

The Priorities of Spain's EU Presidency in the Mediterranean: Ideal and Reality (ARI)

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Theme: Spain's EU Presidency poses major challenges for the country's interests and strategic clout in the Mediterranean, in the new regional geopolitical context that has emerged in the wake of the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).¹

Summary: Above and beyond the developments in the disputes that are ongoing in the region, in which Spain has very limited scope for influence, Spain 'is eagerly awaited' and is expected to bring the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) back on track after two years of strong leadership –often to the extent of unilateralism– from France, and unprecedented political deadlock since the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was first launched in 1995. Spain's prestige and strategic position in the region are at stake: if Spain confines its role to simply 'managing' the UfM during its term at the helm of the EU, without giving it a firm political boost based on specific proposals and initiatives, it will have let what is almost certainly a unique opportunity slip by. Its contribution could be more efficient in relation to institutional aspects or in defining and monitoring certain priority sector-specific strategies than in purely political-diplomatic matters.

Analysis: 'It will be hard for you to accept this, but although Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos is one of the world's leading specialists on the subject, we recommend that you forget about the Middle East, the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean'. Such was the advice to Spain's Prime Minister from two leading Spanish specialists in international relations in regard to this region in June 2009.² This was all they had to say on the subject, and they immediately went on to discuss the Middle-East conflict and bilateral policy towards Morocco and Algeria. This simplistic and expedient approach reflects the lack of interest which many of Spain's own experts in international relations display in regard to Euro-Mediterranean affairs and, specifically, their multilateral aspects, and it is in stark contrast with the specialised expertise in the region which some of the country's most prominent diplomats possess. Another relatively widespread position among analysts and stakeholders alike is that the political difficulties at the UfM hammered the final nail into the Euro-Mediterranean Process's coffin.³

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¹ This ARI is based on the author's presentations at two seminars held in June 2009 by *Fundació CIDOB* in Barcelona and the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid, in both cases jointly with the British Council. I am grateful to all the speakers and participants at both events for their contribution to the discussion.

² José María de Areilza & José Ignacio Torreblanca (2009), 'Diagnóstico diferencial, política exterior', *Foreign Policy (Edición española)*, nr 33, p. 28-39.

³ See Kristina Kausch & Richard Youngs (2009), 'The End of the Euro-Mediterranean Vision', *International Affairs*, vol. 85.5, p. 963-76.

At any event, this recommendation and diagnosis contrasts with the historical commitment of Spanish diplomacy to the Euro-Mediterranean process since its launch in 1995,⁴ and its action as a leader of the achievements and relevancy of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership throughout the entire process of the UfM's birth (2008). It also calls into question the Mediterranean's status as one of the priority axes of Spain's term as EU President.⁵ Due precisely to this leadership and commitment, the prestige of Moratinos himself in the Mediterranean, the projection throughout the Mediterranean of Spanish public diplomacy institutions such as the IEMed (*Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània*), *Fundación Tres Culturas*, *Casa Árabe* and the newly-created *Casa Mediterráneo*, as well as the concern generated in many countries and among many stakeholders by France's unilateralism within the framework of the UfM for the past two years, Spain is 'eagerly awaited' in the region: it is eagerly awaited to bring the process of creating the UfM back on track, to re-orient it and to correct the excessively inter-governmental bias it has taken,⁶ to get EU institutions and, in particular, the European Commission more involved in the process once more, but also to boost it further. To fall short of these expectations could gravely undermine the prestige, strategic position and, ultimately, the interests of Spain in the region.

However, so far it is not clear what Spain's Mediterranean strategy will be ahead of its half-yearly stint in the EU Presidency, or what its specific priorities will be. For example, what is Spain's position regarding the wide range of French initiatives, often presented under the UfM 'label', such as the Foundation of Women for the Mediterranean, the InfraMED investment fund, the seven priority projects 'selected' in the water sector at the behest of local and regional authorities within the framework of a conference organised by the French Co-presidency of the UfM and UCLG, the 'Cultural Council of the Union for the Mediterranean' and the newly-created 'Marseille Centre for Mediterranean Integration'? What are Spain's counterbalancing initiatives?⁷

Neither is it clear whether the necessary human and institutional resources are being marshalled to tackle these challenges and counter Spain's relative loss of leadership in the Mediterranean as a result of France's drive since 2008, which has come to bear on other previous objective factors such as EU enlargement.⁸ In other words, is Spain mobilising the required resources to manage the political drive, summon the capacity to draft proposals and launch initiatives capable of affording the process a real boost and

⁴ See Richard Gillespie (1997), 'Spanish *Protagonismo* and the Euro-Med Partnership Initiative', in *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 2.1, p. 33-48.

⁵ 'Our Presidency will be eminently Euro-Mediterranean', Statement by the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in the Joint Congressional Commission for the European Union, 'Spain's position with respect to the "Barcelona Process" and the outline of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in 2010', *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Generales*, nr 64, 28/V/2009, p. 2-22.

⁶ 'Decommunitarisation of Mediterranean Policy', to borrow the term coined by Esther Barbé (2009), 'La Unión por el Mediterráneo: de la europeización de la política exterior a la descomunitarización de la política mediterránea', *Revista de Derecho Comunitario Europeo*, vol. 13, nr 32, p. 9-46.

⁷ In the last few years, Madrid's Mediterranean foreign policy has slipped into a habit of reaction, rather than initiative, according to Paula Cusi (2009), 'La politique méditerranéenne de l'Espagne face à l'Union pour la Méditerranée', Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS), Paris, July, available in French at <http://www.affaires-strategiques.info/spip.php?article161>.

⁸ See Richard Gillespie (2009), 'España y el Proceso euromediterráneo', in Bernabé López García & Miguel Hernando de Larramendi (Eds.), *Las relaciones de España con el Mediterráneo y el mundo árabomusulmán. Una perspectiva histórica*, IEMed, Barcelona, pending publication. See also Jesús Núñez Villaverde (2009), 'España en el Mediterráneo: una agenda recuperada ¿a tiempo?', ARI nr 153/2009, Elcano Royal Institute, 4/XI/2009, available in Spanish at www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/mediterraneo+y+mundo+arabe/ari153-2009.

ensuring a scenario that is 'best and still possible, not just for Spain but for the entire EU', in which the UfM becomes a successful facet of an enhanced Barcelona Process.⁹

Spain could take advantage of its Presidency of the EU, for example, to at least trigger a debate, if not full-scale negotiations, regarding the increase in funds to Mediterranean Partner Countries ahead of the formal negotiations for the EU Financial Perspectives 2014-20, which must commence in 2011 at the latest. By setting an ambitious target, such as doubling *per capita* financial aid to the region, Spain could lay the groundwork for a policy of real socio-economic convergence which current economic relations are far from promoting, and show its leadership and commitment to helping develop its southern neighbours. However, the volume of financial resources aside, it seems obvious that the region also requires other kinds of financing instruments: in this regard, Spain could start preliminary studies on the transferability of European regional policy to the more integrated Mediterranean Partner Countries, as promised in the Joint Document by the EU and Morocco on the Advanced Status.

Three Action Axes

At any event, Spain will face three main challenges within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Process during the six months of its tenure of the EU Presidency: (1) launch of the UfM Secretariat and UfM projects; (2) organise the II Union for the Mediterranean Summit; and (3) the scheduled sectoral ministerial meetings.

(1) The Launch of the UfM Secretariat and the UfM Projects

Spain undeniably scored a diplomatic coup by securing Barcelona as the headquarters for the UfM Secretariat in the last meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers held in November 2008 in Marseilles. Now, in the wake of delays in its launch, in the approval of its statutes and in the designation of its Secretary General, still unresolved more than one year later, the challenge is to bring the Secretariat into operation as soon as possible. Spain is anxious to facilitate this process and to do all it can to strengthen the Secretariat's role (*vis-à-vis* other initiatives like the Marseille Centre for Mediterranean Integration and the Euro-Mediterranean 'economic capital' status sought by Milan, where the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative may be based, if it is finally created). However, it should be borne in mind that Spain will not be directly present in the political structures of the Secretariat (comprising a Secretary General and six Deputy Secretary Generals), and the only way to maintain some influence once it is launched is to use its geographical location to generate research, debate, proposals, technical expertise and initiatives to be taken on by the structures of the Secretariat. In this institutional context, Spain's capacity to devise specialist proposals becomes even more vital.

Furthermore, if the UfM is to maintain any credibility, some of the projects highlighted at the Paris Summit –civil protection, maritime and land highways, de-pollution of the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean solar energy plan, the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative and the Euro-Mediterranean University– must enter the operating phase during Spain's Presidency of the EU. Except for this last project, which has commenced its institutional phase, all the others are in the feasibility study and finance study stages. But care should be taken to ensure that this set of projects is not perceived as a merely economicist approach, far from citizens' immediate interests, and for this

⁹ Eduard Soler (2008), *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. Genesis, Evolution and Implications for the Spanish Mediterranean Policy*, OPEX (Spanish Foreign Policy Observatory – *Observatorio de Política Exterior Española*), Working Paper 28/2008, Fundación Alternativas & Fundació CIDOB, p. 38-44.

purpose regional projects must be supplemented with specific sector-by-sector initiatives in the socio-economic and cultural sphere.

(2) The II Union for the Mediterranean Summit

From a political standpoint, there is no doubt that one of the priorities of Spanish diplomacy during Spain's Presidency will be to ensure the success of the II UfM Summit, scheduled for June 2010 in Barcelona, which must approve a Work Programme for 2010-12. And this success will probably be gauged largely, at least in media terms, by: (a) its drawing capacity (the number of Heads of State and Government attending); and (b) whether the summit transpires without political incidents, and in particular the degree of mutual tolerance between Arabs and Israelis and the unanimous endorsement of the final conclusions.

However, the experience at the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona in November 2005 and the UfM Summit in Paris in July 2008 should be a cause for reflection: the first was hosted and co-organised by the Spanish government together with the British Presidency of the EU. Although it focused on the most political and diplomatic aspects, it was considered a failure since it was attended by only a small number of Heads of State and Government of Mediterranean Partner Countries, and it was impossible to adopt by consensus the final conclusions (in fact, in the end, only 'Presidency Conclusions' were issued by the British, although the Five-Year Work Programme was unanimously approved). The 2008 UfM Summit, in contrast, was at the time considered a great success because of the attendance of 43 Heads of State and the apparent harmony with which it developed. However, this Summit, which was also eminently political, led to more than three months of political deadlock because of differences regarding the involvement of the Arab League, and left a number of unresolved political and institutional questions (operation of the Co-presidency, statute of the Secretariat, project financing) which continue to put spanners in the UfM's works. We had to wait until the Marseille Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in November 2008 for a detailed Work Plan for 2009 to be adopted that took up the sector-specific initiatives launched in the Five-Year Work Programme established in Barcelona in 2005 (based on the robust groundwork of the British Presidency in assessing the progress made in each of the priority areas of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership). Indeed, it has been this Five-Year Work Programme, approved at a summit which was almost unanimously considered a political failure, which has enabled progress to be made since 2005 in sectors such as water, employment and the social dimension, as well as in education, sustainable development and promotion of women.

Accordingly, the lesson which might be learned from this experience is that the best way to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean process and the UfM, to guarantee the success of the summit and, above all, lay the groundwork for boosting the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, is to combine the launch of the six projects selected by the UfM so far, plus some new initiatives that might be selected, with a series of sector strategies pivotal upon clear action plans in a small number of priority areas, such as employment, water, culture, tourism and energy. In each of these spheres, Spain should arrive at the summit with a series of specific proposals, if possible previously approved at sectoral ministerial meetings, to pave the way for approval of an ambitious 2010-12 Work Programme that is defensible from the standpoint that it actually improves citizens' living standards. The process conducted by the IEMed in 2009 consisting in a series of thematic seminars involving experts and stakeholders to formulate proposals in relation to four of the six major UfM projects is a first highly relevant exercise of its kind, but this should be

extended to other priority sectors in which, so far, Spain has not shown much capacity to devise concrete proposals.

(3) Sectoral Ministerial Meetings

The Work Programme for 2009 approved in November 2008 envisaged 16 sectoral ministerial conferences in 2009. Of these, due to the UfM's institutional deadlock during the first half of 2009, triggered by the Gaza War in December 2008 and January 2009, only six have actually been held (water, sustainable development projects, economy and finance and FEMIP, women and trade), as well as two additional ones on employment and health. Now that the institutional operation of the UfM has returned to relative normality (despite the difficulties leading to the suspension of the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers scheduled to take place in Istanbul in November 2009 and the Environment Ministerial Conference scheduled for December), one might understandably expect this Work Plan to be resumed.

Revealingly, the schedule of Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meetings during the semester of Spain's Presidency of the EU is not yet confirmed as of late January 2010. In any case, of the 10 ministerial meetings proposed in the framework of the Senior Official Meetings, only two would take place in Spain (on water and tourism). The other eight meetings proposed to be held in other partner countries, not yet confirmed, would deal with transport, higher education and research, energy, environment, food security, culture, immigration and justice affairs, and ECOFIN-FEMIP are scheduled to be held in other partner countries. It is surprising that Spain has relinquished the chance to hold summits on topics that are in its own stated strategic interest, such as 'human development' (to which Spain has long been strongly committed within the framework of the United Nations). Similarly, it is surprising that it was Italy and not Spain which pushed for a ministerial meeting on 'justice, security and freedom' (in relation, for example, to issues such as migration, in which Spain has its own migratory management model), and France instead of Spain which pushed for a Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Culture, considering that for the first half of 2010 the Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Strategy was due for approval and that Spain has campaigned tirelessly for cooperation in this sphere (in the framework of the 'Alliance of Civilisations', support to the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, etc.). In any case, the programme for the ministerial conference does not appear to live up to the standards of Spain's commitment to consolidating the Euro-Mediterranean process nor to the expectations raised by Spain in this connection, considering that, following the French, Swedish and Spanish Presidencies of the EU, there will be a series of Presidencies that, in principle, look set to be less favourable to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (Belgium in 2010, Hungary and Poland in 2011 and Denmark and Cyprus in 2012, the latter with very limited diplomatic clout and highly biased because of the conflict with Turkey).

In this regard, as well as the ministerial meetings it organises, it will also be very important to prepare subsequent ministerial meetings and to monitor those that were held in 2008 and 2009. The priority which the Spanish Presidency will grant the Lisbon Strategy and employment, for example, has scarcely been reflected in the Euro-Mediterranean sphere, where the involvement of the Spanish Labour Ministry in monitoring the Framework of Actions approved in the 1st Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Employment and Work held in November 2008 in Marrakech has been extremely limited (the first meeting of the Working Group set up to monitor this Framework of Action took place at the end of November 2009). Incorporating Mediterranean Partner Countries to the European response to the economic crisis would be the best proof of the commitment to

creating an area of shared security and prosperity. Furthermore, two of the three main general priorities of Spain's Presidency of the EU converge in this connection, namely, the creation of employment based on sustainable growth, the drive towards a social Europe and the development of Europe as a global actor (see the aforementioned speech by Minister Moratinos in the Spanish Congress).

At all events, in those fields where action plans, frameworks of action or regional strategies have been defined (transport, energy, culture, maritime strategy, employment, water and promotion of women), it is important to become involved in the specific implementation of these plans and the launch of monitoring and assessment mechanisms, ensuring a transition 'from action plans to action'.

In this regard, it should not be forgotten that 2010 will be the year of the 15th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, but in particular it will be the emblematic target year for the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. In order to maintain the EU's credibility in the economic sphere, it seems necessary to ensure some concrete progress in the application of the road map designed in 2005, for example in the liberalisation of the European agriculture market or in the talks underway in regard to trade liberalisation in the field of services (such as removing the deadlock, for example, in the liberalisation of Mode 4, temporary movement of persons for the provision of services, which would largely benefit countries with surplus labour force such as Arab Mediterranean Countries).

The organisation of the first EU-Morocco Summit, which will also take place under the Spanish Presidency, also requires firm leadership and no shortage of imagination when it comes to submitting proposals in order to give substance to Morocco's Advanced Status, to which Spain is firmly committed. It is worth ensuring that some of the material demands of our strategic partner in North Africa are met in line with the interdependencies that link the EU and Morocco, and preventing the Advanced Status from remaining a mere 'label', a political token devoid of real content, or diluted among the many 'special relationships' with other partners and neighbours of Europe (Israel, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, as well as the members of the Eastern Partnership).¹⁰

Lastly, Spain's Presidency can also be expected to yield some initiatives in south-south regional integration, for example in the Maghreb, despite the deadlock regarding the Western Sahara conflict (Spain has notched up what is so far the most successful sub-regional integration project in North Africa, namely the Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline which links Algeria, Morocco and Spain and transports 9 billion cubic metres of gas per year, making gas the only product which is transported legally and directly between Algeria and Morocco).

A 'UfM Mission' in the Office of the President?

But the three strategic axes set out above require a mobilisation of human and institutional resources that has so far not been forthcoming. It is not possible to take on a brand new context and new challenges with the same scant resources earmarked for Mediterranean policy so far by Spanish diplomacy. Whatever one's assessment of France's idea of creating the UfM and the way it has implemented and conducted it, one must admit that, as well as returning the Mediterranean issue to the European political agenda, it has managed to activate the various sectoral Ministries in France, as shown by

¹⁰ See Iván Martín (2009), 'EU-Morocco Relations: How Advanced is the "Advanced Status"?', *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 14.2, p. 239-45.

the wealth of initiatives in a number of different areas (women, environment, culture, urban development and scientific cooperation). And if one thing has emerged clearly in the last two years it is that the Euro-Mediterranean process has acquired a scale and degree of diversification which is beyond the reach even of regional experts and diplomatic services of the Foreign Ministries which have so far dealt with it almost exclusively. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has ceased to be merely a political-diplomatic exercise focused on confidence-building, and is now a multi-sector integration initiative which requires the intervention of experts from the various sectors involved.¹¹

The challenges which the UfM poses for Spain's Presidency of the EU and beyond are considerable, especially if Spain intends to take on the European Co-presidency of the UfM from July 2010 (although there is no official decision in this regard, the French UfM mission takes for granted that Spain will replace it in the European Co-presidency of the UfM, and has repeatedly said so in public, while Spain has confined itself to expressing its interest and the need to consult other European partners). It is more than debatable whether the current institutional configuration, led by an ambassador on a special mission with a small support team (another diplomat and three advisors hired temporarily for the purpose), is materially equipped to handle these challenges. In fact, one of the recurrent complaints expressed in many ways by members of the French UfM mission refers to the lack of clear sectoral interlocutors, and Euro-Mediterranean meetings of various kinds have often been held where Spanish diplomacy was not present (contrasting starkly with France's omnipresence in the last two years). Furthermore, the inter-ministerial coordination required by the UfM can hardly be performed from a Ministry, even one as important as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (where coordination has so far been confined to operating issues, but not genuine political matters).

Accordingly, there should be a reflection on whether it is advisable to adapt the French model, which since 2008 has been operating with a 'UfM mission' linked directly to the Presidency of the Republic, led by a presidential advisor with significant political influence and comprising between 10 and 20 (currently 12) civil servants and experts from various fields, each in charge of an area. In Spain, from a functional standpoint, it would seem reasonable to consider the creation of a 'UfM unit' of at least six or seven diplomats and sector experts dependent upon the Office of the President, capable of ensuring:

- (1) Inter-ministerial coordination in all sectoral initiatives of the UfM, and sectoral interlocution with other countries in the Euro-Mediterranean framework.
- (2) An institutional presence appropriate to Spain's interests at all the international Euro-Mediterranean forums; there is considerable scope for improvement when it comes to real interlocution with civilian society, local groups, the business world and think tanks regarding their priorities and proposals, and it is precisely here that much of the credibility of Spain's EU Presidency is at stake.
- (3) An adequate presence and coordination with the Spanish stakeholders in this process (civilian society and think tanks, but also regional governments and public institutions such as IEMed, Fundación Tres Culturas, Casa Árabe and Casa Mediterráneo).
- (4) An adequate preparation of the Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meetings, which are increasingly important in the Euro-Mediterranean institutional architecture (there is currently approximately one such meeting every month).

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of the latest developments in this respect, see Erwan Lannon & Iván Martín (2009), *Report on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Status and Progress 2009*, IEMed, http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/10_02_25_Report_BCN_Progress_Lannon_Martin.pdf.

- (5) Adequate capacity to submit proposals and initiatives which it does not currently possess; in this connection, the high number of Euro-Mediterranean seminars and conferences organised in Spain contrasts with the lacklustre specific research conducted on Euro-Mediterranean issues (analysis of impact, forward-looking exercises, comparative research).
- (6) Coordination between the sectoral aspects of the UfM and the strictly political and diplomatic aspects (which, naturally, should continue to be the responsibility of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, including representation before the UfM Senior Officers Committee).
- (7) Development of a 'repository' of officers specialising in Euro-Mediterranean matters at various Ministries.
- (8) Drafting a specific work plan for the Spanish Presidency of the EU and Spain's possible future Co-presidency of the UfM to deal with all these challenges, as required by the increasing complexity of the process. This would also move sectoral Ministries to devise a clear definition of responsibilities which is so often lacking, and to identify contact points in charge of Euro-Mediterranean matters in each of them.

Conclusion: Spain's Presidency of the EU is an opportunity, but also a responsibility, for the country to bring the UfM back on track and boost its future development within the broader framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The expectations of other countries and stakeholders in this connection are huge. To meet these expectations, Spain must:

- Facilitate the launch and the effective assumption of functions by the UfM Secretariat based in Barcelona, as well as the launch of the operating phase of UfM projects.
- Develop the capacity to make proposals and give a political boost in some of the pivotal sectors of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (water, employment, culture, free trade and financial resources), ensuring that in those fields where regional action plans have already been approved, we go 'from action plans to action', with appropriate monitoring and assessment mechanisms.
- Ensure that the appropriate human and institutional resources are marshalled. This will likely imply a new approach to the institutional structure for the management of Euro-Mediterranean matters, especially in order to guarantee more streamlined use of resources and inter-ministerial coordination. One possible solution could be to create a unit dependent upon the Office of the President of Spain.

Spain's Presidency of the EU, to be followed by those of Belgium, Hungary, Poland and Denmark in 2011 and 2012, which will overlap with the application of the Lisbon Treaty (with a British EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and a Belgian President of the European Council), is likely to be the last chance to get the Euro-Mediterranean process back on track and to consolidate Spain's strategic weighting in European policy vis-à-vis the region. The scale of the challenge and the strategic interests at stake require a proactive strategy and not a merely reactive strategy that is focused on dampening the expectations raised by Spain's tenure of the EU Presidency.

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