



Diversity in Europe

- *In varietate Concordia* (EC, Brussels, 2000)



- **issue 5**

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*« These strangers in a foreign World
Protection asked of me-
Befriend them, lest yourself in Heaven
Be found a refugee »*

*« Ces Etrangères, en Monde inconnu
Asile m'ont demandé
Accueille-les, car Toi-même au Ciel
Pourrait être une Réfugiée »*

Emily Dickinson (Quatrains II-2, 1864-65, Amherst, Massachusetts, Etats-Unis)
traduction en français de Claire Malroux (NRF, Poésie/Gallimard, Paris, 2000)

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Europe & the Mediterranean Sea

The Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (Iriv) has published since September 2016 a newsletter dedicated to migration- *Regards Croisés sur la Migration*.

The first issues (September 2016 - March 2018) were dedicated to a comparison between Paris and Berlin on the basis of testimonies gathered among migrants interviewed in the two European capital cities. Since 2018, our newsletter has been entitled “Diversity in Europe”. Its main aim is now to tackle the issue of diversity- the motto chosen by the European Union (EU) since 2000 and definitely in 2004 after the last biggest enlargement of the European Union (from 15 to 25 EU members).

The first issue (November 2018) was focussed on diversity at school with Rotterdam (in the Netherlands) whose inhabitants coming from abroad represent more than 70 % of the total population which is both a challenge and an opportunity to experience new approaches. Paris also has in its schools very diverse students in its class rooms.

The second issue (March 2019) was dedicated to religious & cultural diversity, with a focus on the Jewish community. If the Judaeo-Christian roots of the European Union are obvious, the European Union is a secular project with a genuine cultural identity open to all religions- “*United in diversity*”. This issue suggested a comparison between Paris and Thessaloniki, two cities sharing an history of troubled times during World War II.

The third issue (November 2019) tackled the issue of interreligious dialogue with articles on diversity in Switzerland and France. This is especially important in secular countries where all religions have to be respected together with the right to be free from any religious belonging or belief. A “republican” approach has allowed a civil peace for the past century in most of our European societies (but during World War II).

The fourth issue (March 2020) was focused on Education and Interfaith dialogue among multicultural countries. A first article analysed diversity inclusion in the USA, insisting on the necessity to enhance a “glocal diversity mindset”. A second article reminded of the example of Sarajevo, a city of peaceful existence between Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats in a European country, Bosnia, with a historical “multifaceted, universal identity” that was brutally treated during the bloody Balkan war (1992-1995)

This 5th issue tackles the issue of diversity in the Mediterranean region with two articles dealing with diverse strategies. The first article is dedicated to diversity in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean region , as a crossroad of Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia – a contradictory combination of economic and political interests in favour of an expense of solidarity and at the same time a total inefficiency of the European Union which raises mixed feelings. The second article is focused on the diverse strategies conducted by main actors in the Middle East.

The Mediterranean sea was called, *Mare Nostrum* by the Greek historian Herodote in Antique times. This is certainly this feeling of belonging that makes a bridge among all the countries located all around - in the North (European area), in the Adriatic part (Balkans), in the South, (Magrheb) or in the Eastern part (Middle East). In a book published in 2000 entitled “*Avoir vingt ans dans vingt ans en Méditerranée*”(1) Sami Naïr, who was a member of the European Parliament at the time and researcher in Political Sciences, and Bichara Khader, a teacher at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) both insisted on the urgent necessity to enhance a Euro-Mediterranean partnership by a common political strategy combining Education, Economics, Environment. Bichara Khader underlined the very poor investment dedicated to the Meda Programme and by the European Bank for Investment in a region that should be a main concern for the European Union.

Twenty years after the publication of this book that tackled the future of the Mediterranean countries through its youth, nothing has changed in this key region , the very heart of the European civilization, a “melting pot” of cultures. The Mediterranean region is still a main absent in the European discussions. The European Union seems quite forgetful on its past in many ways- let’s be optimistic and hope for a more constructive future.

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(1) “*Being 20 in 20 years in the Mediterranean Sea*” with an Atlas edited by the Iriv, Marly Le Roi : INJEP, 2000

The sense of diversity in Mediterranean region: management, policies and consequence

The Eastern Mediterranean has historically been at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. From this geostrategic position, it derives an important part of its particular economic and social diversity and consequently the complexity in the formulation of strategies and policies. Greece and Turkey, as NATO member states, are constantly in the process of building complex bilateral relations, while other regional actors, such as Cyprus, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan - a mosaic of political identities - forming a complex network of both bilateral and multilateral relations. (1)

The peak of the intensity of the economic and social crisis, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the exacerbation of the ecological crisis, the emergence of migration–refugee crisis as a regional issue, new developments in the energy sector and its consequences, as well as the general destabilisation, with the shadow of terrorism hovering over strongly, increase the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Current events lead to a focus on Turkey's growing aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean - and not only - which is becoming a very serious destabilising factor, both for the West and for Russia, as demonstrated by its stance in the case of Libya, the crisis of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean, related to the Cyprus issue and its claims by Greece (2), the opportunities that will arise with the exploitation of natural resources, but also the absolute need for internal predominance of President Erdogan. The source of Turkish aggression, the manifestations of which have, in recent years, been crises of greatness and neo-Ottoman plans, is the role it aspires to play as a regional power in the region. (3) The claim, moreover, of a hegemonic role in the subsystem of the wider Middle East is an important stake in Turkish foreign policy, as early as the years of the Ozal government in the 1980s. (4)

Obstacles to Turkey's ambitious plans to control the region are the various cooperation networks developed by the Eastern Mediterranean States, in various fields, such as energy, the armed forces, education-research, agriculture, tourism, civil protection, and within international organisations, with the support of the USA, France and Italy in the initiatives resulting from these partnerships. Typical examples are the historic agreement on the EastMed pipeline between Greece, Israel and Cyprus, as well as the ratification of Greece's two EEZ designation agreements with Italy and Egypt. (3)

Thus, although Turkey had succeeded by the beginning of the Arab Uprisings in 2011 to be strengthened, following a "soft power" policy and taking advantage of international and regional liquidity and instability but also on the indulgence of the US, Russia and the EU, the instability and conflicts that followed demonstrated the limits of its political successes, creating extremely serious problems, starting with the war in Syria. (4)

Within this framework the Turkish regime has instrumentalised the refugee issue, both within its borders, with a view to its political support and at the level of Turkey's relations with the European Union, with a view to political and economic gains, accusing EU of non-fulfillment of financial obligations to Ankara but also denouncing its Member States for Islamophobia. (4)

The European Union, on the other hand, politically fragmented and economically weakened, is trying to renounce responsibility for managing the refugee issue by presenting a picture of division, with some countries making their anti-immigration policies clear and with far-right forms and hate speech finding fertile ground internationally, leading to a more general conservatism and non-acceptance of the

"different", which is totally against respect for equality and human rights.

The content of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which came as Europe's ex post reaction to the chronicle of a pre-announced tragedy, such as the humanitarian disaster in Moria, is an eloquent example of the European inconsistency and ultimately the substantial lack of will and failure in the management of the refugee issue. The important economic and political interests that some EU Member States, such as Germany, have with Turkey complicate further the situation of this peculiar hostage situation of the European Union by Turkey, with a strong lever of pressure on the refugee issue. In addition, the power vacuum in its neighbouring subsystems, with the chaotic conditions prevailing in the Middle East, as well as the international reluctance to make a substantial contribution to the response to regional conflicts, enhance Turkey's ability to move. (4)

Taking into consideration the above parameters, it can be also interpreted the "equal distances policy" by Europe and the others regarding Turkey, which, despite its provocativeness, on both a symbolic and practical level, has so far paid a minimum price, as sanctions are slow, with the Europeans and the Americans not yet activate, due to economic and geostrategic reasons, their "powerful weapon" which is economic sanctions. (2)

The Euro-Mediterranean MED7 Conference, concluded in Corsica, is a representative example of the conflict of interest within the EU. Thus, although the text of the conclusions (Ajaccio Declaration) clearly shows, among other issues, support for Greece and Cyprus (Greek Continental Shelf and Cypriot EEZ issues), in the face of Turkish provocation and delinquency, it should not, however, be overlooked that Malta and Spain - two of the participating countries - belong to those that have kept an equal distance in the past period and have argued against strict sanctions on Ankara.

The different attitude of France and Italy to the Libyan civil war is also indicative, with France supporting Haftar's forces, while Italy's interests are in line with those of the Tripoli government and Saraj, with consequent impacts on the political cohesion of the EU Member States and the agreement that exists between Ankara's views and one's of the major States of the Union, as Italy (1)

In conclusion, if we consider on the one hand that the major economic and political interests acting at the expense of solidarity, have also made the European Union ineffective in dealing with difficult situations in other domains, such as the financial crisis, in the past and on the other hand the fact that the Turkish economy is shaking, with the Turkish lira at a historic low and Erdogan's popularity slumping, we are inevitably faced with the provocative, if not rhetorical, question of whether there is a risk of a new "clash of civilizations" or whether, in the context of a global capitalist system, a conflict of interest underlies.

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Mare Nostrum (1)- Diverse strategies in the Mediterranean sea

The Mediterranean Sea is the very heart of the European civilization. It has always been the place for exchanges among many cultures and people belonging to different countries or religions. It is such a shame it has been associated in the past years with the migratory crisis to a place where so many migrants coming from Africa or the Middle East are killed on cheap boats or pushed in the sea by dishonest people, members of human trafficking networks. The so-called “Arab Spring” - a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several largely Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain that generally began in the spring of 2011 (2), have brought a lot of turmoil in the region. The refusal of the American presidency to military combat in Syria in 2013 was a negative signal given to other countries, not so powerful as the USA with European countries, that were hidden behind and ready to start playing a major role, for the worst, among the local populations or minorities defending their rights (such as Kurds)- the coalition combining Russia, Turkey and Iran in Syria has led to a main human disaster (3)

In 2020, despite a strong threat coming from Turkey and its “*Mavi Vatan*” strategy rising insecurity in the Eastern Mediterranean area (4), and the collapse of Lebanon after almost 30 years of unfair and corrupt government, there have been some points of lights with the peace process in the Middle East. According to an article published in the Foreign Policy review the “*New Middle East- Israel’s pacts with the UAE and Bahrain go far beyond the tenuous “cold peace” with Egypt and Jordan. They could even help end the conflict with the Palestinians.*”(5) Surprisingly, the European Union has been very absent or weak in the region despite its repeated statements of interest and concern in the peace process in the Middle East. The EU hasn’t behaved in a constructive way with its main ally in the region - once more most forgetful on its past. The lack of interest and concern is obvious when visiting the website designed by the European Union dedicated to its policy in the Middle East - the last news was published in 2016 as if nothing had happened since this emblematic year. (6)

In the first place, the strategy conducted by the EU with Turkey is quite confusing – after a series of aggressive behavior from the Erdogan government against Greece or Cyprus, and the offensive declaration of the Turkish president against several European countries (first and foremost France), Turkey is still a member of the Erasmus + programme meant to enhance education and lifelong learning. This is quite chocking in times where the United Kingdom, because of the Brexit, is still unclear on the future of its participation to this key programme in Europe. The official disapproval of the European Union against Turkey after a European Council held in September 2020 doesn’t seem to have discouraged the aggressive strategy conducted by the Turkish government. Its president seems on the contrary very inspired to re-design the frontiers in the Mediterranean Sea by violating the maritime map and frontiers decided by the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I (4).

Another main surprise is the silence of the European Union in Lebanon. France was the only country that openly denounced the corruption of the political parties that have divided the country since the end of the civil war in 1990. Despite the protest of the Lebanese population from all religions and social backgrounds during the autumn 2019 and the official bankruptcy of the Lebanese State, many European countries still support the political coalition that led the country to a total disaster and a main threat for the peace in the region. The explosion that occurred in August 2020 in Beirut, due to the catastrophic and dishonest management of the

harbor by one of the political partner of the governmental coalition (the Shiite party, Hezbollah) was just the final event in a predictable disaster. In complement, the numerous fake news coming from all the parties to the coalition (mainly the Christian party led by Michel Aoun) on the origin of the explosion, was another evidence of the dishonest way to tackle the issue. The Lebanese population shouldn’t expect any support from the “classical parties” with such an unfair way to deal with the situation.

Last but not least, Israel pacts with the EAU and Bahrain, due to several years of constructive economic collaboration between Israel and its Arabic neighbors, haven’t received the support they should have expected from the European Union. Known as the Abraham Accord, the agreement between Israel and the EAU was signed at the White House in Washington on the 15th of September 2020, under the aegis of the United States of America. Bahrain normalised its relations with Israel and signed an official agreement in Manama on Sunday 18th of October 2020 (7). These agreements signed between Israel and its Arabic neighbors have been a decisive step in the Middle East since the peace signed with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. The only reaction of the European Union was a new and joint statement by five European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom) in October 2020 condemning Israel's approval of plans to build thousands of new homes in West Bank settlements. The process at stake in the Middle East should have rung a bell in Europe as the European Union spirit has precisely consisted since 1957 with the Treaty of Rome in building an economic link and commitment among its members in order to prevent any new war in Europe after centuries of fight among European countries (since the Napoleonic wars of the 19th century). This is the same spirit of constructive collaboration that inspired the peace process conducted by Israel, the EAU and Bahrain - “*Both deals are revolutionary in scope: By normalizing ties and focusing on business, trade, and travel, these “warm peace” agreements go beyond the often tenuous “cold peace” that Egypt and Jordan made with the Jewish state decades ago. Not only do the UAE and Bahrain deals set the stage for a sea change in Arab-Israeli relations, but they might even present a novel opportunity to finally solve the most intractable issue between the two sides: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*” (5)

The concern of the European Union in the Peace process in the Middle East seems definitely unfair and unbalanced. Is it really a key issue for the European Union? We may have some doubts. Maybe the European diplomacy could be inspired by the successful strategy conducted by one of its main and first ally in the region. According to the newspaper Haaretz “Israel and Lebanon could reach maritime border deal ‘within weeks’ (8) and Sudan is to normalise relations with Israel (9). This is indeed other inspiring examples of resilience and constructive spirit in a region that has been faced to so many conflicts in the past years. This is also a main source of inspiration as in the immemorial struggle between David and Goliath, courage and perseverance should always prevail

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