



Barcelona reloaded

The revamped Barcelona process, the Union for the Mediterranean, would benefit from greater territorial cooperation, say **Recep Bozlağan** and **Murat Daoudov**

The Paris summit of the heads of states and governments of the European and the Mediterranean countries succeeded in reviving under a new name the process that was started in 1995 in Barcelona. Building the Union for the Mediterranean (UFM) will require considerable commitment and cooperation from everyone involved, and particularly from France, the driving force behind it. Key will be the ability of the various countries concerned to overcome their

differences and put years of suspicion and rivalry behind them. And in that regard, they could learn much from another area of government that already has a strong track record in working together – local authorities.

To fully achieve integration across the Euro-Mediterranean region, this ambitious project must not only be approved by heads of state – it must also be accepted by the people who live and work there. This is why local and regional authorities, the level of power closest

to citizens, will play a more active role and will be the vital element in ensuring full integration at international level. The history of European integration teaches us the importance of regional and local governments – indeed, regions are regarded as far stronger supporters of “Europeanisation” than national governments, which are often stuck on issues of national sovereignty.

This experience should be taken as a model and tailored to the needs of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.



While it was hard to get every head of state involved in the UFM to attend the Paris summit, just three weeks before regional and local leaders from both north and south met in large numbers at a “territorial summit” in Marseille. Local actors have shown that they are more idealistic and open-minded partners when it comes to working together across borders. But we need to go beyond simply raising awareness of the need to involve local and regional players in the UFM: that involvement needs to be formalised. In November 2005, local and regional authorities stressed in Barcelona that any partnership must be built on the basis of common strategies involving all levels of government, so that citizens become the real stakeholders, and proposed the establishment of a permanent Euro-Mediterranean forum of local and regional governments. The meeting in Marseille in June 2008 reiterated this demand, and the Committee of the Regions put a formal proposal to EU leaders via the French presidency. As a result, the Paris summit conclusions highlighted the importance of solidarity forged at the local level. With this common consensus that there is a need for a formal body to encompass the work of the regions at the Euromed level, there is now a need to decide how that body should operate and where it should be located.

If we were to feed all the data into a computer and ask it to pick the ideal location for such a body, a place located at the heart of this so-called territorial UFM, the most likely choice would be Istanbul. The main criticism of the Barcelona process has been that Europe has played too dominant a role, giving the impression that the north is dictating to the south rather than it being a real partnership. That is why the UFM will have a co-presidency, with one country from the north and one from the south, to reinforce the idea of co-ownership of the project. The particularity of this regional partnership is that it brings

together two sides with a range of differences, and the territorial UFM will face the same issues. But these can be overcome in large part by setting the headquarters in a city that has a proven track record in finding a way to balance all these requirements. The UFM brings together two sides from different cultural, religious, political and economic points of view: Europeans and non-Europeans; Muslims and Christians; east and west; industrialised north and developing south. In this respect, Turkey is an ideal “all-in-one” solution: it is a founding member of the Council of Europe, an EU candidate country, a member of NATO, the OSCE and the OECD, a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and an observer country at the African Union. Turkey is the historical bridge between east and west, Christians and Muslims, and Istanbul, the crossroads of civilisations, is the only place in the whole eastern Mediterranean region capable of holding its own with other world cities.

Another major argument in favour of Istanbul is its accessibility; it is the most easily accessible city from land, sea and air. It is a major airport hub, a maritime gateway between the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins and, with the Bosphorus tunnel project, is going to become in the near future the railway node of the “Iron Silk Road”, connecting the vast networks of Asia and Europe. In addition, Turkey, with its visa regime, is the most easily accessible country among all partners of UFM: the success of Euro-Mediterranean integration will also depend on the possibility of interaction between ordinary people, a fact that Europe sometimes seems to forget when setting its visa restrictions.



Last but not least, the system of territorial governance differs considerably between the two opposite coasts of the Mediterranean: strong local authorities in the north and high centralisation and low levels of local autonomy in the south. One of the major challenges will be to foster the emancipation of territorial actors throughout the region, and here again Turkey has particular experience in this field, having empowered local governments through a series of reforms. Modern local administration systems in Turkey date from 1854, the Ottoman era, and modern reforms in Syria and Jordan are taking Turkey as an example, while cities like Casablanca, Cairo and Tehran consider Istanbul as a model of urban development. Historical proximity and the Euro-Asian character of Turkish cities makes them the most appropriate example to inspire other cities, acting as a regional bridge for spreading modern local governance concepts. ★

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