



## **LES MIDIS DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE**

### **« The Mediterranean dilemma : the difficulties of stability »**

*Lunch debate organized by the European Movement Belgium and the Medea Institute on Tuesday 5 November 2009, at the EMB. Report : Andrew Bower & Nathalie Janne d'Othée*

#### **Speaker :**

**Professor de Marco, President Emeritus of Malta**

#### **Introduction** by Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb, Ministre d'Etat, Vice-President du MEI

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Welcome to this tenth "Midi de la Méditerranée", co-organized by the European Movement Belgium and the MEDEA Institute for research on Euromed and Euro-Arab cooperation. Today we have the privilege to have the visit of the former President of the Republic of Malta, Professor Guido de Marco who will address the topic of the stability in the Mediterranean.

Before presenting the biography of our guest, we need to point out the presence of eminent people around the table: Her Excellency Ambassador of Kuwait Nabeela Al Mulla, His Excellence Ambassador of Tunisia, Abdessalem Hetira and his wife, and His Excellence Ambassador of Malta, Pierre Clive Agius. Thank you all for attending this "Midi de la Méditerranée".

#### **Presentation of the speaker** by Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb

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Professor de Marco is a major figure in the Republic of Malta but also on the international scene.

Guido de Marco was President of the Republic of Malta from 1999 to 2004, but before that he had a long political career.

He entered the Maltese Parliament in 1966. In 1987, his long ministerial career began: first as Minister of Interior and Justice, and in 1990, as Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Justice. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, he submitted Malta's application for membership of the European Communities in 1990. Doing so, he stressed Malta's European vocation, but also continued to underline the Mediterranean dimension of his country. According to him, the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue was (and is) important to consolidate stability and cooperation in the region. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, he also accentuated the role of Malta in several international institutions (United Nations, OSCE, Council of Europe, Commonwealth). In 1998, he was re-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs when his party, the Nationalist Party, returned to office.

In 1990 he was elected President of the United Nations General Assembly for one year. In this function, he contributed to revitalize the General Assembly during a period of transition for international relations. As President of the General Assembly, he also undertook a number of

diplomatic initiatives, such as the visit of refugee camps in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and Jordan.

Prof. de Marco has worked as a lecturer and later a Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Malta since 1967.

In September 2004, Prof. de Marco was elected Chairperson of the Commonwealth Foundation, the intergovernmental body of the Commonwealth mandated to work with civil society organizations. He still holds this function.

He will today address the subject of the difficulties of stability in the Mediterranean, and will explain why it is a dilemma.

## **The Mediterranean Dilemma** by Professor de Marco

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### **1. Introduction: Malta at the heart of the Mediterranean**

Strasbourg, symbol and embodiment of Europe and European history has always remained very close to the heart of Professor de Marco. As a former Maltese Prime Minister underlined, “coming to Strasbourg is a little like coming home”.

In Malta, there is a real marriage between Europe and the Mediterranean. Every Maltese is European as well as Mediterranean. Malta is a link between these two entities. Pope Jean Paul II insightfully underlined the central position held by Malta, stressing that “You Maltese, have to be bridge builders between the Northern and the Southern parts of the Mediterranean”. This is the policy followed by Malta since its independence.

#### A historical centrality

It is important to understand what Malta stands for. Despite its European identity, we must not forget that the first country visited by the Maltese president following Malta’s independence in 1964 was Libya, an Arab country along the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Interestingly, during this first trip abroad, Maltese officials spoke native Maltese, a language sharing Romanic and Arabic roots, which Libyan officials were able to understand.

Malta is indeed at the center of the Mediterranean, thus very close to the history of Europe. For centuries, the Mediterranean was at the heart of European affairs, dominated by a number of European powers, namely Britain, which soon colonized Malta until its independence in 1964. Admiral Nelson (1758-1805), symbol of British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean, famously stated when he first set foot on Malta: “Vini Vidi Mani” (I came, I saw and I remained).

Napoleon placed great importance in the geo-strategic role of the Mediterranean and regarded Malta as a central strategic strongpoint for the domination of the Middle Sea. As an illustration of the strategic importance of the Malta, he once said: “I prefer to see the English in Paris than in Malta”.

Similarly, Malta’s strategic position at the heart of the Mediterranean was underlined during the Second World War, during which Maltese resistance played a crucial part in stemming Rommel’s invasion of the Southern Mediterranean.

Former French President of the European Commission Jacques Delors declared that “there is a small country that one sometimes forgets that is Malta”; it is located at the center of European and Mediterranean interests “where our future so much belongs”.

## 2. The Mediterranean Dilemma

### Why?

We are always searching for solutions to the dilemma of stability in the Mediterranean. We repeatedly believe to have reached a solution, but fail when nearing the end.

The last victim of this was French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who “dumped” the Barcelona Process in favor of his heavily criticized Union for the Mediterranean. The French President sought to make the Mediterranean dream possible, a step forward towards a unified Mediterranean region.

As stressed by a Maltese official: there can be no security in Europe without security in the Mediterranean; and there can be no security in the Mediterranean without security in Europe.

Malta's main challenge for years has been: how to bring the Mediterranean back at the centre of national agendas?

### From Pax Britannica to Pax Mediterranea

The Mediterranean, which had drifted away in the interest of many European leaders following the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus, soon regained its predominance with a strong European influence throughout the shores of the Mediterranean (British sovereignty in Egypt, Italian presence in Libya). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Mediterranean was in fact guided by a Pax Britannica.

During the Cold War, Malta was often criticized by Soviets for trying to bring the US in the region, while Americans blamed Maltese efforts to open the Mediterranean to Soviet influence. But Malta succeeded in overcoming both critics, thanks to its belief in a Pax Romana. Referring to this period where the Romans had their empire fixed on the shores of the Mediterranean, the idea of a “Pax Romana” stands against any division of the area.

Prof. De Marco now longs for the day when one can speak of and belong to a Pax Mediterranea.

### Where lies the Dilemma?

Mediterranean nations are strong nations, but the Mediterranean remains weak as a single entity. The Mediterranean has not been able to make the most of its cultural diversity and influence as a result of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The history of the Jews and the Palestinian question embody the Mediterranean dilemma. One has to understand this dilemma. The Jews came to Palestine after the Holocaust where six millions of them were exterminated just because they were Jews. The British proposed Uganda to the Jewish people, but they did not have any historical links with this country. On their side, Arab people have been living there for many centuries.

De Marco has supported a two-state solution ever since his time as president of the UN General Assembly. Israel is there to stay; it is a mistake to think otherwise. Similarly, the State of Palestine is also there to stay. As French President François Mitterrand stated: “The same resolution which created Israel created Palestine”, but this is not yet a reality.

Arabs **and** Israelis are our neighbours; we must learn how to live together and understand our common future. “La Méditerranée est notre maison commune” (the Mediterranean is our common house), we have to share it.

Bearing in mind debates over security in the Mediterranean for security in Europe and vice versa, Professor de Marco asks: "How can there be peace in Europe without stability in the Mediterranean. There is **no** peace in Europe without stability in the Mediterranean and no peace in the Mediterranean without peace between Palestinians and Israelis". We have to resolve the Mediterranean Dilemma, otherwise everyone will suffer (most particularly the Israelis and the Palestinians).

### Meeting Arafat

Professor de Marco spoke of an anecdote taking place on Christmas night at the end of the previous century. The Professor was invited to Palestine by former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat alongside other heads of state.

Arafat held a vision of Palestine as a very modern state; he believed in a state where all religions and differences should be respected and one whose status and activity on the international scene must be improved. According to the Professor, not recognizing the role played by Arafat in the search for peace was a big mistake.

After a Christmas day spent in Arafat's presence, de Marco received a phone call in his hotel room late in the evening. Arafat had to transmit an urgent message destined for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, scheduled to meet with Professor de Marco the day after. Arafat came to the Professor's hotel and delivered his message to Barak: "I want you to tell him that I don't find any objections when they criticize **me**. What is much worse is that they are continuing to build settlements in the West Bank. With us Arabs, we can lose wars, battles, but we cannot lose our face. We will suffer a second intifada in which many Palestinians will suffer most...please tell Barak to stop the settlements".

In response to this message, Prime Minister Barak argued that he had a big problem ruling Israel with a religious minority, and that he could not do anything towards settlements.

De Marco wished to emphasize that "you need two to make peace like you need two to tango", but as Malta is and remains friends of both parties and a neutral country, he could just repeat what Arafat said and no more. Arafat knew the two states solution was the best.

### Seeking a Euromed solution

The objective of converging the Mediterranean and Europe under a common structure, was born in 1995. Manuel Marín was in charge of the Mediterranean and proposed a council with European and Mediterranean people. The Euromed idea was born. They did not realize that Rabin was shot dead a few weeks prior the first Euromed meeting in Barcelona. The officials pushed for the initiative to move forward.

The Barcelona process was meant to be on the move, not static. It was built on three pillars :

- Political and security dialogue;
- Economic and Financial partnership;
- Social, Cultural and Human partnership.

Unfortunately, peace did not come through the creation of the Euromed partnership. Questions remained alive surrounding the appropriateness of the structure and its functioning to successfully overcome the Mediterranean Dilemma.

President Sarkozy then came along with his plan for a Union of the Mediterranean. Following widespread opposition in the EU, the Union **for** the Mediterranean was born but yet encounters

problems. De Marco emphasized that if Arab leaders continue to refuse meeting Israeli Foreign Minister Liebermann, it will be impossible to achieve a successful Union for the Mediterranean.

Presenting another anecdote, Professor de Marco stressed how he travelled to Tunisia on Rabin's request to persuade Arafat to resume talks with Israel. The latter had put an end to talks following the massacre of Palestinians by an American Jew in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron on February 25 1994. Repeating Yitzhak Rabin's argument, the Professor underlined that the peace process should not be jeopardized by the action of one terrorist. Qaddoumi did not agree but was loyal to Arafat. The peace process went on.

### Security in the Mediterranean

The northern side of the Mediterranean is strong with such organizations as NATO, EU, and close state cooperation. While the Southern shore is weak politically and militarily, it is rich in energy and human resources. Do we want a weak South controlled by the North or should we rather build a real Euromed where the EU can be enriched by the South's richness?

Professor de Marco emphasizes his desire to see peace in the Middle East. And for instance, if Palestinian wants to have their own military forces, it is up to them to decide. If we want peace, we have to accept that.

Malta also **needs** peace in the region; it wants to act freely, independently and in friendship with **all** its neighbours. When travelling to Tunisia or Italy, he feels welcome and at home and wishes to feel the same in all countries of the region.

Professor de Marco is proud of his country's independence and of his country's equal friendship with all neighbouring countries.

The professor questioned Huntington's political philosophy that, "He should come to Malta to see what I mean". Indeed, "civilizations don't clash, regions don't clash...individuals clash".

We **must** look at the future as a future of hope. As Pope Jean Paul II said: "We believe in peace, but there can be no peace with no justice, there can be no justice without forgiveness". The history of Franco-German relations is particularly telling, formed of two parties who were enemies for decades, friends ever since.

One day, Israelis and Palestine will reach reconciliation; meanwhile, the Mediterranean Dilemma will remain alive.

### **Questions and Answers**

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- *How does Malta perceive Turkey's accession bid to the EU?*

Many Europeans oppose this accession. Only a few days ago, a law was passed requiring all Italian schools to remove crucifixes. But Europe is a multi-religious union in which different beliefs must be accepted. I support Turkey's accession to the EU, and emphasize the great advantages for European interests. Accordingly, the professor was always proud of Arafat and his desire not to create an Islamic republic of Palestine.

- *Do you think it is right to have put together the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean before achieving peace in the Middle East? Why do you say the Arab countries are weak?*

We all thought that getting Israel and Palestine in the Barcelona Process would constitute a good step forward; unfortunately, this did not materialize. But this did not constitute a radical mistake, there is potential for it to develop into something positive.

Arabs are primarily weakened due to internal differences. The Arab League offers indeed an explicit example. Even if it has an excellent Secretary General, Amr Musa, it is divided. The war in Kuwait was a war of Arabs against Arabs. The Western Sahara conflict is a mild war but it is still a war between Arabs. The Arab countries are also internally divided as we can see with the extremists plotting in Egypt. But the Arabs themselves are not weak, there are strong nations. They have some of the best universities in the world, as Al Azhar in Cairo.

One may question the European and American efforts to make things evolve. Obama's speech in Cairo was excellent; we must now ensure that we do not live by speeches alone. Although the Nobel Prize awarded to President Obama is no surprise, he has to overcome the 9/11 trauma.

- *You say that if there is no peace between Israel and Palestine, there will be no Union for the Mediterranean. What is then the first step to take as Europe? What can the EU do to handle the dangerous situation in the Near East?*

We need more Moratinos, more diplomats. The EU must, above all, believe in the right of existence for both sides. (Malta has been under pressure by the EU for its role as rapporteur for Palestinian alienable rights, but does not intend to remove this role).

- *Where are we going from here? What role can Europe play? How long is the EU going to follow American policies? For years, the EU was at the vanguard in the region. Due to a lack of leadership and political fatigue, European influence has diminished considerably.*

You are right. We have to understand what is meant by values. When the representative of the EU comes to Malta and asks for Malta to stop its rapporteurship, I am not happy with this.

Being refugees in their own country is most certainly the most humiliating for the Palestinian people. In fact, few Palestinians have a passports issued by the Palestinian Authority, many have Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian passports. I felt humiliated when I had to have a British passport when Malta was a colony.

- *How can the EU enforce its role in the Middle East to push forward peace in the region? What steps can be taken when interests differ within the EU itself?*

I hope the Lisbon Treaty will help ameliorate this. The establishment of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs will be a great help. A number of diplomats may be influential, such as Moratinos and Juppé, provided that they show a certain commitment to the Mediterranean.

- *You always talk about EU's role in the Middle East, but even with someone as resourceful as Solana, the Foreign Affairs are still determined by the capital of Europe.*

Important decisions will remain a responsibility of the High Representative. While many Europeans look forward to the Lisbon Treaty, doubts remain regarding a European edge in foreign policy.

To conclude, whichever religion we believe in, everyone of us should turn to prayer. We need a better future for our children, they deserve it.

**Pour plus d'information sur les Midis de la Méditerranée, veuillez contacter :**

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