



Mediterranean light on the Franco-Turkish (mis)understanding

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French opposition to the Turkish accession to the EU poisons the relations between the two countries. Yet, Turkey requires the French support in the North as much as France needs the alliance of Turks in the South.

Launched in 2007, the Mediterranean Union had in its sights, among other objectives, to confine Turkey in the South, what provoked Ankara's fierce opposition to this back-way seeking to divert her from her road to Brussels. Even if later the project has been renamed as "the Union for Mediterranean", and guarantees have been given to Turkey, she joined it without enthusiasm. The Paris Summit laid foundations of this structure... which, since then, doesn't lack qualifications like "dead-born union" or "ghost castle". Let's look why.

In the light of the complexity of the situation in the Mediterranean, with the Arab-Israeli conflict and many countries' deficient human rights and democracy, the architects of this Union have opted for its "depolitisation". An undoubtedly less tricky way than the one of the audacious commitment for peace and commitment to the "diplomacy of values ». As result, the UfM will carefully avoid to interfere in the conflict or to seek to spread any kind of democratisation ; it will confine itself to involve only in technical issues such as environment. This mild content frustrated many. The southern shore does not hurry to engage fully in the project without Europe putting in some hard work for Palestine. The voices in the North also criticise this depolitisation which removes any hope of a process leading to more democracy. Thus, avoiding any political element, the Franco-European chorus preferred a diplomatically "benign" line. But could they really have acted differently? The choice of such "disambition" was probably dictated not only, or not so much by the absence of ardour as by the cold reckon of a lack of real "weightiness" to stop guns and to pull the Arab Mediterranean into a systemic change. Without saying that this Mediterranean "integration" will remain relative in the eyes of those "Mediterraneans", separated not only by the sea but also the visa walls.

Re-politicise the UfM

Though, the Gaza crisis, which put the UfM into hibernation, has shown how much even depoliticised cooperation can become hostage of the dormant unsolved problems. If nothing is done to it, the UfM risks to end up with a resounding failure after its spectacular launching. The remedy is to give it a doubly-political substance: commitment for the "moderation" of the ones and "modernisation" of the others. Easy to say, surely, but how to achieve this challenge with an *a priori* contradictory nature? How to endow it with a content promising peace in Palestine, so to please the Arab capitals, avoiding at the same time to displease these by a change perspective at their homes? Turkey appears incontrovertible for such mission impossible. She is the one who can cement this union of two very different camps: member of the whole range of western institutions and member of the Organisation of Islamic

Conference (OIC), observer at the African Union, Euro-Asian country with a democratic baggage both old (right to vote for women before France) and new (recent reforms).

Turkish piece in the Mediterranean puzzle

The Turkish potential remains unexplored, obscured by the tensions between Paris and Ankara. In the meantime, while distrusting this Union, Turkey engages in the Mediterranean. She creates its partnership area with strategic cooperation councils with Syria and Iraq, provides its support for the municipal modernisation in Jordan, and voids visas, thus courageously opening its doors to all those to whom Europe only locks even more its own. In the OIC, she applies itself to create the UN-like commission for human rights and is described as the “source of democratisation sparkles”... by the conservative Saudis!

Turkey also proves its capacity to engage for resolution of tensions, while she intervenes for Gaza, between Syria and Israel, in the Lebanese presidential crisis, for Syrian-Iraqi or Syrian-Saudi relations, to mention only some diplomatic breakthroughs on the southern flank. How many conflicts Europe has been able to resolve in the same time?

Complementarity to exploit

The French support for Turkey’s European aspirations is crucial, as well as Turkish involvement is necessary to get the UfM out of its impasse. Without great discourses, Turkey becomes the regional “soft power” and its European character and oriental closeness seduces Arabs who wish to modernise without that this being “injected” by the North. Isn’t she already involved in the very realisation of what UfM dreamed to do?

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<http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/0101599738-eclairage-mediterraneen-sur-la-mes-entente-franco-turque>

Turkish translation: “*Akdeniz ışığında Fransız-Türk uzlaşması/mazlığı*”

<http://licencetothink.blogspot.com/list/articles-yaz%C4%B1lar/1648237342.2.pdf>