



Reflections on the future of the MCA

The Mediterranean : cradle of the future¹

A joint paper by the members of the Advisory Council of the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly (MCA) – 1st August 2012

1. The current situation

Even though its unity and its political existence still raise many questions, the Mediterranean region is nonetheless a historical, human, commercial, cultural, social and environmental reality. The political, economic and institutional changes under way have highlighted the emergence of new players – the citizens – and mean that a new kind of citizens' awareness has become indispensable, requiring the establishment of new civil society organisations. The events in the region are pushing public and private institutions to redefine their cooperation and development policies and seek out new civil society partners. The Mediterranean basin should become a new public space and be constructed with respect for the diversity of viewpoints and for the history of each country.

1.1. The Euro-Mediterranean institutional processes

The European Union (EU) has three different frameworks – all of which it has itself put in place – for organising cooperation in the Mediterranean region :

- the Barcelona Process (BP), born in 1995, is a partnership between the Union and the 14 non-EU countries that border the Mediterranean. It has three pillars : « politics and security », « finance and economy » and « society and culture » ;
- the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), born in 2003, is the extension of the BP. The ENP proposes action plans for each partner country with the aim of strengthening practical cooperation ;
- the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), born in 2008, proposes, in an inter-governmental framework covering 43 countries (all those bordering the Mediterranean, the EU, the African Union and other international organisations), *ad hoc* cooperation on the basis of specific projects.

¹ The title of this paper is taken from a document produced by two members of the MCA Advisory Council, Paul BALTA and Claudine RULLEAU : *La Méditerranée, berceau de l'avenir*, published by Milan (Paris, 2006).



The ultimate goal of these initiatives is to « transform the Mediterranean into an area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity »². These three institutional processes have been unable to achieve the objectives fixed. They are the subject of contention – at least as far as the countries of the South are concerned – for sometimes contradictory reasons. Civil society in these countries remains very cautious about these different processes and questions their relevance.

Other Mediterranean institutions have also been created :

- the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA)³, created in 2003, with the aim of relaunching cooperation between the EU and ten countries around the Mediterranean (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey) ;
- the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (MPA), created in 2006, following the decision taken in the last plenary session of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) in February 2005. It brings together parliamentary representatives of all countries bordering the Mediterranean ;
- the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), created in January 2010, seeks to bring a local and regional dimension to the UfM ;
- the Euro-Mediterranean summits of the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, created in 2005, became the Assembly of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions of the Union for the Mediterranean in November 2010.

Parallel to these developments, citizens have become increasingly vital players in the societies of the countries of the South, North and Eastern Mediterranean. Their emergence as key players requires Mediterranean public institutions to rethink their policies.

1.2. The economic crises

The Mediterranean countries of Europe are living through economic crises and crises of governance which have harsh repercussions on their populations ; these crises are undermining the notion of solidarity within the European Union.

The popular uprisings in the Arab world and the major mobilisation of citizens in the countries of Southern Europe, whilst giving voice to fundamental values, are also forcing a rethink of the system of institutional relationships in the Mediterranean region. The financial crisis that erupted in 2008 and that has turned into economic crisis in the countries of the Euro zone should lead us to reevaluate the economic relationships that exist in the Mediterranean region. Unemployment rates in countries both North and South of the Mediterranean are increasingly converging, especially amongst young people, and are generating major migration flows. There are still too many obstacles to the free movement of people and transport infrastructure remains underdeveloped.

² See the *Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean - Paris, 13th July 2008*, the official founding document of the Union for the Mediterranean.

³ It has become the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean



These economic crises require both major political will and a considerable cultural effort in order to understand their complexity and propose adequate responses – notably a new economic paradigm based on solidarity between the peoples of « Mare Nostrum ».

1.3. Conflicts

The Mediterranean region is victim to political – even economic and religious - crises and conflicts that have, in some cases, existed for decades: Israel-Palestine, Cyprus, Western Sahara, etc. New conflicts have appeared recently: Syria, Libya, and also in some countries of the Sahel. Additionally, some of the conflicts on the periphery of the region weigh on relationships in the Mediterranean: Iraq, Afghanistan and countries in the Arabian peninsula.

The permanent Israel-Palestine conflict continues to have implications for the Mediterranean region and for the construction of a peaceful future, even in countries in transition such as Egypt.

Finally, new tensions around the ownership and management of natural resources (water, land, solar, etc) are adding to historical conflicts over the control of energy resources (natural gas and oil). The peoples of the region want to put an end to the plundering of these resources, in the same way that they want to free themselves from the control of authoritarian leaders. In order to achieve this, they are in search of new instruments and new, more democratic forms of governance.

1.4. International power games

The Mediterranean has, since time immemorial, captured the attention of the major powers, whether they are from the region or not ; they have all developed strategies to defend their own interests there.

Europe, the United States and Russia have all been present in the region for a very long time. Iran, Brazil, India and China all show, for diverse reasons, a more recent interest. Finally, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are proving to be more and more influential in the region since the events of 2011.

The Mediterranean therefore continues to play an important role in international relations. This reality tempers an analysis that often presents Asia as the new centre of gravity of international relations, to the detriment of the Mediterranean.

1.5. The changes under way in the Mediterranean region

Since 2011, the changes that have taken place in countries to the North and the South of the Mediterranean have demonstrated the determination of citizens to leave a strong and lasting impression on the life of the City.

The nature and scope of change in the Southern Mediterranean countries in 2011 and 2012 is without doubt considerable. The political and military events, and the citizens' uprisings in



Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria underline the anything-but-anodyne character of these processes and shows, to varying degrees, the depth of changes already under way in all Mediterranean countries.

Citizens' movements are also active to the North of the Mediterranean, where a combination of factors has conspired to generate, in reaction to the political and economic crisis, strong support for active citizenship. This common determination of citizens is a testimony to the depth of people's belief in improvements in their own future. This is why the movements under way are not about to fizzle out.

The transitions taking place in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean reflect a momentum that will necessarily be maintained over time. They underline once again the common destiny that unites Mediterranean citizens. In all their diversity, the people of the region have highlighted the original meaning of democracy and citizenship. With the opening of this new page of history, thanks to the actions of its own citizens, it therefore follows that there is now an opportunity to return to the area's natural significance – historically speaking, a region of commercial and cultural exchange – and to its origins as the birthplace of democracy. The region can now demonstrate its unity and its continuity, and become a source of inspiration for people well beyond its geographical boundaries. This is in spite of the fears and apprehensions linked to a negative perception of the region's religious and cultural diversity, of which the growing islamophobia in European societies is the clearest manifestation.

The Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly (MCA) believes it is necessary to analyse – and participate in – the strengthening of relations between the current movements in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and the European mobilisations against austerity and in support of social justice.

The MCA proposes giving particular attention to the Syrian crisis and to the elaboration of practical initiatives that aim to facilitate meetings of citizens, with a view to discussing the development of an independent, diverse and open civil society as the democratic transition proceeds.

2. Actions proposed by the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly

Taking the current situation presented above into full account, the MCA has decided to conceive its actions in both the short term (2012-2014) and the medium term (up to 2020).

2.1 The 2012-2014 period

MCA's actions are founded on the democratic values of freedom, peace and respect for cultural diversity and environmental responsibility. The Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly proposes to support the emergence of a common discourse and joint actions through the organisation of citizens' encounters.

The MCA initiative complements other existing processes. It is based on the belief that it is principally through the actions and the involvement of men and women as citizens that a positive « common destiny » of people acting together in solidarity will be achieved in the Mediterranean region.

The Assembly process is already under way. It is based on a founding Charter, coordination between regional poles, a Secretariat and an Advisory Council made up of people from diverse



geographical, cultural and professional backgrounds who are recognised for their commitment to the region ; there are also a growing number of citizens' circles being set up across the countries of the region. The MCA therefore has solid foundations that enable it to act and enjoy a real presence in the life of Mediterranean citizens.

The regional coordinations have made contacts with the Euro-Mediterranean and Afro-Mediterranean institutions, where the MCA initiative has been well received. The MCA will continue to broaden and strengthen its relations with other Mediterranean civil society networks as well as with public and private institutions.

On the basis of the experience accumulated since 2009 and taking into account the challenges and the current situation, the MCA will continue its process of construction in the period 2012-14. Specifically, the Assembly will :

- set up citizens' circles in all the countries of the Mediterranean, aiming to cover a wider range of sectors of activity ;
- expand its Advisory Council by involving more women and more members from the countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean ;
- improve its existing communications and information networking, and organise annual Assembly meetings ;
- strengthen the coordination by setting up new regional poles ;
- develop its intellectual and conceptual work, and its capacity to make proposals ;
- institutionalise the MCA, by registering itself as a formal organisation.

2.2 Towards 2020

Even if it is difficult to know how the institutional and political reconfiguration of the Mediterranean region will pan out, the MCA can already envisage collaborating with the surviving Euro-Mediterranean institutions and act in accordance with the objectives that we have set ourselves. Specifically, we will develop our collaboration with the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, the recently established Euro-Mediterranean Assembly of Economic and Social Councils, the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (MPA), the EuroMed university (EMUNI), etc.

Similarly, the MCA will collaborate with other citizens' movements and civil society organisations like the EUROMED platform, the network of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Social Fora, etc.

Additionally, in order to define the MCA's strategy, it is very important to take into account the perceptions of Mediterranean citizens concerning :

- **the geopolitical dimensions of Mediterranean reality** and the role of the powers that currently take an interest in the region (the new perspectives coming from Latin America ; new visions of the relationship with Africa that see the continent as an extension of the Mediterranean area ;
- **the economic dimensions of this reality**: the role of intergovernmental bodies (WTO, IMF, World Bank, etc.); the development of investment from all the regions of the world; the agricultural strategies pursued by third party powers in the Mediterranean ; the mobility of citizens and young people in particular in the region, etc ;



- **the social and cultural changes in the region** : what are the driving forces behind these changes ? Can improvements in economic conditions, or political and/or religious radicalisation, be observed ? What are the key political, economic and social issues that are most important to Mediterranean citizens ? Concerning, for instance, the relationship between men and women and between generations, and young people's current situation and expectations? What kind of vocational education is available to young Mediterraneans and what learning about other cultures takes place ?; what relationship is there between training and employment ?
- **the role of citizens and voluntary organisations** : what is their capacity for action on the Mediterranean situation ? What are the major issues and objectives that could serve as catalysts for action ? What institutions should be targeted ? How could the concept of regional citizenship be built ?

The MCA should monitor, with a critical eye, the processes of reorganisation of the Mediterranean area and listen to all those – intellectuals, writers, artists, economists – who reflect on the Mediterranean question.

This will be the major role of the MCA in the coming years : to promote reflection and research by citizens on how diversity can be preserved in a region the basic unity of which is highlighted in our founding Charter. The Mediterranean citizens' Circles, whilst ensuring freedom of expression for all, will be vital to promote such reflection.

The MCA wishes to collaborate in the design of a strategy that favours the establishment of poles for education, training and the promotion of citizens' participation in the Mediterranean region. It is essential to strengthen the capacity, effectiveness and influence of citizens' initiatives. This requires a strategic approach as well as institutional and private partners.

The primary objective of the MCA is to develop citizens' dialogue processes in order to encourage the emergence of priorities, common strategies and concrete proposals that will serve to influence political decision-making, amongst other things. This is why MCA's participants come from a broad diversity of social, professional and cultural backgrounds across the Mediterranean basin. The MCA seeks to strengthen the practice of « citizens' diplomacy » in the region.

By way of conclusion and as a line of action for the MCA, we will quote Edgar Morin, a member of MCA's Advisory Council, from a speech he made during the second meeting of the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly in Tunis in December 2011 : « *We need to develop a common way of thinking around Mare Nostrum that will inspire a Mediterranean policy* ».