

IL FUTURO DEL MEDITERRANEO¹

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If Europe wants to contribute to peace building in the Middle East it has to count on certain instruments. And we all know that the Barcelona Process was perceived from the very beginning as the best instrument, as it was thought in 1995, to support the peace process in the Middle East and the best way to address the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I think the European Ambassador and Professor Rizzi tried to give two different assessments of the Barcelona Process. I would make my own judgments as a practitioner, because I am 50 years old, I spend half of them in Jordan and the Arab world, the other half in Europe. I started my career in Germany. Then I moved to France, Italy, Austria and Belgium. So I consider myself half Arab, half European, if you don't mind of course.

So, the Barcelona Process was created as an instrument to support the peace process. How did it end so far, I think, instead of being an instrument to support peace, it's become the victim of the blockage of the peace process itself. Now, it has such a bad end. Because when it was conceived the Europeans were thinking that they could share with us, in the Middle East, Arabs and Israelis, their own experience: the European experience of integration that has put an end to centuries of war among European nations. And even if the European integration process was based on values, on democratic values, yet, the founding fathers of Europe have used economy and the implications of economic interests - to start with France and Germany, and then the rest of Europe - as an instrument to spread the democratic culture and the sharing of democratic values among all European nations. So they thought: «If Europe will contribute to the economic development of the Middle East, Arabs and Israelis will have common economic interests that will convince them that

¹ Testo trascritto dall'originale, non rivisto dall'autore.

they have a better stake to make peace than to continue making war». But, with all due respect to the European goodwill, they tried exactly to export their own experience without any adaptation to the mentality and to the culture of the Middle East, the culture of Arabs and the culture of Israelis.

And in my view, I do want to announce the death of the Barcelona Process because I'm part of that process. If it did not deliver I bear part of the responsibility. But what I can tell objectively, is that it did not deliver and it did not meet its objectives. Now, because we reached a certain deadlock in the Barcelona Process, – as I said, in instead of being an instrument to support peace it became the victim in the deadlock of the peace process – we tried to invent another instrument, again, to create a kind of economic interest among Arabs and Israelis. But to facilitate that, it has been put in a wider perspective, in a Mediterranean perspective. And colleagues have spoken earlier about the Union for the Mediterranean. Again, Europe continue to think in the way it has developed its own integration process and they did not do any effort to draw lessons of the European experience, but to adapt it to the situation in the Middle East, and, how to address Arab and Israeli cultures. I think the Union for the Mediterranean, even if it is at the very beginning, but objectively we do not have too much optimism that it will deliver and it will deliver any soon at least.

The same thing applies to the Anna Lindh. And again, I was the representative of Jordan when I was at the Embassy in Brussels. So I am part of the group of Arab, European and Israeli, and Turkish, of course, Ambassadors who have developed the concept of the Anna Lindh Foundation. So, again, I bear part of the responsibility if it did not deliver and it did not meet its objectives.

But, yet, I delimit some processes, all the Union of the Mediterranean, all the Anna Lindh Foundation. These are only instruments. And it is up to us, Governments in Europe and in the South: if we want them to be successful, they could be good instruments; if we do not want them to be successful, they cannot impose themselves as mechanisms to deliver something concrete in our age. Now, if we have to give an objective assessment of more than fifteen years of Euro-Mediterranean partnership, we have to admit that all those instruments did not deliver. Whose responsibility? I think we should not put the blame on Europe. We should not put the blame on the Governments of the South. I think Governments of the North and of the South of the Mediterranean bear equal part of responsibility.

Now, the Arab spring. We have to admit very honestly that we are «all», and I say «all», European Governments, Arab Governments, American

Administration, Israeli Government with all their intelligence agencies, everybody was taken by surprise. Nobody was assuming that what happened in Tunisia or in Egypt could have taken place. So let's taking from there and I think this is another lesson for our diplomats, for our academic community and even for our intelligence agencies that they have to predict what happened in the Arab world over the last few months. Does it represent an opportunity for the future? Is it a good thing or a bad thing? I think it's premature to say whether is good or bad. But what I would not hesitate to say is that it constitutes an opportunity. It's an opportunity for Arab nations to grasp the chance and to transform their societies into democratic ones. But again, it's an opportunity for Europe to rethink, to revisit its way of thinking of the Middle East, of the South of Mediterranean. And this time, hopefully, European Governments will agree among themselves on a different approach to the Mediterranean.

Over the fifteen years of the Barcelona Process, European Governments were insisting that Europe is not a bank, Europe is not a financier, Europe is not a provider of financial and technical assistance. Europe is a community of democratic values. So, you, partners of the South, if you want to have a special relationship with Europe, you have to share our democratic values. But this was purely flagging a slogan. Europe did not follow up that slogan. It used to repeat it every year, but I think it was addressed to its own public opinion. It was not addressed seriously to the Governments in the South. And I think, if it was seriously addressed to the Government of the South I think after fifteen-sixteen years, the Governments and political regimes in the South had enough time to transform their societies, their political regimes into a relatively democratic ones. So, again, it is a lack of seriousness on the part of Europe and on the part of the Governments of the South.

But as I said, now let's put the past behind us, let's look for the future. What is happening in the Arab world, in the South of the Mediterranean, again, it is an opportunity for all Arab countries, including for Israel, and it's a new opportunity for Europe to revisit its own policies towards the Mediterranean. If Europe still believes that it is a community of democratic values, I think it got another chance. I don't want to impose that set of democratic values on the partners of the South, but at least to seize the opportunity of what is happening in those countries where their own people are asking for democracy and for adopting democratic values. They say: «Ok, since you people are asking for democracy, we are there as partners, to support your democratic transition».

Let me go back to the main purpose of this conference, which is dialogue. I

think, even if historically, we used to say as Orientals that we feel that Europe is much closer to us than the United States... Simply because we are much closer to each other geographically, we have a long shared history and that's why everybody was assuming that we understand each other better than any level of understanding between Arabs and Americans. If we have to give an objective judgement, I think even if we are closed to each other, and even if we have shared many centuries of common history, I think the gap and the discrepancy between our reciprocal and mutual understanding is to be revisited and discussed. Europe should continue saying that it is not a bank. And should continue saying that it is not a financier. But it should provide what it is. I think the best message and the best European contribution to the democratization process that the Arab world is witnessing is to ask people what they do really need at this conjunction. Not to offer them a menu and to ask them: «What do you want to start with? And what do you want to end with?» I think, it is up to our people to decide what are our needs and I think if Europe has anything to offer... And it has so many things to offer, but it depends on intra-European understanding on what kind of new policies, what kind of new mechanisms of cooperation they are willing to collectively offer to their partners in the South.

Where is Israel in all of that? I think Israel has a vested interest in seeing democracy spreading in its neighbourhood. It was Israel itself and its successful Government; they used to say that democracies understand each other better. If this is true, I think, Israel should feel somehow optimistic about what's happening in the Arab world. It should not worry whether the regime change that is taking place in some Arab countries could bring its limits to power. This is a main concern for all Arabs. Israel should not be much more concerned than the citizens of the concerned countries themselves. So, again, Israel should stay out of the game, of course, but should not hinder the democratisation process that the Arab world is witnessing right now.

Final remark. I understand that over the three days we have listened too many experts on the Mediterranean and on the Middle East. But, yet, I invite everybody not to generalize. Each Arab country has its own specificity. What happened in Tunisia is not similar to what has happened in Egypt. What's happening in Libya, in terms of tension and war, is not comparable to what's happening in Yemen. So, if anybody pretends to be an expert on the Middle East, he should avoid generalization and to look at each partner of the South on its own merits.