There are several reasons why these ambitious goals did not succeed. The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, shortly before the Barcelona Conference, opened the way for a blockage of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in NY in 2001 led to US military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, with negative consequences on stability in the region, reinforcing radical Islam and strengthening Iran’s regional influence. The US is losing interest in the region because it has other strategic priorities and is less dependent on oil imports, as it has become a major producer itself. The vacuum is being filled by extra-regional powers such as Russia and China, with Turkey becoming a player as President Erdogan projects his ambitious “neo-Ottoman” foreign policy. The emergence of non-state actors, such as ISIS, has added to instability and brought terror attacks to Europe’s territory. There is a massive arms race in the region (the Persian Gulf area has the highest per capita military expenditure in the world) and arms purchases -together with declining income from gas and oil exports- are impacting national

⁴ Areas covered are: energy, transport, women, industry, environment, climate change, digital economy, trade, employment, water, and sustainable urban development.

⁵ Read the co-Chair Joint Statement in: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89535/ufm-joint-statement-jordanian-and-eu-co-presidency-fifth-regional-forum-union-mediterranean_en

⁶ This has been recognized by the HR/VP Josep Borrell himself. See: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89511/ufm-press-remarks-hrvp-josep-borrell-after-5th-regional-forum-union-mediterranean_en

⁷ In fact, the trade deficit of the partner countries with the Union has increased, not diminished, over the years.



finances, subtracting money from basic services. Weapons of mass destruction have been used by some governments against their own people, with limited reactions by Western Powers.

But, above all, the Barcelona process has not succeeded because there has not been a clear improvement in the lives of the people of our partner countries. Ten years after the citizens took to the streets in the so-called “Arab Spring” (2011) to oust corrupt leaders such as Egypt’s Mubarak and Tunisia’s Ben Ali, the rule of law in most of the Southern Mediterranean countries does not exist or is very weak. Old dictators have been replaced by new dictators or authoritarian military régimes, who count with open or tacit support from foreign powers. This is the case, to give an example, of Abdelfatah al-Sisi in Egypt (Donald Trump’s confessed “favorite dictator”)⁸. Citizens across the region suffer from low income; a demographic explosion; poor job opportunities (26.5% unemployment rate in some countries); widespread corruption at all levels; precarious state services (such as healthcare and infrastructures); and abuse of power by political elites. Hyper urbanization has led to the formation of megalopolis surrounded by slums full of misery. Inflation is adding to the suffering due to the price increases of basic staples. Armed conflicts in Syria, Libya and the Sahel, together with poverty and climate change, and, more recently, COVID-19 pandemic have multiplied the number of refugees, of displaced people and economic migrants, putting enormous pressure on some EU Member States.

Frustrated with the lack of political and economic reforms, citizens in some countries in the region (Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, and Iran) took to the streets again in recent years (2019) to protest peacefully and demand reforms. They got little or no results. An example is the refusal of Lebanon’s President Michel Aoun -long seen as the embodiment of a failed political system- to resign after the catastrophic explosion in Beirut’s harbor last year. These citizens probably will take to the streets once more after the present COVID-19 lockdowns are lifted, but this time protests could become more widespread and violent, as the lockdowns have had a negative economic and psychological impact on people.

The protests that begun in Tunisia at the end of 2010, were the beginning of a long and complex process of historic dimensions, which has had -so far- limited results. It is not clear what the outcome of this process will be nor what the next stage of these people’s struggle will look like.

What has the EU done wrong?

Ambassador Marc Otte is probably right when he states that the Barcelona Declaration has not aged a bit, but the bureaucratic process that followed it did not work as expected and political will eventually faded away (see: <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/the-eu-mena-partnership-time-for-a-reset/>). The lack of results is frustrating, in spite of the fact that the Mediterranean is perhaps the region in which the EU has invested more time and money to develop a true partnership.

The basic problem was that Europe failed to grasp -as recent Lebanese protests have shown- that the people in the region were not demanding piecemeal concessions by their politicians,

⁸ Tarek Shalaby, a left-wing Egyptian activist describes the situation 10 years after the massive demonstrations in Tahrir square: “*With the triumph of the régime, everybody acts as a policeman against the others. There is a very toxic atmosphere and a lot of hatred, no freedom and tens of thousands of people have been imprisoned for defending their ideas, many others had to go on exile. The régime has defeated them..*”.



but a complete overhaul of national and local structures of governance, which would together eradicate corruption and enhance inclusive sharing of the country's wealth and resources (see Noha El-Mikawy "From Risk to opportunity: local governance in the Southern Mediterranean" CIDOB, 06/2020⁹).

The EU did not use its soft power to its full extent to achieve the lofty goals set in Barcelona in 1995. Azlan Amirah writes that the Union was not able to solve the dilemma between "values and interests", focusing only on short-sighted goals. *"If the EU wanted to be consistent with its values, it should have put strong pressure to achieve real democratic reforms. But, if the priority was to defend its most immediate interests, it had to keep friendly relations with the autocrats"* (see: "La adicción de la UE a los falsos dilemas del Mediterráneo" Real Instituto Elcano, Comentario Elcano 28/2020, 24.07.2020¹⁰).

Perhaps Amirah's commentary is too hard on the EU. It is true that, faced with the rise of radical Islam, the European Union saw as a priority the maintenance of stability in its southern neighborhood. The ousting of dictator Hosni Mubarak in Egypt brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power, hardly a democratic movement. Syria's "Arab Spring" ended up in a terrible civil war and enormous suffering for the population. But it could have also been firmer in demanding democratic reforms and the end of corrupt practices. Even when people revolted against Tunisia's Dictator Ben Ali, the EU hesitated to support the pro-democracy movement. After almost 11 years since he is gone, there is still too close a relationship between private business and senior civil service in that country. Morocco is somewhat the same, although its Monarch has encouraged market reforms and the opening of the economy to foreign investment, which has produced quite positive results. Algeria is still anchored to a statist economic model, too dependent on oil and gas exports and its economy remains stagnant.

As for regional conflicts, the EU's voice is weak. As François Ghiles¹¹ has said, although the EU is not a player in the Syrian civil conflict, it is the main receptor of refugees from that country and spends large sums of money to keep many others in Turkey. It has no capacity to exert any influence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even though it still is the main financial contributor supporting the Palestinian people. It has not played a main role in the Libyan conflict (after a military intervention that brought more instability to the country), although its security and economic interests are very much at stake there. According to Ghiles, the EU is paying the price of disunity and narrowly designed national interests, which are the cause of inefficient and incoherent policies.

It is true that the EU cannot by itself democratize its southern neighbors, but it can exert real influence and play a crucial role in promoting democracy and good governance in the region. It could offer a generous economic partnership to its neighbors under the condition of real

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https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionales_cidob/n1_232/from_risk_to_opportunity_local_governance_in_the_southern_mediterranean.

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http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/mediterraneo+y+mundo+arabe/comentario-amirah-adiccion-de-ue-a-falsos-dilemas-en-el-mediterraneo

¹¹ "The cost of strategic failure in North West Africa. CIDOB 1/2021.

https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionales_cidob/246/the_cost_of_strategic_failure_in_north_west_africa



economic and political reforms, to be truly implemented. This is perhaps the time to launch a new “Euromediterranean Initiative” that would reflect the same spirit of Barcelona, but would be improved and updated, taking into account the experience gained since 1995 and the present political situation in the region. The EU cannot stay idle, because new players (Russia, and to a greater extent China) are striving to gain influence and presence in a region which is of crucial importance to Europe’s security.

The US progressive disengagement from the region and Trump’s erratic policies

The Obama Administration was the first to envisage a reduction of the United States’ military presence in the region. The fact that the US was less dependent on Middle East oil resources and the greater attention demanded by new challenges in other areas of the world –notably the Asia-Pacific region- drove the Administration to limit its engagement there. The Obama Administration was, however, well aware of the need to maintain a balance of power in the region, especially in view of the challenge presented by revolutionary Iran, with its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programs and its support to its proxies in Syria, Lebanon (Hezbollah), Iraq, Yemen and Gaza. The penetration of other powers, notably Russia, Turkey and China, were also factors to pay attention to. In 2015, US and European diplomats made a breakthrough in their efforts to contain Iran by concluding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that brought the Iranian nuclear program under supervision of the IAEA (the International Atomic Agency). Although limited in its scope¹², the JCPOA provided a solid framework to prevent Iran’s nuclear program from moving forward and a good basis for addressing other outstanding issues. However, Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, unhappy with this agreement, decided to sidestep the Obama Administration and discuss Middle East issues directly with Republican legislators.

Shortly after taking office, President Trump decided to withdraw unilaterally from the agreement -without consulting its allies and other signatories of the JCPOA- and at the same time exert maximum pressure on the Iranian regime¹³. Some members of his staff even declared openly that the goal was regime change in Iran¹⁴. Simultaneously, Trump decided to remove US troops from the region (mainly Eastern Syria) at a fast pace and -with the advice of his son-in-law Jared Kushner- to transfer the burden of containing Iran to its partners, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Kushner’s personal relationship with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (better known as MBS) and also with Netanyahu played a crucial role. Trump was excited by the promise of huge arms deals with the Kingdom. He even decided to make his first official trip abroad as President to Saudi Arabia, to attend a summit in Riyadh in 2017.

¹² The JCPOA enabled Iran to resume parts of its nuclear program after 10 years, did not apply to the ballistic missile program, nor addressed its support to armed groups in the region.

¹³ Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a long set of demands: no uranium enrichment, no interference with IAEA inspections, no missile program, no support for Hezbollah, Iraqi Shiite militias, Houtis and others, no threats on Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. And all this, while increasing the economic sanctions, notably on the oil sector, pressuring other countries to abide by these sanctions and clearly stating its goal of régime change in Tehran.

¹⁴ Martin Indyk, one of the main US experts on the MENA region, says that one of the reasons for this hasty withdrawal from the JCPOA was Donald Trump’s obsession with undoing everything his predecessor Barak Obama had done. JCPOA was one of the main Obama Administration’s diplomatic achievements. See “*Disaster in the Middle East. Why Trump’s Middle East Plan can’t work*”. Foreign Affairs, November/December 2019.



The Trump Administration proceeded in the following months to take initiatives that altered the delicate balance preserved in the Middle Eastern region for many decades¹⁵. Among them, the acceptance of the UAE/Saudi blockade of Qatar (although this country hosts the biggest US military installation -Al Udaid Air Base- in the whole MENA region), the recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights and its settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem (ignoring UNSC Resolution 242, which forbid the acquisition of territory by force), abandoning the two-state solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, supporting MBS's intervention in the war in Yemen with military equipment (which has created a terrible human catastrophe among civilians), cutting off aid to the Palestinians and stepping up US naval presence in the Persian Gulf.

Trump's Middle Eastern policy exploits did not stop there. He did all he could to protect MBS after strong suspicions that he had ordered the appalling assassination of the Washington Post's columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Then, in January 2020, came the killing of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, leader of the foreign wing of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, by a US strike near Baghdad. Top Iraqi paramilitary commander Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes was killed alongside Soleimani. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif called it "an act of international terrorism" and promised revenge. In November 2020, a top Iranian nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was murdered -apparently by an Israeli-led commando- in Teheran. On its part, Iran was able to bomb major Saudi oil installations with drones and attacked six oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian missiles attacked Israeli positions in the Golan and Palestinian Islamic Jihad provoked confrontations in Gaza. In sum, instead of being more stable, the region entered a much more volatile situation.

On August 13, 2020, Israel, the US and the United Arab Emirates, signed the so-called "*Joint Statement between the United States, the State of Israel, and the UAE*", called the "*Abraham Accords*" as a remembrance of the common heritage of both monotheistic religions, Islam and Judaism. This was followed by the signing on 15 September of bilateral treaties between Israel and the UAE, between Israel and Bahrein and, on October 23, between Israel and Sudan. The Israel-UAE agreement was officially entitled: "*The Abraham Accord Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel*". Both countries agreed to normalize relations, exchange resident ambassadors and conduct diplomatic and consular relations in accordance with international law. They also foresaw the establishment of cooperation in many areas, including civil aviation, trade, agriculture, science and technology and others. The signature of the agreement with Sudan was followed by the removal of that country from the list of states sponsors of terrorism, the lifting of economic sanctions and the beginning of discussions on debt forgiveness¹⁶.

On 22 December 2020, after a "telephone conversation between HM King Mohamed VI and President Trump", a Joint Declaration (JD) Morocco-Israel-US was adopted. The Joint Declaration, which, significantly, **was signed by Jared Kushner on behalf of the US**, foresaw the immediate resumption of official contacts between the Moroccan and the Israeli governments

¹⁵ Indyk considers that this order was initiated by Henry Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" that brokered the disengagement agreements and Arab-Israeli negotiations after the 1973 war, which led to the Israeli-Egyptian and Israeli-Jordanian peace accords and the beginning of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that eventually lead to the Oslo and Camp David agreements.

¹⁶ The agreement was signed in January 2021, the US removed Sudan from the list of states sponsoring terrorism and provided a bridge loan to clear Sudan's arrears with the World Bank and access to \$ 1 billion annual funding.



to establish full diplomatic relations. Morocco achieved an enormous political and diplomatic success because the JD established that: *"The United States recognizes Moroccan Sovereignty over the entire territory¹⁷ and reaffirms its support for Morocco's serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute over the Western Sahara territory"*. The US would also encourage economic and social development of Morocco, including the Western Sahara territory, and to that end it would open a Consulate in Dakhla. The EU was not consulted nor informed of this movement by the United States, in spite of the fact that it has vital interests in the region and remains aligned with UNSC resolutions that state that the conflict must be resolved by negotiations¹⁸.

Oman has postponed its decision on joining the Abraham Accords and Saudi Arabia has not yet made any announcement on this matter, in spite of the rumors (reported by Israeli media) of a secret meeting in November 2020 in the city of Neom between PM Netanyahu, Crown Prince MBS and then US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. The Saudi Foreign Minister denied that such a meeting had occurred and the Ministry said that Saudi Arabia would stick by the Arab League position of not establishing ties with Israel until the Jewish state's conflict with the Palestinians is resolved (this was likely a personal decision made by King Salman himself, overruling MBS).

In his first major foreign policy speech (February 4, 2021) after taking office, President Joseph Biden did not refer to the MENA region, except to say that the US would end all support and aid to warring parties in Yemen, one of the major proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is not clear to what extent the Biden Administration would reverse some or all the major initiatives taken by the Trump Administration. As regards Iran, Biden has stated his will to return to the JCPOA system, but it has requested that Tehran first resumes fulfilling its obligations under the nuclear deal. Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, has declared in Fareed Zacharia's CNN GPS program that his government is ready to fulfil its obligations if all economic sanctions are lifted. This is a catch-22 situation. It is also not clear how Washington could help reestablish Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and again become an honest broker without putting strong pressure on both sides, which could damage US-Israeli relations. In sum, it will not be easy to undo some of Trump's actions on the MENA region.

The Libyan problem

The toppling of Dictator Mohammad Gaddafi in 2011 created a power vacuum in Libya, which opened the way to a civil conflict that has produced great instability in one of Europe's most sensitive neighborhoods. The outcome has been uncontrolled migration; the opening of the country to Islamists, Salafists and ISIS; tribal fighting and the presence of foreign powers such as Turkey, Russia, the UAE and Egypt. It also has had destabilizing effects on Tunisia, which has been compelled to significantly increase its defense budget. The EU's role has been very limited, due in part to the strong differences among some of its MS. However, there is hope of making Libya a viable country again thanks to the efforts of the UN and other stakeholders within the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF).

¹⁷ Morocco controls only 80% of the Western Sahara Territory (including the coastal areas). The remaining 20% is basically controlled by the "República Árabe Saharaui Democrática" (RASD). The RASD is a member of the UA (African Unity).

¹⁸ The EU's position on the Western Sahara conflict did not prevent it from signing trade and fishing agreements with Morocco, in spite the European Court of Justice (ECJ)'s ruling in 2018 that any such agreements should not include the territory of nor impact on the rights of the Sahrawi people.



Turkey's assertive foreign policy has placed it in confrontation with its NATO allies¹⁹. In 2006, President Erdogan launched his "Blue Homeland" ("Mavi Vatan") policy, with the ambition of extending its influence throughout a large part of the former Ottoman Empire's territories, including the Central and Eastern Mediterranean. In Libya, it has given military support to Tripoli's Government of National Accord (GNA). This has pitted Ankara against Russia, the UAE and Egypt, which support the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by the self-proclaimed Marshall, Khalifa Haftar.

Turkey has signed an agreement with the government in Tripoli on maritime boundaries in the central Mediterranean, which, among other things, cuts through Cyprus and Greek waters around Crete. This has created new tensions in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Ankara has engaged in drilling to explore hydrocarbon resources in that area, provoked the EU by opening the flow of migrants, insulted French President Emmanuel Macron and depicted the EU as a failed organization. Since January 2020, Ankara has deployed an estimated 7,000 irregular forces on the ground in Libya, backed by drones, anti-aircraft batteries and other equipment. In response, Haftar hired fighters from Bashar al Assad militias and opened an embassy in Damascus, thus importing the Syrian conflict into Libya.

The continuous fighting in Libya seems to have reached a stalemate. Haftar had to admit that his plan of a final offensive on Tripoli failed. No faction seemed capable of imposing itself over the others. Meanwhile, the constant efforts of the International Community and the excellent work of Stephanie Williams, Interim Special Representative of the UNSG for Libya, have produced some good results, opening the way to diplomatic discussions. Based on UNSC Resolution 2510 (2020), which endorsed the conclusions of the International Conference on Libya held in Berlin in January 2020, an agreement was reached in Tunis on 23 October 2020, by which all military fighting would cease and all foreign forces would leave the country in a term of three months. At the same time, a political process within the framework of the LPDF was established with a roadmap that includes the holding of general elections²⁰ on December 24, 2021 and, after that, the approval of a new Constitution (no date was set for a Constitutional referendum). At the same time, the GAN was dissolved and a new Presidency Council was formed, with Mohammad Younes Menfi as President (representing Cirenaica) and a new Prime Minister, Abdul Hami Mohammed Deibah.

The task ahead is very challenging: Deibah must try to form a new Cabinet within the next few weeks and obtain its parliamentary approval, not a simple task due to the high degree of tribalism and the internal fracture that plagues the country. Some of the leaders who enjoyed influence and power will have to relinquish most of it, which they will be reluctant to do. Making sure that the cease-fire holds is also difficult, because there are so many armed factions everywhere. Achieving a consensus on a new electoral law and a new Constitution, as well as on economic reforms²¹ will certainly not be easy.

On January 18, 2021, the UNSG appointed Ján Kubis as his Special Envoy and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya. On February 7, 2021, the EU Council issued a statement giving strong

¹⁹ NATO's SECGEN, Jens Stoltenberg has expressed his concern for Turkey's purchase of Russia's S-400 air defense system. The US has threatened to cancel the delivery of F-35 fighter aircraft to Turkey.

²⁰ "A roadmap to credible, inclusive and democratic elections, to be held on December 24, 2021, which will mark the 70th year since the declaration of independence in 1951" says UNSIMIL (UN Support Mission in Libya) communiqué.

²¹ Such as the reunification of the National Oil Company and the Central Bank.



support to the LPDF agreements. It underlines the importance of effective implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, respect for the UN arms embargo and urges the withdrawal of all foreign fighters and mercenaries in accordance with UNSC Resolutions. The Council recalls its instrument of sanctions against possible spoilers.

Conclusions

The Barcelona Process was an ambitious and well oriented partnership program aimed at facilitating democratization and economic progress on the whole Mediterranean region. It was, in a way, the other side of the coin of what soon after was achieved with the EU enlargement towards the East. Nobody thought that this would be easy, but a whole cumulus of circumstances has produced disappointing results.

The European Neighborhood Policy for the South was well intended. The UFM offers a valuable forum for discussion and channels substantial amounts of money to carry out projects in important areas of development. But all these efforts have been basically unsuccessful in transforming the economies and democratizing our partners' political systems. There was perhaps a lack of understanding of social dynamics in partner countries; too much attention was given to the elites in power and little to the demands by these countries' citizens to be the owners of the reform processes. Divisions among MS and too much importance attached to narrow national interests bred incoherence in EU Policies. This facilitated the entrance of other players in the region.

The EU cannot sit idle. It is perhaps now the time to set up new goals and a new vision in dealing with our Southern neighbors. Europe should take the leadership but should also try to work closely with our Allies -notably the United States- and other partners. NATO SECGEN has launched a comprehensive reflection process on the Alliance by 2030 and has tasked NMAs and the IS to reflect on ways to reinforce NATO's engagement in the Mediterranean region and develop initiatives for the Sahel. New attention should be given to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to reverse not only an historic injustice against the Palestinians but also a source of justification for many extremists and radicals in the region.

The EU should offer to the Biden Administration the possibility of establishing a new transatlantic partnership in the Mediterranean region to facilitate political, social and economic change there. If we don't do it, others will try but on the basis of their own interests, not ours.

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