

Euro-Mediterranean Region: Resurged Geopolitical Importance

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Abstract Ancient World's Geopolitical Centre, the Mediterranean region has once again a chance to conquer laurels. The Mediterranean region has a unique global position with some most remarkable geostrategic corners (the Suez Canal and Strait of Gibraltar to mention two of many). With an open access to the Black Sea, it enables Russia and other continental states to easily enter global markets. On the other hand, the Euro-Mediterranean region represents a religious, cultural and academic bridge between the Arab world, North African states and the European Union (EU). These are the reasons for the Euro-Mediterranean region still playing an important geopolitical role in the world chessboard. Unfortunately, in last decade and particularly in the last few years, world players lost the *fil rouge* in playing the game. The USA decided to step aside from the regional game, the EU does not have a clear vision of why this region is of crucial importance for its future development, the Arab spring shuffled geopolitical cards and thus instills bewilderment in the region and the Arab League is focusing mainly on the dialogue with its Northern African partners. The Euro-Mediterranean region offers once again a great opportunity to all regional players to build a strong and powerful region with a great economic, political and lastly intercultural and interreligious impact. In this paper, we discuss the current Euro-Mediterranean geopolitical challenges and try to examine its potentials to resurge as a strong and powerful global region.

Keywords Euro-Mediterranean · Region · Geopolitics · Geoeconomics · Interests

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Introduction

Region is a very large concept which does not have a single and unified definition. Definition is thus dependent on context, for which the term is used. According to Cohen (2003, p. 40), the term 'region' refers to geographic, political, cultural and military contiguity, that is closely connected by historic migrations and common historic background. According to this definition, we can state that the Euro-Mediterranean region can be defined as a single region, since it has all the attributes mentioned above. Another definition of the region is even better and that is what Evans and Newnham (1998, p. 472) claim: to define something as a region, geographic proximity has a vital importance. But it is much more difficult to talk about the Euro-Mediterranean region in the sense of Hettne et al. (1999, p. 9), for whom the region is a political subject with its own identity. Thus, to determine the Euro-Mediterranean region, we need to enumerate countries that belong to the area. As a basis, we can consider the countries of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) which consists of 43 member states.¹ Why are all these definitions and explanations essential for our paper? First, to know which countries our analysis refers to; second, to understand that the Euro-Mediterranean region should be discussed and viewed from different levels; third, to show various geopolitical implications, which comprise all above mentioned categories (political, economic, military, geographic, cultural and historic).

Finally, we should not forget to briefly discuss one essential imperative when talking about regions, regionalism or localization. According to political realism and the theory of geopolitics, the most powerful states in a region (as well in the world) aim to achieve its supremacy, in other words, aim to be a regional leader. When such state is achieved, other countries start looking for the balance of power (Morgenthau 1995, pp. 146–149). The Euro-Mediterranean region thus lives in a time of regional disharmony or, in other words, in a regional anarchy (to make an analogy with an anarchic international system). It has neither a regional leader nor a balance of power assured. The EU is politically too weak and without its own military, the North African states face social and political transformation and thus cannot take the burden of carrying such high international responsibility, the Near East is drowning in its own tensions and conflicts, while the Middle East is trying to reestablish stable relations with the Near East countries and trying to ensure an environment of peace, stability and security.

The Euro-Mediterranean region has gone through several geopolitical changes as a consequence of the following factors: global financial and economic crisis; the Arab spring; US partial strategic withdrawal from the region; European incapability to play one single game.

¹ 27 European Union (EU) member states and 16 Southern Mediterranean, African and Middle Eastern countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

Geography and Geostrategic Position

First of all, we have to examine the geography and Euro-Mediterranean geostrategic imperative. According to Tlili (2011), the Euro-Mediterranean countries encompass 475 million people (272 million Europeans, 20 million Muslims and 200 million non-European Arabs and Jews). The Mediterranean Sea represents a common ground for Asian, European and African countries. This is not a negligible fact, since the Euro-Mediterranean region was the world's center for many centuries. The Mediterranean Sea is a gateway for East Asian countries and a sea window to world oceans for Russia and Ukraine and after all also for Commonwealth of Independent States. The Mediterranean Sea gained its main geostrategic importance during the Second World War when the Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Communist Russia (Soviet Union) saw it as a tool towards regional and further world supremacy. Germany saw it as part of *Großdeutschland*, Italy as *mare nostrum* and Russia as a tool for economic expansion and export of the communist idea (Parker 1997, pp. 139–145).

The Euro-Mediterranean's most important geostrategic point is for sure the Suez Canal (along with three natural straits: Gibraltar, Bosphorus, and Dardanelles). It represents the shortest seaway from East Asia and Middle East to Europe as well as for some African states to Europe. Goblet (in Parker 1997, p. 157) considered the Suez Canal a key attribute for the British Empire to have an open access to India. It goes even further by saying that the Suez Canal somehow provided the British Empire with a *vis vitalis*. The Canal route from the Far East to the Western countries is about 30 % shorter than sailing across the Cape of Good Hope. The geography thus makes money, route, time and operating costs lower (Suez Canal Authority).² Obviously, there is another, geopolitical condition that must be met to achieve this rebalancing: the Suez Canal must continue to be a safe and reliable shipping route. Any threat to the canal's normal operations would shift the Far East-Europe route to the southern tip of Africa, marginalizing the Mediterranean (Solana and Saz-Carranza 2011). The Mediterranean Sea has multiple decisive meanings in international geostrategic planning.

Geoeconomics of the Euro-Mediterranean

In the Euro-Mediterranean region, the EU is the largest and strongest economic power. The Near East is the second largest and North Africa the third. American and European politicians are constantly repeating that Asia (with China and India at the head) is going to take over the leading role in global economy. And at the same time, we are all afraid of them, because we do not know what they are bringing to us on the long term. For the EU, this fear is partially a consequence of inappropriate policy in rescuing the European crisis. The same can happen with the Euro-Mediterranean region. If politicians and states will not stand for common goals, we

² Suez Canal Authority. Available at: <http://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/sc.aspx?show=11> (September 15, 2012).

risk losing the strategic partnership. Therefore, instead of looking for strategic partnerships abroad, we should first create it in our own neighborhood. For the EU, this is for sure the Euro-Mediterranean region with a strong European-Arab economic and political partnership.

We should not neglect the fact that the EU is still the second most developed region on the world. The first is North America (with the USA dominating). Statistics for 2010 show (World Investment Report 2010, pp. 4–6) that the USA are the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) host economy, followed by China and France, while the USA, France, Japan and Germany were the first four FDI outflows economies. It needs to be pointed out that the values of FDI are much higher in transatlantic relations than transpacific. We can see that the main economic flows occur in the transatlantic region. Dicken (2007, p. 39) asserts that commodity exchange is more intensive between the USA and East Asia, while the value of exchanged commodities is higher between the USA and the EU. According to the World Investment Report 2010 (pp. 167–169), FDI inflows and outflows slowed down in most developing countries (including China) between 2007 and 2009, but not in Lebanon or Algeria, where there were still rising.

In international economy, the most precious value is predictability. We cannot expect China to be fully predictable if we learn from their military strategies. The EU should first make its neighborhood predictable and stable. With the Eastern window (Russia and Ukraine), we have already achieved this. Thus it is the main task to create a stable environment in the Euro-Mediterranean region, which has a huge unexploited economic potential. Of course, the EU has to maintain and consolidate its economy with China and India as well, because they are both important trading partners. But at the same time the EU needs to enhance and work on economic relations with the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries. These countries have many advantages: they are closer to the Europe, which lowers the transportation costs and other costs related to distance; there are already existing partnership programmes to accelerate the economy; it is easier to plan common infrastructure (like oversea electric installation or underwater pipelines). The EU therefore has an opportunity and particularly a leverage to stabilize and strengthen its own environment.

Geography endowed the Mediterranean with plenty of natural richness. To mention just few: natural gas, crude oil, excellent solar position, perfect agricultural conditions and high touristic potential. We can best use and exploit them only in cooperation with all actors. Numbers and statistics are significant:

1. Natural gas is considered as a clean source of energy, which is important not only for the EU but also to the MENA states. It is again the Euro-Mediterranean region which provided all together 17 % (Algeria 14 %, Libya 3 %) of all natural gas to the EU in 2010 (EU Energy Figures 2012, p. 22).
2. Especially for the EU, the import of natural resources from North African states (particularly Libya and Algeria) is of vital importance. The EU imported 3.01 % of all crude oil in 2011 from Libya, 2.94 % from Algeria, 0.94 % from Syria and 0.24 % from Tunisia (European Commission: Energy 2012). To sum

- up, 7.13 % of crude oil import to the EU comes from Euro-Mediterranean region.
3. Natural solar endowment is an enormous energy potential, which is basically untapped. According to the Mediterranean Solar Plan, born under the scope of the Barcelona Process (UfM), the Euro-Mediterranean region should produce 20 GW by the year 2020 and thus meet demographic and energy consumption challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region (Identification Mission for the Mediterranean Solar Plan 2010). Moreover, the Euro-Mediterranean region could provide in the future enough solar power to feed northern Europe as well. If this happens, the EU could also revise its relations with Russia.
 4. Agriculture may seem not important, but is in fact of vital importance for all of us. It provides market with basic agricultural products we need every day. Because of perfect weather conditions (mild winters, hot summers), the Euro-Mediterranean region is an excellent place to cultivate different agricultural products.
 5. In 2011 tourism in southern Mediterranean had an 18.5 % market share; North Africa 1.7 % and Middle East 5.6 %. Together, it is 25.8 %. This is quarter of total world market share in tourism (UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2012).

When elaborating geoeconomics of the Euro-Mediterranean region, we cannot overlook the EU energy strategy and Euro-Med energy security. In the beginning of the 1990s, the EU did not pay much attention to the energy security. Only in the late 1990s and particularly around the time of the EU enlargement, the European Commission started discussing this field seriously and systematically. The EU has several profound energy problems: it is completely dependent on imports (mainly on Russian gas and oil); it is the second largest world's consumer of primary fuels; its energy security is pretty feeble, because it does not have its own natural reserves. Darbouche (2011, p. 194) says that it is of strategic importance for the EU to import the fossil fuels from North Africa (namely Libya, Algeria and Egypt). Thus these countries play a crucial role in forming the EU energy security strategy. To secure these vital resources of growth, the EU recognized the higher regional role of these states. We all have to strive to find wise solutions from which both sides will benefit. In this field, the UfM proposed a new approach. The North African states do not dispose with such sophisticated high-technology. Therefore, the EU can offer new institutional arrangements, technical cooperation, concrete projects and know-how for their enterprises (Darbouche 2011, p. 195). Once again, Europe should avoid bilateral agreements and rather function within an institutionalized structure. Darbouche (2011, p. 203) shows the case of Sarkozy's single game of French-Algerian partnership on energy. It was presented as a Euro-Mediterranean project but in fact served to French national energy interests. The EU must become a strong and credible single player with clear foreign policy vision for this region.

Another issue can be addressed—the so-called Mediterranean highways. This field is one of the six UfM priorities. To ensure fast, safe and cost-effective transportation in the Mediterranean Sea, we need to start working on sea highways. In this context, the Mediterranean Sea offers an opportunity to carry this project out. It still has some unexploited seaports and shores, which could serve as a springboard

to these sea highways. To mention just two of them: Gela Bay in Italy, whose geographic position is in the heart of the Mediterranean; and Koper Bay in Slovenia, which is considered the most in-land port for the Central Europe.

Mediterranean Sea offers another strategic advantage. According to Solana and Saz-Carranza (2011) “/t/he container traffic between the Far East and Europe totals 18 million TEUs (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units) per year, compared to 20 million TEUs of annual Trans-Pacific traffic and just 4.4 million TEUs of Trans-Atlantic flows between Europe and America.” This means that “most ships from the Far East enter the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal and sail straight past Genoa, Marseille, Barcelona, and Valencia, adding three days to the trip to reach Rotterdam or Hamburg.” (ibid.) Along with the Mediterranean seaways, we can also mention the north Adriatic system, which is still in breaking. It connects Slovenian port of Koper and Italian ports of Trieste, Venice and Ravenna. These ports are per se too small to be competitive with the enormous Mediterranean ports mentioned above, but together, they can become a serious strategic partner.

Taking these facts into consideration, we can immediately bring out the following conclusions. First, the EU and MENA states must work hard to protect the sea routes and enable safe sailing. Unfortunately, the EU does not recognize this as crucial for its development. Instead, mostly US (because it is in their economic interest) military protects ships and cargo to safely enter the Strait of Aden and further the Suez Canal. If the Euro-Mediterranean states achieve and agree on this topic, they could take control over the transport system through the Suez Canal. Second, unloading the cargo at Mediterranean seaports means a 3-day time saving in comparison with Atlantic seaports. It should be in the EU particular interest to invest more in the Euro-Mediterranean region to modernize the infrastructure, invest more in peace and stability in the region, and to promote cooperation between all countries involved.

The last thing that needs to be addressed is how the financial crisis influences the Euro-Mediterranean relations. The fact is that southern European states (namely Greece, Spain, Portugal and partly Italy) were severely hit by the financial crisis. Moreover, economic prospects for the future forecast a gloomy growth. What does this situation mean for the EU-MENA relations? Escribano (2010, p. 454) states that the EU countries will be more EU-centered with focus on rescuing the southern EU-states. But on the other hand, there come some incentives signs from the 2010 World Economic Outlook where it is stated that the MENA region is going to grow in spite of global economic slowdown. It has to be pointed out that the financial crisis in the Euro-Mediterranean region could be solved in a completely different way. While Germany and its allies focus mainly on the whole EU and particularly seek solutions for Greek debt crisis, the southern European states could find different and smoother solutions. Escribano (2010, p. 457) points out some very prosperous Euro-Mediterranean plans and initiatives, which could alleviate the crisis: Small and Medium Enterprise initiative, Mediterranean Solar Plan and agricultural trade liberalization. All these concepts comply with the goals in the Neighborhood Action Plan and the UfM.

Arab Spring as Opportunity

The EU made an incredible achievement—it consolidated the democracy in the Central and Eastern European states. This is a huge success which has never been achieved by the USA in the Latin America. The end of the cold war meant a great geopolitical opportunity for the EU to transform the Central and Eastern European states. Not to forget to mention that this was also in the US interest to restrain Russian geopolitical appetites. The mission was achieved in 2004, when these countries entered the EU. After that period, the EU seems lost or at least weak, because it cannot influence anymore to the East (since it already encroaches the Russian geostrategic sphere). Therefore, the EU should turn to its south. As Edwards (in Hill and Smith 2005, p. 45) suggests, the EU could turn its compass towards the Euro-Mediterranean region since there are much more challenges to solve and nevertheless opportunities.

In 2010 we witnessed the beginning of the “Arab spring”. The ancient autocratic governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were overthrown. The Arab spring opened some other tensions, from which one of them grew to an open conflict and civil war in Syria. The citizens of these countries demanded democratic changes. But is a democratic change possible at all? If yes, how will it look like? According to what we saw in the media, it is hard to say that democracy will rise from it. People on the streets demanded contradictory solutions to militarized dictatorship: democracy with swords in their hands; democracy with one ruling party; democracy with civil war. As Fischer (2011) said, democracy must come from within each society and must not be supported only by bayonets. At the same time he claims that external factor is missing in this Arab spring. The USA cannot financially afford anymore to play a regional “policeman”, while the EU cannot play the game.

These revolutions mean a complete turnover on the chessboard. As Solana and Saz-Carranza (2011) said, “the changes in the world’s balance of power from the West to the East, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, is making both the United States and Europe apprehensive. Their loss of geopolitical and economic power is evident. Although the future geopolitical behavior of the rising new powers—Brazil, China, and India—remains uncertain, this shift may nonetheless provide an opportunity for the Mediterranean.” The Euro-Mediterranean region has now become an empty chessboard, where players have to be determined once again. As stated in the IEMed (2012, p. 21), Turkey recognized this new picture the most and became the most engaged and supportive of the events on the southern shore. It is not surprising if we take into consideration Turkey’ facts: it is the second largest NATO military equipped member state; it has been trying to join the EU; Turkey treats itself as a natural link between the Arab and European world. Another explanation springs from what Gaiser (2010, pp. 211–212) claims. Turkey is very disappointed with the behavior of the EU, therefore it should turn its foreign policy globally and not only towards the EU. It should start taking part in the world balance of power. According to this explanation, Turkey maybe sees its first foreign policy confirmation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It clearly refused in 2008 to be *primus inter pares* in the Sarkozy’s concept of the “Euro-Mediterranean Union”, which was *de facto* a supplement to the EU.

The Euro-Mediterranean region is going through a harsh time—Arab spring on the one hand, financial catastrophe of Greece, weak economic position of Spain and Near East political instability (Lebanon’s political showdown, Syria’s war). But as Fischer (2011) claims, the Euro-Mediterranean region does not face financial–economic–political problems, but a strategic one. Therefore we have to find the solution to this problem first. He sees the solution in an enhanced strategic partnership, where the EU would offer the necessary help and assistance. This can be achieved only with full cooperation of all EU member states and not *per partes*. On the EU level, there have been many agreements achieved in the Euro-Mediterranean region such as the UfM and European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Now it is a perfect time to start implementing them. The EU should and could offer the MENA countries an economic assistance and political support. This would be a run on long term with immediate impacts. The EU would become the leading partner in the region, while the partner countries would benefit particularly economically. For the North African countries it is of vital importance to reassure European markets again. For the EU it is of vital importance to reassure a stable and secure environment for trading and prosperity.

Global Chessboard

We can further elaborate another fact—partial withdrawal of the US active policy from the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is not a secret anymore that the USA has turned its compass towards the Asia-Pacific region. The US president Barack Obama stated that it was time to shift their foreign policy to a more critical world region—especially the Asia-Pacific region. US priorities in foreign and defense strategy in 2012 clearly confirm this statement. This paper states that “.../ the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region. Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of the region. We will emphasize our existing alliances, which provide a vital foundation for Asia-Pacific security” (Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for twenty-first century defense).³ At the same time, this US strategy gives less attention to the MENA states—there they should be present and enhance cooperation with its already existing partners (*ibid.*). Ajami (2012) confirms this thesis that Obama left behind the greater Middle East. Before the democratization wave swept the Arab region, the USA perceived the region as a balanced power. The USA somehow preferred *status quo*. This is why the democratic explosion in the MENA countries surprised them just in time, when they were focused on their strategic areas. The USA were thus not prepared for these sudden events and therefore played more of a firefighter than commander.

³ Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for twenty-first century defense. Department of Defense: United States of America. January 2012. Available at: http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf (September 15, 2012).

The USA is focusing more on vital geostrategic area, namely the Asia-Pacific region: with 50 % of total world trade and 60 % of total world GDP (Hu 2009, 12); South Chinese Sea, where 80 % of all crude oil for China goes through there (Kaplan 2007, 4) and partially the Middle East (main sea routes for crude oil to provide the USA). Taking into consideration new world geopolitics, it is expected that the USA will give less emphasis to the Euro-Mediterranean region.

An argument in favor of this statement is the fact that the US military troops were not involved in the military intervention in Libya. Instead, the French, British and Italian armies did it. Thus the USA has actively withdrawn from the Euro-Mediterranean region. This can be clearly marked as a US geostrategic blunder. Why? The most important consequence is that the region has lost the presence of a stable global actor. According to the theory of realism, such loss can cause a geopolitical vacuum. This is what happened to the Euro-Mediterranean region and the EU cannot fulfill it. Europe still does not play the game as one player. Therefore we cannot expect the EU to take the role of the USA. As Tlili (2011) says, if we look at Europe from a distance it seems that the continent is receding from the world stage.

The question that stems from a broader geopolitical picture is who will assure the stability and particularly the security in the region if we are facing such tensions and open conflicts? The Cyprus question is covered by the United Nations resolution and the USA watches over the Arab–Israeli conflict. All other tensions, including the Arab spring, are at the time being left on their own. First serious approaches were made during the Barcelona Process (with Barcelona Declaration), where the EU policy-makers aimed to address not only political questions but also security issues including the prevention of the proliferation of the WMDs and resolution of military conflicts (IEMed 2012, p. 149).

We need to be realistic and say that the EU cannot—because it has no common military or other hard means of power, it still acts divided and member states still defend their own national interests. The USA seems not willing anymore to help Europe sustaining its foreign policy. It is time for mother Europe to set up once again on its own! As it is stated in the IEMed (2012, p. 101), the EU opted to “play safe”, failing to put a plight behind democracy and navigate as developments unfold. To confirm the EU’s reluctance to actively interfere in the regional security picture, we can have a look at the conflict assessment to be solved. Probability that Cyprus and the Arab–Israeli conflict will be solved is very low (IEMed 2012, p. 152). But what the EU can do is to push ahead the multilateral framework. In the present time, many EU countries have bilateral agreements with the MENA states, which slow down the security and stability process. Instead of defending partial interests and thus further be ineffective in implementing the EU CFSP, the EU should start working on multilateral agreements. We know from history when peace and stability could not be reached and guaranteed, multilateral/international organizations were set up. The EU could do the same—it is not capable to ensure peace and stability on its own in the region, therefore it can enhance multilateralism. Of course, there has been much done in this field (UfM, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, etc.), but still has not become fully operational and implemented. If the EU cannot be a hard power, it can for sure be a soft power. Like such, it can offer much more to the MENA states as if it were a hard military power.

European Approach Towards the Mediterranean

For the EU, the Mediterranean Sea represents its integral part. It is necessary for the EU to have a certain position towards this region. Following the Barcelona Process,⁴ it emphasizes three core areas of partnership: political and security dialogue; economical and financial partnership; social, cultural and human partnership. According to another EU instrument, ENP aims to strengthen the prosperity, stability and security of all.⁵ On the EU level, we thus have two very well-formed and developed strategies. But when it comes to their implementation, we face twofold problems. The first one is disharmony in the implementation of foreign policy goals of each EU member state; the second is the Mediterranean perception and relevance for each EU member state.

Despite the European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), each EU member state still has its own interests and thus varies a lot in achieving their foreign policy goals. In the IEMed analysis (2012, p. 98), one of the respondents said that the CFSP is unfortunately not visible. Let's take an example of a common EU army. We do not have it, even though the army is a pillar of security and defense of sovereignty. An example which confirms this thesis is the armed attack on Libya in 2011. Germany strongly opposed to military intervention, while France, Great Britain and Italy did it. Great Britain and Italy were forced to intervene in Libya's war (also on behalf of the USA) in order to check and balance the French interests. We should also bear in mind that Libya was part of the Italian geopolitical sphere of influence. It is not only on the EU, but mainly on the Maghreb and Mashreq countries to call for unanimous and more pro-active role of the EU in the Euro-Mediterranean region (IEMed 2012, p. 27). As it turns out, when the presence of the main transatlantic partner is missed, the old European powers are still trapped into their own historic loop.

This should alert European politicians that they are doing something wrong or that they are perhaps missing a historic opportunity. We should not forget that according to the IEMed (2012, p. 77), if the EU does not take a greater role, it will face difficulties in trying to compensate its influence in comparison to Turkey, USA, the Arab League and Saudi Arabia. The EU should not waste its time and particularly reputation that it enjoys among the MENA states.

Another important aspect when looking at the Euro-Mediterranean region is the perception and relevance for each EU member state or group of EU member states. As Lebanese and Moroccan respondent claims (IEMed 2012, p. 77), the EU is perceived as the most respected political structure in the region with far more strategic potential than the USA. Unfortunately, but at the same time naturally, the eastern EU member states are by nature more attached to the Eastern window and partnership with Ukraine and Russia, while the southern EU member states are by

⁴ The Barcelona Process. Available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm (September 15, 2012).

⁵ European Neighborhood Policy. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm (September 15, 2012).

de fault more inclined to the Mediterranean partnership with the MENA states. Through the theory of a region, this is normal because of a geographic contiguity.

Other challenges and opportunities stem from the Euro-Mediterranean region not only for the EU but MENA states as well. Such is the creation of an area of peace and stability. Historically, the European states were not able to meet these goals and the EU was not capable to achieve it either. Regional conflicts, tensions and other challenges still persist: the Arab–Israeli conflict, potential terrorist threats, weapons of mass destructions, question of Cyprus, raising migration flux to the EU to name a few. If these challenges are not met by the EU, the scenario of the Italian former Foreign Minister Franco Frattini could come true. He said that “acr of crisis” with all the above encountered potential problems could get more severe (IEMed 2012, p. 98). When talking about the European challenges, recent events come to our mind—consequences of the Arab spring—immigration to Europe (especially France and Italy). A response of the EU was completely wrong. What did the EU Mediterranean states do? They closed the border for their own national interest (IEMed 2012, p. 99). With such behavior, they did not act in the way that would assure peace and stability.

For the EU and (Pan)Europe as well, it is a propitious moment to offer something more to the south Euro-Mediterranean countries. We can make some analogy with what Romano Prodi already in 2002 called for with regard the European states. He said that “we have to be prepared to offer more than partnership and less than membership /.../” (Smith, Karen E. in Hill and Smith 2005, p. 287). The Arab spring brought uncertainty in the region. The EU should not lead a flabby politics but make some strong steps and show these countries that they can count on the EU. By doing so, they could eventually be in a position to replace the role of the USA in the region.

Conclusion

It is tempting to say that the Euro-Mediterranean region is a geopolitical vacuum which is waiting to be filled. Europeans, Arabs and Jews need to come to a conclusion that we share common economic, geopolitical and demographic space. We all share the idea that democracy, peace, stability and prosperity is vital for us to grow together. We can legitimately reclaim our past, the time when the Euro-Mediterranean region had a global reputation. To be able to reach this goal, we have to undo some steps in our chess match and forget that they have once already been made.

Firstly, we need to confess that the Euro-Mediterranean region is a region of cultural and religious diversity and that some steps are needed to surpass obstacles. Israel and the Arab states will have to reconcile themselves and tolerate each other. We cannot change the geopolitical cards anymore. Permanent conflicts and tensions are not a solution for the region. Common institutions, forums and organizations can help a lot in achieving this goal.

We can take the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), also acting as an international organization, as an example. It was established in 2008 (European year

of intercultural dialogue) in order to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, to start building our confidence, surpassing cultural and religious barriers and learning from each other. It was decided for the Euro-Mediterranean University to be seated in Slovenia as it is a neutral country in this Euro-Mediterranean region, but has historically been attached to the Mediterranean Sea. The former Slovenian Minister for Foreign Affairs Dimitrij Rupel also said that Slovenia could not survive without the Mediterranean extension, since it has deep historic, political and cultural heritage from the time of non-alignment (MMC RTV SLO 2012). Moreover, Slovenia, after having achieved all foreign policy goals (joining the EU and NATO), could draw its potential vision of foreign policy in the Euro-Mediterranean region and thus finally replace an old foreign policy strategy which dates back to 1999. This is why we consider the decision of setting its seat in Slovenia as a right approach towards the implementation of the mission of EMUNI.

Second, the EU must at once start to behave as one entity, as one player. We must not lose the credibility and reputation we have in the region. We urgently have to implement our CFSP in order to be considered as an important actor.

Third, the USA as the greatest Euro-Atlantic power cannot just cede from this European region. The history teaches us that lack of regional leaders (powers) bears new conflicts and tensions. Therefore the USA has to rethink its actions if it does not want to trigger another crisis area. The Euro-Mediterranean region is empty for the time being, which is a perfect time and place for new extremist groups to gain power. It should be in the interest of the USA to be present in the region in order to keep their status as a global power—otherwise we can start considering it a regional player, which finally leads to global disorder, power imbalances and even harsh international anarchy.

Forth, the Arab world should avoid Islamist extremists to come to power. It is in the peoples' interest to cooperate with the EU, since it is still the most developed region in the world. They can benefit greatly, particularly people with the economy in the forefront.

The Euro-Mediterranean region was a world geopolitical centre for many centuries because politics and people wanted it, because it was in their interest. Why should we not have the same desire today, when this is not only feasible, but also needed? There is even the place to develop a completely new concept of citizenship, parallel to the European citizenship, what de Petrini (2010, p. 163) calls a “Euro-Mediterranean” citizenship. It is on the new, younger generations, to start working on it and to return to the Euro-Mediterranean region its old reputation and glory.

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