

CHAMPIONING THE MEDITERRANEAN

Ever since French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced his initiative for a Union for the Mediterranean (previously referred to as the Mediterranean Union) numerous assessments have been published on the merits and shortcomings of this policy framework, which is due to be officially launched next month in Paris.

The reality is that Union for the Mediterranean framework is providing an opportunity for all those interested in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean to adopt a collective approach and start addressing in a more immediate manner the multitude of security challenges facing all the states of the Mediterranean area.

Sectoral focus: euro-med development bank, management of illegal migration including the introduction of a comprehensive visa regime, promotion of a more competitive knowledge based educational system; boosting energy security relations;

UfM provide the long desired boost to the Barcelona Process as the new label of the endeavour is adopting: Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean – seek to deliver what the 2002 Valencia five –year work plan the more recent five year work plan adopted at the 10th anniversary summit in Barcelona in 2005 did not succeed in achieving – namely that of implementing more aggressively the policy action plans that have been agreed to in the political, economic and cultural sectors.

Union for the Med – position the Med in the limelight after being overshadowed by other regions of the world where regional cooperation and integration have taken leaps forward while the Med remains caught in a vicious cycle of regional fragmentation.

UfM can create the necessary strategic climate within which other Unions may be able to prosper – these include the Arab Maghreb Union, the 5 + 5, the Mediterranean Forum, the EMP, the ENP, and the UfM itself. Med countries need to unite if they are to be able to cope with security challenges plus succeed in becoming a more competitive region in international affairs.

Regardless of the ultimate form that the UfM takes, one factor is already crystal clear – there is a need for closer cooperation across the Mediterranean. Issues such as illegal immigration, protecting the Mediterranean sea from pollution, water and solar energy research and development, and the proposal for joint civil protection operations need a forum for them to be planned, adopted and monitored during implementation.

Malta is very well placed to play a leading role in the evolution of the UfM. A brief review of Malta's foreign policy credentials highlight that Malta has consistently been promoting a cooperative Euro-Mediterranean perspective: Malta's success in highlighting the indivisibility of security in Europe and security in the Mediterranean in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, Malta's proposal to create a Council of the Mediterranean in 1992 by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Prof Guido de Marco, very much a harbinger of the

current Sarkozy proposal, and more recently the setting up and dynamic functioning of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM).

Side shows to the UfM, like who will and who will not attend the Paris UfM summit, must not distract from the main focus, namely what agenda will the 44 participating states agree to start implementing, what will the UfM work programme consist of and what amount of political will the EU and the Mediterranean partner countries be prepared to invest in the UfM?

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