

Does the Mediterranean still exist?

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In the last six months the political and geostrategic equilibrium of the Mediterranean basin has been disrupted. Young hopeless graduates who manage to get by have unveiled the social and economic unrest, the widespread despair and uncertainty for the future. The protest burst even in the remotest villages, and swept away the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, etc. . Extreme gestures of young unemployed people echoed throughout the Mediterranean basin by the social network.

This scenario brings up some crucial questions: does the Mediterranean still exist as an area of shared peace and prosperity that Heads of State and Government had designated in 1995 on the occasion of Barcelona Summit? What has become of the political plan of the Union for the Mediterranean launched in July 2008 in Paris by 43 Heads of state and government and strongly supported by Sarkozy? And again what about the political strategy of the EU towards the South and East Mediterranean shores? Is the Mediterranean still on the political agenda of Foreign Affairs and Agricultural Ministers since the protest stems also from issues linked to food security? As a matter of fact, food security is an issue which is in the limelight and interweaves with the political problems. In 2010, five countries (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) totaled 2% of the world population; however, they account for 6% of cereal consumption in the world and 18% of world imports. These percentages are increasing across the region. Demo-

graphic evolutions (over 80 million people more in the south shore in the last 10 years), the growing unemployment, mainly of young graduates and in the rural areas, the impact of the climate change, water scarcity and the hypervolatility of raw materials prices in agriculture, the diffusion of financial activities in agriculture, a sector which is increasingly explored by financial speculators, the land grabbing by foreign investors (China, Arab Emirates, etc.) are phenomena which compound access to food and, consequently, cast light on the strategic dimension of agricultural problems.

Thus, we are confronted with food and political crisis. It is high time to really create an area of shared peace and prosperity beyond national solutions so as to solve an increasingly global and multidimensional crisis. The world population increases along with the increase in food and energy demand. Photovoltaic panels, wind blades, lands for the production of bioenergy, processes of urbanization on farmland, climate change...How can we produce more with fewer resources and does the world want to feed the world? And if so, how can that be possible?

Nowadays in the world, one individual out of seven has nothing to feed on. Three fourth of hungry people are very poor individuals who are isolated from the urban areas, from trade channels; they are considered as a sort of social problem with respect to the rest of the world which devours all sort of resources. Trade liberalization and its impact are phenomena which are studied by the wealthy classes of the population while the have-nots suffer from its effects.

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The social frustration of these countries will inevitably bring forth the cyclical problem of illegal landings of desperate people from the poorest to richer areas of the Mediterranean shores. It's up to us to decide whether solutions to development problems and prospects may be shared.

In 2003, in Venezia, 37 Agricultural Ministers met to meditate on common problems and on possible solutions. Unfortunately, this meeting did not result in any tangible action for development. The financial crisis of the last years has cut the financial resources for International cooperation projects thereby aggravating the fragile economic situation of beneficiary countries.

In the Mediterranean are 39 million people (1 out of 3) are employed in agriculture: 34 million individuals in the south shore. In the north shore, agriculture has a multi-functional value, stress is laid on the quality of production, and provides environmental and social services. In the south, it is a tool for economic development, it helps improving the living conditions in the rural areas and the food security for a growing population.

The primary objective of mankind is to avail of food in high amounts and of good quality; hence, the fate of human beings is linked to the increase in agricultural production.

Farmlands are shrinking; water is a precious resource more than oil, the biological equilibrium is endangered and the climate change a new challenge. The dissemination and sharing of scientific knowledge can provide the solutions to the new emergencies through a better use of resources, the breeding of plants adapted to dry or saline soils, increasing production.

Economic development is the prerequisite for a stable democracy; democracy and development shall be centered onto human beings, their potential, traditions and shared respect.

For the future of Europe and of the world, it would be unsafe not to consider the Mediterranean basin as an area of shared peace and prosperity. Resuming Barcelona process can be crucial for the fate of the region and of its economic development so as to eventually pursue the principles of peace, stability, and the human rights shared by all the nations.

